

OUTREACH IN A LUTHERAN GRADE SCHOOL CAN SUCCEED BY APPROPRIATELY
APPLYING BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

BY

SAMUEL L. BIEBERT

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PROF. DANIEL P. LEYRER, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

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Abstract

As an evangelical church body one of our chief goals is to follow the command of the Great Commission. Obviously this has implications for many facets of ministry but that which this paper addresses is how this relates to schools. Outreach has been happening for many years in our schools and yet the topic seems to continue to arise over concern for maintaining the biblical doctrine of church fellowship. The intent of this paper is to revisit this doctrine. Then, with it fresh in the mind, take a look at outreach in our schools. By taking a look at the challenges and blessings of using Lutheran elementary schools for outreach may the reader see that outreach in Lutheran elementary schools can succeed along with proper application of biblical principles of fellowship.

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Introduction

There are many facets of gospel ministry being done throughout our synod. Obviously there is always room for improvement in anything that is done. I think one would be hard pressed to find any professional say otherwise about their specific profession and the same would hold true for us as well. That being said, one of the things I think many people would agree with, we as a synod do education very well. Our teachers are top notch and are prepared for pretty much anything that gets thrown their way when they get sowed out into the real world.

It should not come as a surprise then that more and more of our synod's ministries are taking advantage of this; using our schools and the excellent education they provide and applying them to gospel outreach. Some are even using the excellent education that we provide as a start-up for their ministries.

The blessings that God has lavished on the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in using our schools as outreach tools are too numerous to mention. Schools are buzzing with children. The precious gospel is being preached to them and they in turn are going home and sharing Christ's love for sinners with their families. But just as Satan was working in the Garden of Eden, turning the blessed opportunity to worship God by not eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil into a curse, so also he has slithered into this blessed opportunity placed before us and has laced it with temptations.

As a synod we live, and rightly so, by Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." But with this love that is deep within all our called workers to share the gospel, the old man in us likes to rear its ugly head and falsely make us think that we are only rightly carrying out the Great Commission if our numbers are big. Satan tempts us to think that if our numbers are not there then we are obviously not being faithful. We look around with envious eyes at booming and prosperous ministries that our brothers and sisters are a part of and think, "If only we could be as big as them. If only we could have the facilities they do. If only..."

The big temptation, though, is then to think, "Well so many prospects get hung up on the fact that we are so strict. So many of them are turned off because they cannot do things that

members do.” So we “tweak” something here and we “bend” something there. We see the numbers rise and get that good feeling of pride, not ever realizing that all the time we are chipping away at the bedrock of our foundation with a chisel after every exception we make. We do not realize that in not practicing biblical fellowship we are really hurting the spiritual lives of those whom we are doing ministry to and, more importantly, we are really hurting the body of Christ.

Or maybe we go too far the other way and we become scared by “numbers talk.” We may think that if we dream big in terms of numbers we are not placing our trust in the Holy Spirit and therefore we are placing too much emphasis on ourselves when we are nothing but clay pots. The temptation is then whispered into our ears that all we really need to do is minister to those that are within our fold. We use fellowship as an excuse to not go out and preach the gospel. We use fellowship as a defense against the unbelieving world rather than the offense it really is. We do not use it to show that we are different from an unbelieving world and we no longer use it to show that we practice biblical fellowship because we love that unbelieving world. We neglect using it to show Christ’s love and therefore we stray from fellowship in this way also.

Professor Deutschlander, someone who so accurately seems to be able to put down on paper the struggles of the heart, puts it this way,

“The temptation is to let our zeal get out of bounds. The temptation is that we imagine that the success of our mission efforts depends on us – not on God’s election, not on God’s promise to gather in those whom he has chosen by means of the faithful proclamation of his Word.

When that temptation gets the upper hand, we can start to get a sort of ‘Messiah complex,’ either individually or as a church body. We can see evidences of a Messiah complex when we torment ourselves over the seeming lack of success in proclaiming the gospel. ‘Since what I’m doing isn’t working, I’ve got to find some new method (a. k. a. -- - gimmick) that will work. Maybe if sermons were more fun. Maybe if I didn’t tell my neighbor that he really needs a Savior because he is a sinner; maybe if I left that part out until later. Maybe if our worship services were more entertaining, people would come. Maybe if we had more fun organizations.. Maybe if we . . .’ The list goes on and on and knows no end.”¹

¹ Deutschlander, Daniel M.. *The narrow Lutheran middle: following the scriptural road*. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2011), 198

The devil is certainly crafty. He lures us into his traps with a lullaby so soft and sweet that we don't even know we are falling into until the carpet has been pulled out from under us and we are thrashing about in the mucky pit of sin.

Now someone may jump up and object: "But are we supposed to just repeat Bible passages in as tedious a way as we can find? Shouldn't we do our best with the gifts that God has given us in the proclamation of the gospel?" Of course we should employ the best means we can for sharing the gospel. It's not a question of trying to be as tedious as we can. It's not a matter of paying no attention to the way we invite, the way we worship, or even the order in which we present the truths of the Bible. The point is not that methods don't matter. The point is that methods as such do not convert or preserve our faith. Only the gospel can do that. We need to make sure that when we are looking for methods, we don't imagine that if we just hit on the right method, then everyone will like the gospel (and us!)

The number of our schools being used as outreach tools is growing. But in order for our schools to succeed on not only a worldly level, but also on a spiritual level; they need to keep the importance of fellowship before them at all times. Even if we think we are standing firm we must always be careful unless we fall as we are soberly reminded in 1 Corinthians 10:12. This is so important in our schools because they are the future of our synod. They, together with parents, are the means we have for training the future lay leaders and called workers to spread the gospel when we are gone.

Biblical fellowship is important because it protects and preaches the gospel and because it is a cause for joy among the body of believers. Fellowship protects the gospel by keeping those who teach contrary to God's word from teaching their man-made doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1-6; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:3,4; Romans 16:17,18). It preaches the gospel because it reflects a Christ-like love to those who teach falsely (1 Timothy 1:3,5; 1 John 4:6; Romans 10:1-3). It causes joy among the family of believers because we can rejoice in our spiritual relationship we have with God through faith in Christ. We can come together to be strengthened by each other as we are constantly pointed back to the cross and reminded that we are not alone (2 John 10; 3 John 5,6,8,12).

Justification is the bedrock of the Church and fellowship is the cement that holds it. I do not at all intend to neglect any of the other doctrines of the Bible. However, in this paper I desire to take a more serious look at the wonderful God-given gift we have in Christian education. It is a tool we can use very effectively to reach more people with the sweet message of the forgiveness won for them in Christ. But it needs to be used carefully. For if we neglect the importance of biblical fellowship then we open ourselves up to damaging the pure beauty of Justification. Keeping this in mind, we look at what has been placed in our laps and know outreach in a Lutheran grade school can succeed by appropriately applying Biblical principles of church fellowship.

Review of the Doctrine of Fellowship

One can read this paper, analyze it carefully, and I promise you will come up with things I could have said better, clearer, more eloquently; you might even find one or two grammatical mistakes and you would be completely justified in pointing them out. The reason for that is simple, I, Samuel Biebert, am a sinner. I am not perfect. Besides stating the obvious, I believe it makes a point. If the doctrine of fellowship was some man-made doctrine then we would have total liberty in tweaking, revising, and changing it to better fit the times. The really awesome thing about it though is this is not the case with biblical fellowship. It was created by the great I Am, Jesus Christ himself. The one who was, is, and is to come. It is as perfect as he is. It does not need to be tweaked because he created it for us in his perfect wisdom for our good.

He gave it to us to implement because he knows we need it. Our Lord knows we live in a sinful world where the truth of his gospel needs to be proclaimed as well as safeguarded. If it was left up to us it would have been ruined the moment the very thought of fellowship was conceived by our sinful minds. The question may then arise, “If it is perfect, then why all the fuss?” The “fuss” comes about because we still mess it up. We take applications of this doctrine and turn them into principles. We get flustered when we see someone applying the doctrine a little differently. So to avoid any “fuss” let us lay the principles out clearly so these may be in front of our eyes when consulting applications to them, specifically as they pertain to our Lutheran grade schools.

The Biblical principles then are as follows²:

- A. How Scripture leads us to the concept of church fellowship
 - 1. We are united with God our Savior through faith.
 - 2. This Spirit-given faith also unites us in an intimate bond with all other believers.
 - 3. This faith expresses itself in inward actions of spirituality and in outward actions such as prayer, means of grace, praise and worship, furthering the cause of the gospel, deeds of Christian love, etc. . .
 - 4. We are led to express our faith in these various activities through God the Holy Spirit.
 - 5. This Spirit-given faith that bonds us with all Christians also leads us to express our faith jointly with fellow Christians as we have opportunity in different groups and congregations.
 - 6. Church fellowship is therefore a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith.

- B. Principles Scripture teaches of the exercise of such church fellowship.
 - 1. Since we cannot read hearts, we select individuals or groups for a joint expression of faith on the basis of their confession.
 - 2. This confession is in principle always to be a confession to the entire Word of God as truth. A denial or change of any of it does not stem from faith but from unbelief.
 - 3. Sadly, the faith of all Christians expressed in everyday living is marked by lack of grasp, understanding, or turning completely to Scriptural truths.
 - 4. Because we are to abound in our love to the weak, weakness of faith is not a reason to terminate fellowship but rather a reason to more vigorously practice fellowship.
 - 5. Persistent practice and adherence to false doctrine by an individual or group does call for termination of fellowship.

As a synod, like I said previously, we have Matthew 28:19-20 as our guideline. I think sometimes we don't see all of what the Great Commission has to say to us though. Pastor Bruce McKenney says it very well when he states:

² Here in the body of the paper I have just given a basic summary. For the complete theses along with biblical support taken from the "WELS statement on church fellowship" please see the appendix.

“As we talk about the Great Commission and how our schools are to play a role, let’s not overlook an important aspect of the Great Commission. It’s the part of the Great Commission which involves **‘teaching people to obey all things Jesus has commanded.’** There are two key words in this participial phrase. The first is the infinitive *tepein*. Its basic meaning is **‘to attend to carefully, or to guard.’** In the context of the Great Commission its meaning is **‘to observe, or to obey by holding onto or standing firmly in.’** In other words, part of the work which Jesus entrusted to us is to teach his Word with the goal that through the power of that Word, people will not only be brought to believe its truths but also cling to those truths.

Another key word in this phrase of the Great Commission is the word *panta*. What is that Christ wants us to teach and to what does Christ want his disciples to cling? All of his Word. Not just the gospel in the narrow sense, but the gospel in the wide sense. From Genesis to Revelation, from creation to Christ’s second coming, from man’s fall into sin to God’s promise of salvation, from the demands of the law to the comfort of the gospel, from the doctrine of forgiveness to the doctrine of fellowship, Jesus wants us to teach it all with the goal that the hearers will not just hear it, but cling to it. This is our work as followers of the Lord. This is the mission of the church.”

This relates to the topic at hand in a very serious way. Yes, we are to be outreach minded and we have many tools we can use to open the door to talking with others about the gospel. But it is equally important we are outreach minded in that we always follow Scripture and teach all of what Scripture has to say. We don’t leave out the “uncomfortable” or “controversial” doctrines.

These principles cannot be bent because they are teachings made by God for us for our good. Paul states this very clearly in Acts when he says:

“I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard”(Acts 20:27-31)!

May it be clear, therefore, that our struggle is not to find loopholes in the doctrine of fellowship, to twist and contort it in order to condone non-biblical and thus sinful outreach, but to work in harmony with it. Our struggle is not to attempt to make an easy way out by making a “cover all” rule about the outreach being done in our Lutheran grade schools. Rather, we need to realize that

the better way, even though it is the harder way, may be seeing the uniqueness of every situation in which there is no hard and fast “cover all” rule.

If we are to make the hard decisions, we need to be in the Word constantly. We cannot rely on our sinful logic to solve the tough questions. We have been given the one thing needful as Luke 10:42 tells us, “but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

In researching how other Christians handle not only outreach in schools but more so outreach in general; the importance of a proper handling of all Scripture becomes apparent. To do anything but consult the Word of God in every situation will just cause confusion and error among those whom you are teaching, especially those who are both young in age and young in faith. A very sad example of this is found in the midst of our former brothers and sisters in faith in the Missouri synod.³ “To make matters worse, many in Missouri go far beyond the degree of unionistic practices that the official position condones. The widespread practice of open Communion and participation in ecumenical services has gone undisciplined. Some do this knowingly and persistently, in deliberate defiance of their synod’s position, and yet remain undisciplined.”⁴ Another example of a warning to hold all of Scripture as truth and to take matters of fellowship seriously can be seen in the Methodist’s view on evangelism as explained by William J. Abraham:

“What is especially striking is the way in which the gospel of the kingdom initially spread. It did not spread because of a carefully designed program of evangelism; nor did it start because the early disciples meditated on the Great Commission and felt that they had better obey it to assuage their feelings of guilt. The church did not begin its evangelistic activity because it was terrified about the prospects that faced those who died without hearing about Christ; the Christian movement was not initiated by a band of

³ Because of the lack of church discipline in the Missouri synod one cannot tell what every single church believes, teaches and confesses. Sadly it varies from church to church. Because of this alone, I am choosing to quote Professor Brug. I realize it would be better to get the information directly from the source but at the same time I strongly believe the information given by Professor Brug is an accurate description of what is going on among the LCMS with regards to their fellowship practices.

⁴ Brug, John F.. *Church fellowship: working together for the truth*. (Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House, 1996), 84

professional evangelists eager to sign up a public relations firm and get the show on the road. Rather, the gospel spread and the church grew because the sovereign hand of God was in the midst of the community that found itself surrounded by people who were puzzled and intrigued by what they saw happening.”⁵

We have been given the gospel. I pray it is pure gospel motivation and Christ-like love for souls in which we go forth in any and all outreach methods. Obviously this is no less true for our Lutheran grade schools. In spreading the gospel, it is imperative that we teach all of what Christ has laid out for us in the Bible, including the biblical principles of fellowship. It is a dangerous road to tread down if we do not. As Deutschlander so succinctly says, “We want always to be faithful to all he has taught us in the law and to give all that he gives in the gospel. Royal priests do not pick apart his Word. They do not consider themselves free to leave out things from his Word that some may object to or find offensive. Even if in their weakness Christians imagine that some parts of God’s Word keep people away from the gospel rather than draw them to it, it is not a Christian’s business to act on that weakness in their faith.”⁶ May we keep this in mind as we next address outreach in our schools and its relation to biblical fellowship.

Applications of the principles

The application of principles is always where an issue can turn into a grey area. Professor Brug lays out some wonderful guidelines to reference when dealing with tough fellowship cases:

1. Before we tackle tough cases, we should be sure that all parties in the discussion understand and agree with the scriptural principles as discussed above. We cannot make sound applications without a clear understanding of the principles. This means that we will constantly be studying the principles in Scripture, not simply receiving them by tradition.
2. We must be careful that we do not allow difficult cases to establish or modify the principles. We may not let feelings, emotions, or human reason pressure us into a particular application and then reshape our principles to condone our action.
3. We must guard against allowing specific applications or historical precedents to become rigid rules that govern all similar cases. We must evaluate each case in the light of the scriptural principles.
4. We must remember that there are hard cases (cases of casuistry) in which it is difficult to determine which scriptural principle applies. For example, is it still time to warn or is it now time to avoid? In such cases, like-minded Christians may not reach the

⁵ Abraham, William J.. *The logic of evangelism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 84

⁶ Deutschlander, 184-185

same conclusion at the same time. We should be careful not to pass hasty judgment on decisions that fellow Christians have made in such difficult cases. We may not know all the circumstances that led them to their decision. We should patiently listen to their explanations.

5. When we are faced with such a hard case, we should seek the advice of fellow Christians and explain the reasons for our actions to those who are concerned about them.

6. We should recognize that exceptional cases may lead us to depart from our normal practice, but we should be on guard that exceptions are not used to undermine the principles.

7. We must constantly balance two responsibilities: to patiently admonish the weak and to promptly separate from those who cling to error. How can we determine if we are dealing with weak brothers and sisters or with persistent adherents of false doctrine? We can determine this only by examining their confession. What do they say? What do they do? Does their confession contradict Scripture? Are they willing to accept instruction and correct their errors? Do they reject correction and hold to their error? Are they making propaganda for their error?

In this process we must guard against two types of judging the heart: We cannot say of the penitent, 'I don't believe his retraction. He is a hypocrite' We cannot say of the one who holds to error, 'I think he's really sincere. Maybe he'll change his mind someday.' We can judge only by the person's confession. If he corrects his error, we may remain in fellowship with him. If he does not, we must separate from him.

8. We must pray for patience and humility in dealing with the weak. We ask God to free us from pride, impatience, and legalistic tendencies, which may make us unwilling to bear with the weak. But showing love for the weak does not mean that we will be weak in acting against error, even when our action may not be fully understood by those who have a weak understanding of the principles.

9. We must be careful that our patience in dealing with the weak does not become a source of offense and confusion to other Christians who get the impression that we are condoning the error. We can guard against this by reporting the status of our dealings with the errorist to our brothers and sisters in the faith.

10. We must pray for courage and decisiveness in dealing with the adherents of error. We ask God to take away any timidity or desire for the approval of men, which may make us hesitant to testify clearly against error or may make us willing to yield to false teachers and their followers (Ezekiel 2:3-7; 3:3-8).

11. We should be indignant when God's Word is twisted in support of all sorts of false teaching and shameful conduct (Psalm 119:129-144).

12. When we must refuse to practice fellowship with adherents of false teaching, we should be sure that all parties are aware of the specific commands of God's Word that make it impossible for us to work together with these people. God's doctrine is at stake here, not ours. We express our concern for doctrine each time we pray 'hallowed be your name.' When we practice the principles of church fellowship, we are obeying the Second Commandment, which teaches us to honor God's name.

13. We must not regard our responsibility to practice the principles of church fellowship as a burden or a handicap, but as a privilege and an opportunity. Here is an opportunity to show love for God and for our neighbor. Here is an opportunity to suffer for the truth if it is God's will that we do so (1 Peter 4:12-16).

14. Above all, remember that these are not our principles of church fellowship; they are God's principles revealed in Holy Scripture. Human judgment cannot determine the principles. They are established by God's Word. But human judgment must evaluate each situation to see which principles apply at a particular moment. As with any application of law and gospel, the proper application of the principles of church fellowship requires lifelong study and practice. We pray that God gives us the willingness and the wisdom to apply these principles faithfully.⁷

Having taken a look at some guidelines for applying principles permit a made-up scenario. Johnny and Timmy are children attending two different Lutheran grade schools. Both are from families that are not members of the church where they attend school. At Johnny's school a Bible Information Class is mandated for parents before their child can be considered for enrollment. At Timmy's school the parents are given a statement clearly laying out the beliefs of the church and what is taught in the school. Both parents have agreed to send their child in light of what they have been taught or the information clearly laid out for them. The parents have not rejected the information, yet they are unsure as to whether or not they believe exactly what they have been taught or given. The children sing in church when the class is asked to sing. Both pastors keep in touch with the families from year to year. Johnny's family eventually says they do not believe what the school is teaching and has made it clear that they are telling Johnny what he is being taught is not true. Because of this, the family is asked to seek a church body with whom they are in agreement and they do not come back the next year for school. Timmy's family remains uncertain during the duration of his schooling yet does not openly express disagreement with what their child is being taught. Timmy completes his studies at the school but does not become a confirmed member. When he is done with school the family does not return to the church.

The above scenario is not a specific example but, I believe, one that very well may have occurred or is occurring in our Lutheran grade schools. Were the pastors and school faculty properly applying the biblical principles of fellowship? Before we look at the answer to this question let us look at why applications of the principles can and do raise eyebrows.

The problem with applications usually has to do with someone, either in the congregation or from another congregation, who looks at a specific situation from the outside in. They do not

⁷ Brug, 107-109

see the process that was used. They do not see the prayerful study of the principles. Or maybe they see the leaders of a church doing one thing and the leaders of another church doing another. How can both churches be correct? One of them must be doing something wrong, right?

The problem with the above scenario and thus a “problem” with this paper is a hard and fast rule cannot be laid out for every scenario. The above situation has two different methods being carried out by two faithful ministries. What it comes down to for those two “scenario ministries” or more importantly what it comes down to for those with ministries now and those who, God-willing, will someday have a ministry of their own is how a situation is handled in light of God’s word and how that relates to the current situation of the body of believers they have been asked to serve.

Moses handled a situation in light of God’s Word and its relation to the current situation of the body of believers he had been asked to care for. We see this situation unfold in Numbers 9:1-14.

The LORD spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt. He said, “Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations.”

So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover, and they did so in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses.

But some of them could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body. So they came to Moses and Aaron that same day and said to Moses, “We have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be kept from presenting the LORD’s offering with the other Israelites at the appointed time?”

Moses answered them, “Wait until I find out what the LORD commands concerning you.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites: ‘When any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body or are away on a journey, they may still celebrate the LORD’s Passover. They are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at twilight. They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations. But if a man who is ceremonially clean and not on a journey fails to celebrate the Passover, that person must be cut off from his

people because he did not present the LORD's offering at the appointed time. That man will bear the consequences of his sin.

An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born.”

Here we see two principles collide. Moses realizes this and goes to God for the answer. God does not tell him that the celebration of the Passover trumps the uncleanness of some in the camp but he does offer a solution different from the norm. Now before we go saying, “Well that is all well and good but we cannot go and talk to God like Moses did,” may we remember the promise given to us by God in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” We have been given the Bible, God's own words. We can indeed go and talk to him!

But how does this relate to the topic at hand? Applications are not always going to be easy. We need to have a very close relationship with God's Word in order to apply it to everyday life. Situations will arise where the principles of the Bible collide. It is the consequences of living in a sinful world. Obviously this does not give us license to do as we wish. May we take a lesson from Moses and always retreat to God's Word for the answer.

This passage is also not telling us to forget about the matter of uncleanness. No, the matter of being unclean was present and it needed to be addressed. However, in God's mercy he allowed them to still partake of the meal. This is merely a very clear example how applications need to be made in a world that sin has ruined. Because of our sinfulness making those applications are often times not going to be easy. But may we pray for wisdom to know when we need to put something aside for a bit in order to acknowledge the greater need.

On the one hand, the problems that certain applications can cause is not a bad thing. May prayers be continually offered up to our heavenly Father for us to always look at everything done within our circles and compare them with the principles found in Scripture. On the other hand, these problems escalate when we see a different practice and scoff or pass judgment without first searching scripture and approaching your brother or sister in Christ to see why the decision was made. But may we never mistake an application for a principle. Applications are going to vary greatly from situation to situation but the principles will always stand firm, unchanging.

Even though made-up situations are always going to inadequately compare to the influences and intricacies of a real-life situation, let's return back one more time to the situation mentioned above concerning Johnny and Timmy. This is really a study on two different applications of the principles, two different philosophies. The more thorough Bible information class may have led the parents to leave the one school while the handout allowed more leeway. This would be where I would urge us to be cautious. I am not saying this is not the case, but we do need to realize that in both situations we see pastors being faithful to God's Word and to their call. In both situations we see ministries dealing with families and applying principles in different ways, according to different philosophies. There are many things that may have come into play in their decisions to handle things differently. Maybe legalism is a big problem among area churches for the school that did not mandate a Bible information class, so they decided to remove that stumbling block. All the while one needs to be careful not to break the biblical principles. We could go on and on with examples, but I guess the point I hope to illustrate is the need to constantly assess our ministries and the people to whom we are ministering. At the same time we need to constantly review the principles found in God's word so we are able to apply them in the best possible way.

Professor Deutschlander provides analyzes our methods or philosophies with significant insight:

“We need, therefore, to watch our hearts carefully when casting about for new methods of sharing the gospel. On the one hand, we do not want to despise the search with the thought that it doesn't matter at all how we present the gospel message. That would be akin to saying this to someone: ‘Why do you bother preparing a tasty meal for your family? You could get all the same benefit from fiber and minerals and vitamins in a simple and tasteless pill!’”⁸

Recognizing we have a narrow road to walk he adds, “But, on the other hand, if we cover up some of God's truth because we are afraid of failure, then our methods do not advance the cause of the gospel; they become another hindrance to it. False doctrine converts no one, and silence about the whole truth of God's Word doesn't strengthen anyone either.”⁹

⁸ Deutschlander, 200

⁹ Ibid., 200

I pray that much thought has been put into the reason behind having our current philosophies. I pray this is not something that is taken lightly but has been prayed over and considered very seriously and thoroughly. This is good for more than one reason. First, so that we are being faithful with our talent (Matthew 25:14-30). Secondly, and closely related, so that we are being faithful to the calls given us by our Father in heaven. Thirdly, we have an obligation to our brothers and sisters in the faith. We need to be able to explain to them both so that they understand and so that we understand. If we can explain it to someone else it shows we have given the matter thought and have a clear and logical reason behind the applications made according to the principles. Professor Brug puts it all into perspective in a very fitting way when he says, “Sometimes cases are very clear-cut. We obviously cannot let a false teacher preach in our congregations. At other times we are confronted with situations in which two or more biblical principles seem to be in tension. We have a responsibility to deal patiently with the weak person who has fallen into error, but we have an equal responsibility to avoid giving offense to other weak Christians who may be misled by his error.”¹⁰

Outreach in our grade schools

We have taken a glance both at biblical fellowship and at applying its principles. Now we shall address how this all relates to outreach in our synod’s schools.

Let us joyfully then struggle with some tough questions together and may we come out of it with a new sense of joy over the intimate connection fellowship has with outreach in our Lutheran grade schools as well as the knowledge they can be successfully used as an arm of outreach.

I am very aware of the fact that I am not really addressing some big new concept here. Our schools have been being utilized in this way for 25 plus years. For this, I know that I am not alone when I say, “God be praised!” However, I firmly believe that more and more ministries in our circles are taking advantage of this opportunity. Out of 316 of our synods Lutheran elementary schools over 22% of the students are coming from outside the WELS and about 8% of those are from non-Christian homes or don’t have church affiliation. That comes out to just

¹⁰ Brug, 110

under 2,000 students who are possibly hearing about their Savior for the first time!¹¹ That is a number that, not including last year, has been on the steady incline!¹²

May caution be given, however, so that numbers do not cloud our thinking or, more importantly, our spreading the truth. As stated previously this is not a new topic, yet because of the trend this topic may be flaring up again. The only way to make sure that we handle this blessing properly is to constantly ask ourselves questions. Yes, a wonderful opportunity exists in our education system but, like anything dealt with in public ministry, we need to ask the right questions. The perfect advice given in God's Word answers those questions.¹³ The heart of the issue may be not a question of, "Can it be done?" but rather a question of, "How can it be done appropriately?" The following lines of thought delve deeper into the issue: How is the school different from the church? In church there is nothing we desire more than visitors, non-members. Are or should our schools be any different? How do we handle funding this ministry? Is it proper to be funded by non-members or are we to not expect non-member families to pay for their child's education? How do we handle biblical fellowship in our schools? How do we handle parents who express no desire to join or even claim our schools are teaching false doctrine yet still desire to send their children to the school. What about the dangers of proselytizing? An important question that may be often overlooked is how does having non-member children in our schools affect member children? Does the search for the lost sometimes let our eyes drift from the fact that our members are making less use of our schools? All these questions express blessings and difficulties with using our schools as outreach tools. The best thing to do may be to look at each of these questions one by one.

How are our schools different from our churches?

¹¹ "Stats - Snapshot Collection - All Documents."
<https://connect.wels.net/AOM/ps/schools/Administration%20and%20Leadership/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2FAOM%2Fps%2Fschoools%2FAdministration%20and%20Leadership%2FStats%20%2D%20snapshot%20collection&FolderCTID=0x012000FDCAAA4C3F22814797E6E30E813A6059&View={11476859-13C4-4DE3-BE17-141C3615A9DA}> (Accessed March 13, 2013).

¹² Last year was only different in that it was actually higher in December of 2011.

¹³ In some cases a question may be raised and no answer given. The reasoning for this is two-fold. First it may be because there is no hard and fast answer and the question is something that each ministry will have to struggle with on their own as it is best for them. Secondly, the author plain and simply does not have experience dealing with all of these questions and therefore has not developed a hard and fast answer on the practical level yet.

Is it not true that we desire those from outside our fellowship to be sitting in our pews come Sunday? Of course it is! That is why so often various pre-evangelism strategies are pointed at accomplishing nothing more than to get visitors on the church or school grounds. We hope for people to develop a familiarity with our places of worship so that we can rub shoulders with different people and get to know them. Then people will be more relaxed when they, God-willing, do visit our churches. A school as an outreach tool makes it so much easier to get those visitors, lost souls on the grounds. They come to us every day. Every day they give us the opportunity to say hi to them, maintain contact with them, and teach God's saving gospel to their children!

Are or should our schools be any different than the church though? The school is a place members can trust for assistance in carrying out God's command to bring their child up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Yet the Church as a whole also has been given the command to let the little children come to Jesus and not to hinder them (Matthew 19:14). The answer may not be as black and white as we would like it to be but I believe the answer is no; our schools are no different than our churches in this respect. The school, like the church, still exists under the call of the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations, to administer word and sacrament to all who give an ear for the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20).

Now, obviously, it is true that the school is different than the church on many levels. Grammar, spelling, world history, science, physical education and the like are obviously not taught in Sunday worship. Shelly Cunningham presents thought provoking idea as to why schools may be considered even more valuable to those who are church shopping: "In a constantly changing society with uncertainty at a high level, people are unwilling to make open-ended or long term commitments. There is a resistance to 'joining' causes or organizations, including the church. Children may be taken by their parents to different churches or no church at all on any given Sunday."¹⁴ What an opportunity then to offer a familiar place for these families to be brought to faith, or strengthened by the gospel!

¹⁴ Anthony, Michael J., ed. *Foundations of ministry: an introduction to Christian education for a new generation*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1992), 150

This idea pertains to fellowship because it gives us an opportunity to witness to people who may not have been in contact with the saving gospel previously. It gives parents the opportunity to make friendships with other parents from either a different church background, or from an un-churched background as well as the wonderful opportunity to have something else in common with fellow members! It gives a wonderful opportunity to teach fellowship to parents through Bible story take home sheets, informational packets upon school registration, through mandatory Bible information classes or Bible information classes through encouragement and contact with school families. Obviously the chance to have parents in a Bible information class is an important one, especially if members of the church also make use of them. This is important because the Holy Spirit is working through the Word first and foremost but also because members can then start to build relationships with these people. Joel Heck writes on the topic, “The pastor’s Adult Instruction Class begins the assimilation process in two ways: by thoroughly teaching the basic truths of the Bible and by involving current members in the classes... This will enable friendships to be established between current members and new members.”¹⁵

Another note worth mentioning is that these parents have come to us with their children. They have been instructed either through the application process or through a mandatory Bible information class about what we believe and what we unashamedly teach. They have placed their children under the leadership of our church leaders. The children are not usurping authority or teaching but are being taught the truth of God’s Word just as if they were brought to church as a visitor on Sunday morning. Finally, it would be a disservice not to mention the fact that through the gospel seed being sown we very well by the grace of God will get to enjoy perfect fellowship with all who believe at the glorious wedding feast in heaven!

How does a congregation handle funding this ministry?

A question which is sometimes brought up is how are we to fund a school made up of a significant amount of non-member children? Are we peddling the word of God for profit as Paul warns about when he states:

¹⁵ Heck, Joel D.. *Make disciples: evangelism programs of the eighties*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1984), 34-35

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God (2 Corinthians 2:14-17).

May we be cautious when we use this passage to say offering a Christian education to non-members and making them pay for it is not biblical. The phrase Paul uses in the Greek is *καπηλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ*. It means “peddle the word of God,” referring to the motivation. He was stating that they did not preach the word of God to make money as a businessman would work in order for purely financial gain. There is not a problem with charging money to someone in order to teach them. Teachers need to be paid in order to teach and the children are in fact getting a solid education. The bigger question would be is our attitude that of a business or that of reaching and teaching as many as possible about the wonders of Christ as well as prepare children to be educated responsible adults? May our prayer be that we never let dollar signs cloud our vision of the real purpose we have been placed on this earth.

Another thought related close to this topic is who should be funding this ministry, the members or the non-members? Reasons have been stated above as to why it is ok for congregation's to charge something for non-members who send their children to one of our congregations schools. It is general practice for members of the church to get a discounted fee and non-members to be charged a higher price. According to the WELS school statistics for the 2012-2013 school year the standard prices were \$1,528 for members of the governing WELS congregation, \$2,492 for members of other WELS/ELS congregations, and \$2,926 for non-WELS members.¹⁶ The logic in this makes complete sense as we want to encourage members of the governing congregation(s) of the school to send their children to it. However, why do we do what we do? Or like a good Lutheran, “what does this mean?”

¹⁶ Stats - Snapshot Collection - All Documents.”
<https://connect.wels.net/AOM/ps/schools/Administration%20and%20Leadership/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2FAOM%2Fps%2Fschools%2FAdministration%20and%20Leadership%2FStats%20%2D%20snapshot%20collection&FolderCTID=0x012000FDCAAA4C3F22814797E6E30E813A6059&View={11476859-13C4-4DE3-BE17-141C3615A9DA}> (Accessed March 13, 2013).

Hopefully all would agree the number one proponent of the school would be the members of the church. Sadly though, as the numbers suggest, the percentage of non-WELS members is trending positively while the percentage of member children is trending negatively. Yes this could be for a variety of reasons that have not been thoroughly researched in the writing of this paper, things like smaller family sizes, economic struggles, a combination of the latter two along with an increased push of school outreach, as well as other possibilities. Would it be helpful though to ask who should be funding this ministry more, the members or the non-members? If we are indeed proud of our schools, and please understand I am not suggesting we are not, would it be beneficial to show that in the tuition we ask our members to pay? Would it show more care to charge less to those non-member/un-churched families to whom we desperately wish to share God's word? Can an enthusiasm be kindled within a church where this becomes the norm, allowing our schools to truly reach out to more with the eternal gospel? The synod's current outline for tuition has served us well for years and careful thought has undoubtedly gone into its reasoning. This being said may we always see the value in a constant self-evaluation of why we do what we do.

A second point which may be valuable to bring up on this topic is another look at Matthew 19:14, the common passage where Jesus states his desire for the little children to come to him free of any hindrances. So often this passage is stated as a beautiful reason why WELS schools should see the wonderful evangelism opportunity before them, and rightly so. However, if the cost is almost double for a non-member than it is for a member are we in fact placing a hindrance before them? Again, let it be clear I am in no way pointing blame or accusing our schools of disobeying this command. Rather let it be another example of positive self-evaluation. If these questions do nothing more than that may God be praised!

This also has implications with respect to biblical fellowship. What an opportunity a body of believers has to rally around their school and church by showing ownership for the Christian education they are funding! It is indeed a wonderful way to show fellowship through support of their school! Whether through funds in the offering plate, tuition, volunteer work, or prayers offered up to the throne in heaven; it gives opportunity for a congregation to rally around something and draw closer as a family of believers. Finally, through these different means of support, the church can show how much it cares about faithfully teaching the Word of God.

How do we handle biblical fellowship issues that come up in our schools?

Many questions seem to pop up concerning fellowship, especially with regard to the children of church families that are not within our fellowship. Pastor Valleskey seemed to discover this as well with interviews he had with different pastors. He states in his paper:

‘A pastor writes: ‘Very frankly we have not found the school to be a good mission arm for authentic mission prospects.’ Another expresses concern that if the congregation begins to publicize its school, because of anti-discriminatory laws it will not be able to control enrollment. The result will be a school that could be dominated by members of other churches who might argue in class for their particular religious position, e.g., only believer baptism, and thus cause an unsettling situation for the members’ children. One school handbook sees this as posing a “fellowship problem.” “We find it next to impossible,” the handbook states, “to educate a child with divided church loyalties For this reason we will enroll only children whose parents are willing to give us the whole child.”’¹⁷

Another issue along these lines is how long does a particular ministry deal with a family who keeps desiring to send their child to our school but who may not be sure if they really believe all the church body stands for? When do we call it quits and acknowledge the fact that it is no longer a matter of love to allow them to be attached to our school? Professor Kuske’s paper divides these souls into three categories: “weak Christians,” “persistent errorists,” and “inquirers.” He stated the following concerning these types of people:

“When we speak of fellowship and refer to a person as a “weak Christian,” we mean a person of our fellowship whose understanding of some portion of God’s word needs clarification or correction, or whose acceptance of some portion of God’ word needs to be strengthened. Dealing with a ‘weak Christian’ does not call for us to break fellowship with him but to use our fellowship with him to help him overcome this weakness.

By ‘persistent errorist’ we mean a Christian who in spite of patient admonition continues in a sin, or who in spite of instruction not only accepts an error in doctrine but insists that his understanding of that doctrine is the correct one and promotes his error publicly. We cannot recognize such a person as a Christian brother with whom we can practice fellowship.

An ‘inquirer’ may be one of the following: a) There may be a person from another denomination who leaves that denomination and declares that he is in fellowship with us, but needs to be instructed in some areas of doctrine prior to his being accepted into

¹⁷ Valleskey, David J., “An Evangelism Perspective of the Lutheran Elementary School | Essay File.”:7 <http://www.wsessays.net/node/1133> (Accessed March 14, 2013).

membership in one of our congregations. b) There may also be a person of another denomination who makes a fine confession of Christian faith and with whom we find ourselves in agreement on most of the catechism truths we discuss. Such a person may also indicate that he accepts the entire Bible as God's word. At the same time he may have no inkling of the inconsistency of that statement with his membership in a heterodox church. The doctrinal errors, the false practice, or the unionism in which his denomination is involved may not be apparent to him or may have escaped his attention. As the opportunity presents itself, we will witness to him in regard to the truth. If he responds positively to this witness, we might meet with him often over an extended period of time to continue our witness to him about the truth. At the same time, as a result of our witness to him, he hopefully will understand that we are bound by our conscience not to fellowship with him publicly because of the errors taught in his denomination even though he may not fully understand all that is erroneous about those teachings as yet... The person from another denomination who wishes to enroll in our area high school is not a 'weak Christian' and seldom a 'persistent errorist.' Most come close to the 'inquirer.'¹⁸

The children often are brought up because the real issue is with the parents. When it becomes evident that a non-member parent is taking advantage of the school, in that they openly confess opposite to or deny the truths found in the Bible, the situation may very well need to be studied. Quite possibly this situation may lead to showing the parent(s) we differ in beliefs and asking if they would withdraw their child from school the following year or whatever is appropriate.

Kent Hunter brings up another facet of looking at the motives behind the parents bringing their child to the school. He says,

“Liking or not liking parents’ motives does not change the reality of the situation. The fact is, people rarely become members of a church for entirely theological reasons. Often, spirituality has little to do with the decision, yet God works through our selfish fleshly motives in amazing ways. While we need to accept the motives of the non-Lutheran parents we need not be satisfied with them. Thank God that he puts us in touch with the unregenerate, for then the Spirit has a chance to work. How are these people going to believe if they do not hear the message? How are they going to hear the message if someone does not tell them?”¹⁹

The motives of someone may not be pure at first. Those motives may indeed make ministry a little messy for a time. However, before sandals are dusted off and we have nothing to do with

¹⁸ Kuske, David P. “The Scriptural Principles of Fellowship Applied in an Area Lutheran High School Setting | Essay File,” January 2001: 2. <http://www.wlssays.net/node/1285> (accessed May 13,2013)

¹⁹ Hunter, Kent R., “The Lutheran School Opportunity For Mission,” (Information Bulletin 32179, BES/BPS LC-MS, 1978), 9.

them let a measure of patience be used in dealing with these families. The message they desperately need to hear is worthy of that.

Also, the children can be a way to show the importance of fellowship to the parents, especially those parents who would be considered “inquirers.” First and foremost we want to show the children Jesus but we can also show the parents how important it is to join with a group of believers. Dawson Bryan delves into strategies on how to win parents. One of the appeals he says to base approaches on is this: “Unite with the church to provide an example in leading their children, in living for their children, in practicing religion with their children. It is an established fact that what the parents are, the children will become.”²⁰ Often times these parents need to be trained how to be biblically loving parents. God willing, one way they will see that is through the bond of fellowship displayed at the church.

Another issue is to look at the children. Is it contrary to biblical fellowship to have children from non-member families participate in worship through singing or maybe to have them serve as ushers or greeters on an education Sunday? Here I would suggest the Lutheran elementary schools offer an opportunity that is maybe not as straightforward as it is in the Lutheran high school system. The children have not yet been confirmed, reached an age where they are held under more responsibility.²¹ This is a question that may have to be looked at closer on the high school level but in grade school, again we have a special opportunity. The parents have placed them under our care. Like any situation wisdom needs to be used. This might affect different congregations or individuals, but over all something like the situation stated above is a wonderful opportunity for children to see the importance of worship, the importance of a family of believers, and to hear the gospel; all the while not pushing the limits of biblical fellowship.

What about the danger of proselytizing?

²⁰ Bryan, Dawson C., *Building church membership through evangelism*. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1952), 144.

²¹ The age that the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church has decided is best, not on the basis of biblical command but rather because it is a time in their life when many new decisions are going to be upon them is right at the end of eighth grade. It is an age by which most kids have developed the ability to understand abstract thought and therefore have a grasp on some of the tougher teachings of the Bible.

Proselytizing, or the act of “stealing members” from other churches, is another concern when it comes to using the school as a means for outreach. This topic can be a tricky one because much of it has to do with motives. Believers will exist wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. Many people will be in heaven who never stepped foot through a WELS door frame, and like the angels, may we rejoice over this. The school must be careful with its outreach methods to not actively seek members from other churches. Bruce McKenney has this to say on the topic:

“If we are increasing our efforts to reach out to the community, can we run the risk of proselytizing? Let me use this example to illustrate my concern: How would you feel if a Baptist or Pentecostal church built a big church and school right next to yours and began to hand out brochures, put up door hangers, and actively sought out your members who live in the neighborhood? I would hope that you would be concerned about that and warn your members about it. I certainly wouldn’t be happy. Therefore, we need to be careful that we don’t do the same thing. Yes, we can make our presence known in the community and be prepared to reach out to others who inquire. But let’s be careful not to seek out actively people who already belong to another Christian church. That would be proselytizing.”²²

Fellowship is a wonderful thing for us as it is for other church bodies. Just as we do not wish for our members to be taken from our care so also other church bodies wish the same. If members from other congregations approach us this is a different story and they would be considered inquirers. Just as the visible fellowship of a synod’s congregations is important, the invisible fellowship of the entire Christian Church is important. May we not cause chinks in that by saying we are the only church body ushering souls to eternal glory. May we instead make every opportunity to preach the pure gospel to those willing to give ear to it.

Does having non member children in our schools affect member children?

This question is more philosophy than anything else but non-member children will and do have an effect on the children of congregational members. Is the purpose of the school to shield children from contact with others? We are all in the world. We rub shoulders with many people every day. The lost are in the world. Having friends “in the world” outside the church can be a very beneficial thing. All we can do is preach Christ crucified and pray that the Spirit work strongly through that. Jesus himself recognized that we would be dealing with this, which is why

²² McKenney, Bruce A., “Using Schools For Outreach: The Potential and the Pitfalls” (Paper, Zion Ev. Lutheran Church, Bristol, WI, September 4, 2006).

he prayed his high priestly prayer saying “As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they may too be truly sanctified” (John 17:18-19).

Non-member children in the school will have an effect on member children, but there is no need for that to be a negative effect. There is no reason we should have to worry, especially when parents and teachers are doing their jobs of teaching the children in their care the truths of God’s word. This would also do wonders in understanding the similarities and differences friendship has with church fellowship. It is also my opinion that this will allow them to appreciate the blessing of fellowship more!

Does the search for the lost let our eyes drift from encouraging our members to make use of our schools?

Congregations need to take a serious look at assessing themselves. In order for outreach to succeed in a school in-reach also needs to be thrive. The number of member children is declining, as was previously stated. This does not necessarily mean that congregations are doing a bad job of maintaining a healthy relationship with church families, but it does suggest that they need to acknowledge the issue. Any ministry needs to maintain the balance, but it is an issue which requires hard prayer and hard work. Training is necessary to show God’s people the beauty of fellowship between brothers and sisters walking together during their time of grace on this earth. In an effort to use schools as outreach may it always be clear that this starts with a strong understanding of fellowship within the church family itself. Carl S. Dudley hits on this point, perhaps without even realizing it when he says:

“Growing churches have a spirit that is distinguishable from dying churches. Some churches which are declining in membership have that same spark, even in the face of overwhelming difficulties. Other congregations, even in areas of maximum growth potential are barely limping along. There is a spiritual quality in some congregations that will make the difference, if the social context allows any room for growth at all.”²³

Here, Dudley is actually expressing the concept of fellowship. The wonderful thing is we know about this already! When we express the joy of joining together with other believers in a setting

²³ Dudley, Carl S.. *Where have all our people gone?: new choices for old churches*. (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979) 66.

where we are constantly in contact with prospects, interest will certainly be aroused. Expressing that joy will convert no one; only the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace can do that.²⁴ It will, however, express that joy which Philip showed his brother Nathan when he said to him, “Come and see (John 1:46)!”

Specific Cases

In researching this paper 46 interviews were sent out in order to get a better feel for what is happening in our schools presently. Though the return was smaller than what was hoped for here is a sample of some of the findings.

The percentage of non-WELS members varied greatly among the returned interviews. The range varied from less than 5% all the way up to 90%. When the question was asked if fellowship difficulties ever arose the overwhelming response was generally they did not. The reason for this was due to the fact that proper instruction was given, either through the registration and introduction process or through mandatory Bible information classes. This just further shows the importance and necessity of having some sort of education system in place to instruct parents outside of the church home.

For all but one of the interviews, the ministries said their school was what accounted for their biggest form of evangelism or at least put them in connection with the most people for “face to face” ministry. This fact was interesting to me and may account for some of the reason that fellowship questions get brought up so much with regard to schools. When any ministry is dealing with an influx of people who are new to Christianity or have different views on theology, challenges will undoubtedly follow. The cool part about that is one gets the opportunity to meet those challenges. One may be reminded of the need to go to their heavenly Father in prayer because of those challenges. One gets the opportunity to instruct his flock concerning these challenges and grow in his own faith as a result. Finally, one also gets to do ministry as a result of these challenges and have the distinct privilege of showing sinners their Savior!

Some of the various “come strategies” ministries had or have for the non-member families are: offering but not mandating Bible information courses throughout the year,

²⁴ William J. Abraham would falsely claim this is exactly how faith is planted. Refer to the quote on page eight of this paper.

mandating Bible information courses throughout the year, an abbreviated Bible information class for non-member families, having the children sing in church, and having the children sing in chapel. They also offered various opportunities for parents to interact with the teachers and pastor(s), such as a fall festival, family game night, Christmas and Easter for kids, spaghetti feeds, and play nights. There were examples of parents and students “recruiting” new families, having pastors be active within the community, making use of websites and local papers to provide news and publish registration and open houses, providing floats in parades, allowing children the opportunity to help with the Jesus Cares program, and organizing summer basketball camps. Another idea was to have a pastor and his team host a different classroom on a specific morning. Parents can come, get a tour of the school, get the chance to ask questions, and then top it off with a served breakfast.

These things are encouraging to see as many of them are examples of showing certain aspects of the importance of fellowship within a body of believers. Hopefully one can see through attending these types of activities heightens the importance of not only joining together as people but, more importantly, the spiritual joy of being connected with one another through an eternal bond, and having people to go to when spiritual questions arise. Many of these ideas are pre-evangelism but, handled in the proper way, can prove a great segue to allowing the Spirit to work through a preaching of the Word that they may join a more full fellowship with the congregation on this earth and a perfect fellowship with all believers in heaven.

Probably the coolest thing that came from the interviews was the overwhelming response to the fact that outreach in a Lutheran grade school can succeed. Before we look at them let it be clear I understand numbers do not tell the whole story. They do, however, give at least a gauge as to whether or not something is reaching souls. The Last Day will be the day when the faithfulness of ministry is made clear and may we continue to look forward to that day with earnestness. That being said, here are some of the responses as to how using the school for outreach impacted the earthly body of believers positively within the last 5 years. From one congregation, there were 13 baptisms and 14 adult confirmations. Another congregation said they averaged 3-5 families each year and baptisms through the BIC but it did not seem to correlate with the school right away as much as a person who had fulltime Christian education showing its value to a non-WELS mate. Another stated that approximately 65% of their current

membership had come to them by way of their school. Still another noted there had been 18 parents confirmed (four were also baptized) from the new BIC class. Besides the parents baptized five students had also been baptized. Yet another one stated they have averaged 10-15 school parents voluntarily attending BIC class every year, they have averaged 10 new members into the church directly from the school each year and they have averaged 7-9 children baptisms from the school each year. Statistics like this were found in other congregations and there is no doubt that this is going on in many other congregations. In closing permit a quote from a pastor who spoke on the relationship between school outreach and biblical fellowship with the following:

“In my mind, the immense positives of outreach that can be done by a school far outweigh the risks of fellowship confusion (which can be avoided through clarity at the outset). A person who does outreach primarily through door-to-door evangelism is going to have a few minutes at the door to share the Gospel, doing outreach through a school gives you constant daily contact with the families and hours of daily Gospel work with the children.”

Conclusion

Holding onto biblical fellowship has to be a priority among the pastors, teachers, and lay members of the congregations in our synod. This is the case because it helps to project and protect the chief doctrine of the Bible, the doctrine of justification. Another priority for the ministries within our circles is evangelism. It is important to us because of the command our Lord and Savior gave us to preach the gospel and in doing so make disciples of all nations. The sad part is sometimes a struggle comes up with following these two commands: one to watch out for those who cause divisions and one to go out and preach the gospel to all nations.

Our Lutheran elementary schools have been seizing the opportunity to use the quality education and the doctrinally sound teaching they provide as an outreach tool for some time. The question continues to lurk in the background, however, whether an outreach minded school can work while maintaining the biblical doctrine of fellowship. This issue continues to resurface as schools continue an upward trend with more and more non-WELS members. Questions arise in our schools that do not always have cut and dried answers. The easy answer would be to just

remove them by only offering schooling to member families. A prayer would be that this paper has led the reader to see the easy answer may not be the best answer.

Using schools for outreach can be effective while still maintaining and holding onto the doctrine of fellowship. Great successes in sowing the seed can and are resulting from it. This outreach tool gives opportunities to further instruct members and non-members alike. It gives opportunities for both children and parents to gain friendships with children and parents outside their church home, while still ensuring they are under the protecting arm of the church to be fed and ready to resist the attacks of that old evil foe. This then also has an added bonus of remaining in contact with those friends and being able to share Jesus through their lives and words.

Finally, may Paul's words to the Galatians be remembered when the question is brought up as to what brothers and sisters in the faith are doing in their respective ministries: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Galatians 5:24-26). May their names not be brought up behind their backs, but may they be approached first in order to fully understand the situation. May a prayer be for each other, so Satan may not win the day and destroy the fellowship we have in faith in our Savior from within. The doctrine of fellowship is truly a valuable doctrine and one to be embraced. May that be made clear in action and word as we successfully use the God given gift of our Lutheran elementary schools to reach the lost!

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Appendix
WELS statement on church fellowship

Theses on church fellowship

Preamble

Church fellowship is a term that has been used to designate both a status and an activity. Both usages lie very close together, and one flows out of the other. The two usages follow the general dogmatic distinction of *actu primo et actu secundo*.

Church fellowship can be defined as the status in which individuals or groups, on the basis of a common confession of faith, have mutually recognized one another as Christian brethren and now consider it God-pleasing to express, manifest, and demonstrate their common faith jointly.

Church fellowship can also be defined as the activity which includes every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians (individuals or groups), on the basis of their confession, find themselves to be united with one another. (Mutual recognition of one another as Christian brethren is itself one such "joint expression" of common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another.)

For very practical reasons, we have preferred to treat church fellowship in our theses as a term designating an activity since the inter-synodical tensions have to do more with church fellowship as an activity than as a status. Both as a status and as an activity, church fellowship needs to be distinguished from the spiritual fellowship of faith in the Holy Christian Church (Una Sancta) which it is meant to reflect but with which it cannot simply be identified. For in the case of hypocrites, who have not yet been revealed, church fellowship is still called for, though the fellowship in the Holy Christian Church (Una Sancta fellowship) is actually not existing. On the other hand, people may in God's sight be united in the fellowship in the Holy Christian Church (Una Sancta fellowship) and yet not have warrant to practice church fellowship here on earth. We also felt that our definition of church fellowship was general enough to include both proper and improper practice of church fellowship, for the definition itself does not specify what constitutes an adequate confession on the basis of which individuals or groups may properly find themselves united in a common faith. For is there not in all church fellowship the assumption present that an adequate confession exists? Our presentation under the points of B sets forth what constitutes a proper confession, the marks of the Church (notae purae), on the basis of which Christians may properly find themselves united in a common faith.

The Theses

Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common

faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another.

A. How Scripture leads us to this concept of church fellowship.

1. Through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit unites us with our God and Savior. Gal 3:26; 4:6; 1 Jn 3:1.

2. This Spirit-wrought faith at the same time unites us in an intimate bond with all other believers. 1 Jn 1:3; Eph 4:4-6; Jn 17:20,21. Compare also the many striking metaphors emphasizing the unity of the Church, e.g., the body of Christ, the temple of God.

3. Faith as spiritual life invariably expresses itself in activity which is spiritual in nature, yet outwardly manifest, e.g., in the use of the means of grace, in prayer, in praise and worship, in appreciative use of the "gifts" of the Lord to the Church, in Christian testimony, in furthering the cause of the gospel, and in deeds of Christian love. Jn 8:47; Gal 4:6; Eph 4:11-14; Ac 4:20; 2 Co 4:13; 1 Pe 2:9; Gal 2:9; 5:6.

4. It is God the Holy Ghost who leads us to express and manifest in activity the faith which He works and sustains in our hearts through the gospel. Gal 4:6; Jn 15:26,27; 7:38,39; Ac 1:8; Eph 2:10.

5. Through the bond of faith in which He unites us with all Christians, the Holy Spirit also leads us to express and manifest our faith jointly with fellow Christians according to opportunity: as smaller and larger groups, Ac 1:14,15; 2:41-47; Gal 2:9; as congregations with other congregations, Ac 15; 1 Th 4:9,10; 2 Co 8:1,2,18,19; 9:2. (Before God every activity of our faith is at the same time fellowship activity in the communion of saints. 1 Co 12; Eph 4:1-16; Ro 12:1-8; 2 Ti 2:19.)

6. We may classify these joint expressions of faith in various ways according to the particular realm of activity in which they occur, e.g., pulpit fellowship; altar fellowship; prayer fellowship; fellowship in worship; fellowship in church work, in missions, in Christian education, and in Christian charity. Yet insofar as they are joint expressions of faith, they are all essentially one and the same thing and are all properly covered by a common designation, namely, church fellowship (see footnote 2). Church fellowship should therefore be treated as a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith. Hence, Scripture can give the general admonition "avoid them" when church fellowship is to cease (Ro 16:17). Hence, Scripture sees an expression of church fellowship also in giving the right hand of fellowship (Gal 2:9) and in greeting one another with the fraternal kiss (Ro 16:16); on the other hand, it points out that a withholding of church fellowship may also be indicated by not extending a fraternal welcome to errorists and by not bidding them Godspeed (2 Jn 10,11; cf. 3 Jn 5-8).

B. What principles Scripture teaches for the exercise of such church fellowship.

1. In selecting specific individuals or groups for a joint expression of faith, we can do this only on the basis of their confession. It would be presumptuous on our part to attempt to recognize

Christians on the basis of the personal faith in their hearts. 2 Ti 2:19; Ro 10:10; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 1 Sa 16:7.

2. A Christian confession of faith is in principle always a confession to the entire Word of God. The denial, adulteration, or suppression of any word of God does not stem from faith but from unbelief. Jn 8:31; Mt 5:19; 1 Pe 4:11; Jer 23:28,31; Dt 4:2; Rev 22:18,19. We recognize and acknowledge as Christian brethren those who profess faith in Christ as their Savior and with this profession embrace and accept His entire Word. Compare Walther's "Theses on Open Questions," Thesis 7: "No man has the privilege, and to no man may the privilege be granted, to believe and to teach otherwise than God has revealed in His Word, no matter whether it pertains to primary or secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or non-fundamental doctrines, to matters of faith or of practice, to historical items or other matters subject to the light of reason, to important or seemingly unimportant matters."

3. Actually, however, the faith of Christians and its manifestations are marked by many imperfections, either in the grasp and understanding of scriptural truths, or in the matter of turning these truths to full account in their lives. We are all weak in one way or another. Php 3:12; Eph 4:14; 3:16-18; 1 Th 5:14; Heb 5:12; 1 Pe 2:2. Compare Walther's Thesis 5: "The Church militant must indeed aim at and strive for absolute unity of faith and doctrine, but it never will attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one." Cf. Thesis 10.

4. Weakness of faith is in itself not a reason for terminating church fellowship, but rather an inducement for practicing it vigorously to help one another in overcoming our individual weaknesses. In precept and example, Scripture abounds with exhortations to pay our full debt of love toward the weak.

a. General exhortations. Gal 6:1-3; Eph 4:1-16; Mt 18:15-17.

b. Weakness in laying hold of God's promises in a firm trust. Mt 6:25-34.

c. Weakness with reference to adiaphora in enjoying fully the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. Ro 14; 1 Co 8 and 9. The public confession of any church must [on the basis of Scripture] establish, however, which things are adiaphora, so that it may be evident who are the weak and who are the strong. Ro 14:17-23; 1 Co 6:12; 10:23,24.

d. Weakness in understanding God's truth, and involvement in error. Ac 1:6; Galatians (Judaizing error); Colossians (Jewish-Gnostic error); 1 Co 15; 1 Th 4:10-12,14; 2 Th 3:6,14,15; Ac 15:5,6,22,25. Note how in all these cases, Paul patiently built up the weak faith of these Christians with the gospel to give them strength to overcome the error that had affected them. Compare Walther's Theses 2, 3, 4, and 8.

5. Persistent adherence to false doctrine and practice calls for termination of church fellowship.

a. We cannot continue to recognize and treat anyone as a Christian brother who in spite of all brotherly admonition impenitently clings to a sin. His and our own spiritual welfare calls for termination of church fellowship (excommunication). Mt 18:17; 1 Co 5:1-6.

b. We can no longer recognize and treat as Christian brethren those who in spite of patient admonition persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it. Gal 1:8,9; 5:9; Mt 7:15-19; 16:6; 2 Ti 2:17-19; 2 Jn 9-11; Ro

16:17,18. If the error does not overthrow the foundation of saving faith, the termination of fellowship is not to be construed as an excommunication. Moreover, an excommunication can only apply to an individual, not to a congregation or larger church group. The "avoid them" of Romans 16:17,18 excludes any contact that would be an acknowledgment and manifestation of church fellowship; it calls for a cessation of every further joint expression of faith. Cf. 1 Co 5:9-11. Compare Walther's Theses 9 and 10.

c. Those who practice church fellowship with persistent errorists are partakers of their evil deeds. 2 Jn 11.

From all of this, we see that in the matter of the outward expression of Christian fellowship, the exercise of church fellowship, particularly two Christian principles need to direct us: the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and His clear injunction (also flowing out of love) to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds. Conscientious recognition of both principles will lead to an evangelical practice also in facing many difficult situations that confront us, situations which properly lie in the field of casuistry.

On the basis of the foregoing, we find it to be an untenable position

A. To distinguish between joint prayer which is acknowledged to be an expression of church fellowship and an occasional joint prayer which purports to be something short of church fellowship;

B. To designate certain non-fundamental doctrines as not being divisive of church fellowship in their very nature;

C. To envision fellowship relations (in a congregation, in a church body, in a church federation, in a church agency, in a cooperative church activity) like so many steps of a ladder, each requiring a gradually increasing or decreasing measure of unity in doctrine and practice.