

## Lutheran Schools: Mission Imperative! by Rachel Klitzing

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Growing up, one of my favorite TV shows was *Mission: Impossible*. The challenges and opportunities were intriguing, as week after week Jim Phelps was assigned a new “mission” – a villain to defeat, a global problem to solve, or a world leader to rescue – should he choose to accept. Jim always accepted the mission!

We’ve been given a mission! Each day in our Lutheran schools around the country and throughout the world, the Good News of Jesus, the living and reigning Savior, must be shared in word and in action. Each day in our Lutheran schools, educators, pastors, secretaries, and other leaders all have the tremendous opportunity to share the precious Gospel with children and families. This mission is not impossible. This mission is imperative!

In Matthew 28, 18-20, Jesus’ words to the eleven disciples, and to us, leave us with a clear mission – the Great *Commission*: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

In Lutheran schools, the mission is being carried out by passionate and dedicated “mission agents” – educators who, by God’s grace, understand their roles as missionaries in the classroom, on the playground, in the office, and in the community. As missionaries, they work together to share the love of Jesus with a school population that is increasingly un-churched and de-churched.

To be effective in mission work, missionaries must understand the culture of their communities. This is as true of missionaries in Egypt or New Guinea as it is in communities in southern California or Michigan. Understanding the culture of our communities includes understanding the changing “face” of families and the differences in generations, among other things.

Parents and guardians choose our Lutheran schools for many reasons: for their safe and nurturing environments, for academic excellence, to escape pressures in public schools, for good morals and values. Many of these families have no church home or have never heard about the love of Jesus. What an opportunity! *Mission: Imperative!*

Here are some ways that Lutheran schools *in mission* reach out to families who do not yet have a living faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

» Teachers make home visits before school starts. They build relationships with families

and discuss spiritual growth at parent/teacher conferences.

- » Teachers teach children songs about Jesus, prayers, and Bible stories. Children repeat these at home. Questions about our faith are welcomed and encouraged!
- » The pastor meets with new non-Lutheran and un-churched parents at the beginning of each school year and talks about what Lutheran Christians believe and teach – a Gospel presentation.
- » All staff members are intentional in witnessing to newly enrolled families, letting them know that they view their role as partners in nourishing their children’s faith.
- » Students are involved in the regular worship services as readers, instrumentalists, ushers, greeters, parking lot attendants, and singers. This gets parents through the doors of the church on a regular basis.
- » On the school enrollment application, there is a place that indicates if parents would like to be contacted by one of the pastors. Many indicate that they would. Follow-up by the pastors is prompt and timely.
- » JOYning together Sundays are planned specifically to invite school families to worship and Bible studies.
- » Families of the congregation are recruited and selected to be “mentors” for un-churched families of the school. They invite them to worship and Bible studies as well as social gatherings.
- » Pastors greet children at the drop-off location each day before school starts, welcoming the families. Pastors or School Chaplain “hang out” at recess and lunch with the children.
- » A Good Neighbor potluck, picnic or meal is shared after a worship service. All “missionary staff” is available, welcoming and building relationships with the families.

Creating a culture of peace and care invites people in. As they realize there is something special and different here, the door is open for the message of the love of Jesus. Our Mission: ***Imperative!*** ■

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