

SCHOOLS AND CONGREGATIONS CATCHING THE MISSION WAVE TOGETHER

A. THE PAST AND PRESENT.

In 2002 the Schools and Mission departments of the SA/NT District of the Lutheran Church began a joint venture entitled PARTNERSHIPS, with the mission statement:

Congregations and Schools working together to pursue common ministry goals for the transformation of peoples' lives in Christ.

Partnerships involves 41 Schools and 80+ Congregations.

STAGE I SURVEYS

Surveys were conducted to gauge the quality of the relationships between schools and congregations, to assess the commitment to and culture for mission, and to seek suggestions on how there might be more effective ministry.

Five groups were surveyed.

1. Principals and Staff of Primary Schools and Kindergartens.
2. Primary and Kindergarten Council members.
3. Pastors and key leaders of school connected congregations.
4. Secondary School Principals and Staff.
5. Secondary School Council members.

Some discoveries:

Primary Schools and connected congregations:

- Staff respondents shared a strong and positive concern for the spiritual life of the children.
- Schools are demonstrating a good quality hospitality.
- Both School and Congregation respondents reflected healthy and respectful relationships between congregation and school.
- Congregation leaders were not over confident of congregations hospitality to unchurched families whose children attend the school.
- Communication between congregation and school in regard to pastoral care of families in crisis needs improving.
- For congregations to be more effective in reaching the lost, the most frequent among the 400 suggestions were:

* Be open, accepting, including

- * Provide involvement, build relationships
- * Update worship styles, use understandable language.

Secondary and R-12 Schools:

- Schools recognise the need for partnerships with congregations to carry out the Great Commission, but find difficulty in carrying this through.
- There is call for extra curricula opportunities for students to grow in faith and discipleship, ministry of youth leaders in the school, the sacraments to be included in worship.
- There is a concern that Christian students do not find relevant worship communities when they leave school.

Meetings were held in zones where survey results were shared and discussed.

STAGE II A GATHERING

On October 26th 2002, 300 people gathered in Concordia College Chapel for “Partnership Day.” This was a celebratory, inspirational and motivational event. Three keynote addresses focussed on current culture, spiritual culture and Lutheran culture.

STAGE III LOCAL WORKSHOPS - Primary Schools and associated Congregations

In 2003, workshops (3 hours in length) were conducted for Primary School and connected Congregation leaders in zones.

Participants were challenged to

- a) Set 1 or 2 key objectives in fulfilling the Partnership mission.
- b) Develop the outline of an action plan for reaching those objectives.

From workshop evaluation forms we discovered:

- a) Most Schools and Congregations had not previously worked together in a focused manner to pursue their common mission.
- b) These workshops had opened new lines of communication for partnership.

Secondary Schools.

In 2004 workshops are being conducted for Secondary and R-12 School leadership groups.

After seeking to clarify current mission attitudes, action and opportunities, participants are being challenged to seek new and innovative opportunities for mission and ministry partnerships.

There is a growing awareness that we are just beginning a new phase on this journey in the Secondary scene. God may well have some big surprises for us in the future.

B. THE FUTURE

Present situation.

- Currently there are almost 11,000 students in Lutheran Schools in SA/NT Approximately 1,000 adults (parents, grandparents) are joining these students at weekly worship/chapel.
- There are staff members in all our schools passionate in their Christian faith and committed to sharing their experiences of Jesus with their students.
- In Lutheran churches in SA/NT there are approximately 17,000 people gathered each week for worship.
- Not surprisingly there is often a striking contrast in the atmosphere, the ambience, and the attitudes between these two worshipping communities.
- When students have completed their 12 years at School they often find it difficult to adapt to a traditional congregation culture and outlook.

Future possibilities.

- Congregations develop a diversity of ministries which target a variety of micro cultures.
We eliminate the “one size fits all” philosophy.
- Some School worshipping communities (e.g. Friday morning chapel) take on more of the responsibilities of a faith community. Without becoming institutionalised, such communities give attention to discipleship and outreach. Obviously the ministry in these places needs to include word and sacrament.
- Some schools, particularly secondary schools, become seed beds for planting new faith communities. Such new communities may be based geographically away from the school, some “house churches”, some mobile small cells meeting in the world for mission and ministry to the world.
- Catching the mission wave may well sweep us into new currents when some traditions (and sacred cows?) may have to be re-considered.
- Whatever the currents, our passion is for Christ. “Christ is all that matters, the rest is tactics”.

A key question: What is it about your experience of Jesus that your community cannot live without?

