



# PRINCIPALS VOICE

## Lutheran schools—why?



*Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.* [Oscar Wilde]

In Australia's highly competitive education markets, why have Lutheran schools? What do Lutheran schools uniquely contribute to this environment?

If we look to the past, then the answer is: to preserve unique cultural values and

practices. Many of our schools used German as their first language. They were parochial schools, aimed not only at preparing their students for life but for a life shaped very much by the values and practices of German culture. Lutheran education was strongly focussed on one, single identity. It was a received, corporate or tribal identity into which Christian-Lutheran faith was inseparably embedded. Lutheran schools were for training emerging Lutheran souls, and they generally had the surnames to show it. Is this still our unique contribution to Australia's education environment?

'Identity' is still part of the core of Lutheran education, but without imposed ethnic values and practices. Our schools are multi-cultural communities where the journey into identity is focused on discovery rather than mono-cultural conformity. Our schools are places where each member of its community can safely ask the question, 'Who am I?' being confident that others will respectfully journey with them into that discovery.

On its surface this does not make Lutheran schools unique. Such respect and companionship should be enjoyed in any school environment. What makes Lutheran schools unique is where people can go with that question. Lutheran schools provide people with the opportunity to look into the very face of God, and ask their question, 'Who am I?'

It is there in God's determined, '*...let us make*' (Genesis 1:26) that they will discover that they are God's longed for.

It is there in God's desperate, '*Where are you?*' (Genesis 3:9) that they will discover that they are God's searched for.

It is in God's besotted, '*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you*' (Jeremiah 1:5) that they will discover that they are God's planned for.

It is in God's pain-filled, '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' (Mark 15:34) that they will know that they are God's ached for.

It is in God's lifeless, '*It is finished*' (John 19:30) that they will know that they are to die for.

It is in God's comprehensive, '*Come to me*' (Matthew 11:20) that they will discover that they are God's invited.

It is in God's, '*Follow me*' (Matthew 4:19) that they will discover purpose.

It is in God's, '*Remain in me*' (John 15:4) that they will discover that they are God's... well, that they belong.

While all schools are places for vibrant discovery, Lutheran schools bring something unique to that environment. They are places where people are offered the opportunity to discover themselves in the face and voice of God. The God who, from the cross says, 'Look up and see. Look up and see me. Look up and discover yourself in me.'

[Jesus said:] *For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

Matthew 16:25 NRSV

In a world where identity is slyly imposed, manipulated and exploited. In a world where the journey into identity can be difficult and dangerous, particularly for young people,

Lutheran schools make a unique contribution. Desiring nothing to gain but offering everything to give, we see ourselves in our honest Other. We discover ourselves in God.

*Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, "Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody." ... [My dark side says,] I am no good... I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the "Beloved." Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence."*

— Henri J.M. Nouwen

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