

# *I broke one of my rules ... and we spoke about community*

**A** basic rule in my office is that I do not speak to any parent of a Lutheran school who has a grievance against their school. I point out that all operational matters in Lutheran education are handled locally and that my office deals with policy issues and national relations. Parents are referred back to the school to seek resolution, and if that does not work, then to the district director. If the issue has arisen after the latter has happened, then I will satisfy myself that due process has occurred. I will then add the aggrieved and their school to my prayer list.

Today I spoke to a parent – Judy (not her real name) an interstate parent who was so moved by her experience of community at the Lutheran school her children attend that she wanted to tell 'someone higher up' about it. Her husband had died at 32 and she was left with three young children. She spoke of the caring school community that had supported her and her children. The unobtrusive additional attention that she felt that her children had received from teachers, the three months of meals she did not have to cook, and seemingly always having someone to talk to. A real sense of belonging to a caring community dominated her perception of that school.

In the last edition of *SchoolLink* I wrote about service being an authentic quality of the Lutheran school. In this article I want to suggest that a second quality is community. Community implies relationships and people, and in all that it does the Lutheran school will focus on people. It is people rather than tradition or the old school tie or projecting a marketable image that matter in the end.

Our theological tradition asserts that we are called to serve and are to be 'faith active in love'. Our understanding of vocation encourages us to see our life as one that is lived in relationships. Attending divine service on Sunday is preparation for a life of service in the various stations of life – family, community, work and church. From the beginning God created humans to live in relationships and not to be alone - the call to be human has a clear sense of connectedness. Our heritage points us to the theology of the cross where we see the love of God for the world, Christ working in the world and Christ present when we see those who suffer. And so we, as connected people, identify with the marginalised, are challenged to side with the hurting and 'do it unto the least of these'.

Community in the Lutheran school sense is not 'rah rah' stuff, but rather people of God in action. It is not really the positive vibes and feelings of wellbeing that we gain from being part of a successful community that matter. Community is rather what we do in compassion and pastoral care. Actions in love are the clearest manifestations of school as community. Whilst being a 'Christian caring community' just rolls off the tongue of Lutheran school leaders, for Judy and countless others like her it is experienced reality.

In community we acknowledge and celebrate the gifts of individuals. There is a realisation that all are gifted in different ways. However, these gifts are not given for the good name of the school, nor for self-advancement, but for a life of service. Community moderates a natural tendency to use gifts selfishly.

Worship and devotionals, at both staff and whole of school levels are at the heart of community building in the Lutheran school, providing the motivation and rationale. There are symbols such as mottos, mission statements and badges that focus attention. Stories heighten an awareness of the character of the community. But above all, community is lived out in the ordinary events of

school life. The Lutheran school's connection to its congregation(s) strengthens and enriches the sense of community.

Of course I know all about the Lutheran school as community since I worked and lived in three Lutheran school communities for 25 years. Now I exist outside of a Lutheran school community and I miss it. It is thus a reality for me, as it is for Judy and her three young children.

It was not only my rule about seeing parents that made me anxious about seeing Judy. My busy program keeps me focused on time schedules and a thirty minute fit in appointment would stand in stark contrast to the patient and ongoing care that she had experienced in her Lutheran school community. In highlighting community as a quality of the Lutheran school I acknowledge with thanks the teachers, principals and others who in countless and mundane ways daily build community.

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