

*The Lutheran school as a worshipping community*

An extension of the discussion of the role of the Lutheran school in the 'kingdom of the right' relates to the place of worship within the Lutheran school. The issue here is not the worship activities which form an integral part of the school curriculum, which are attended as part of the school program by all students and staff and which the Lutheran Church of Australia 'confesses' as 'central to the life of the people of God in mission to the world of the school' (Appendix C: 3.1). The worship under discussion is rather 'public worship of the faithful, involving the ministry of word and sacrament' (Appendix C: 3.1), the worship activities usually associated with congregations and parishes under the responsibility of a pastor.

This approach promotes the formation of 'school-churches' as a 'major mission strategy' for the Lutheran Church of Australia (Stolz 1995: 10). It attempts to take seriously the situation mentioned in chapter two, that an increasing number of families in Lutheran schools are not regular members of any worshipping community. Since a significant number of these families participate in worship experiences within the school, particularly at the Lutheran primary school level, the question arises of whether the school should attempt to become the worship home of those families rather than have the school try to redirect the families to some other worshipping group which may be unfamiliar to those families. In fact, requiring such families to move from the familiar context of the school to an unfamiliar congregation, may cause them to withdraw from worship altogether.

This situation is not only of concern for Lutheran schools, but is reported by schools of other churches as well as they grapple with the relationship between the school and the neighboring congregation or parish (Dwyer 1993: 21). This can, of course, be seen as a challenge to the work of local congregations and parishes, and particularly as undermining the role of parish clergy.

A number of Lutheran secondary schools, particularly those who have boarding students, have school worship involving word and sacrament led by the school chaplains. There have also been examples of the 'school-church' where a worshipping congregation has developed within the structure of the school under the oversight of a pastor, but has then become a separate entity retaining some affiliation with the school. Such practices would seem to be consistent with Lutheran confessional theology. However, if the main purpose of the Lutheran school is seen in terms of its mission outreach rather than its educational function, then, from a Lutheran confessional viewpoint, the school has lost its right to be seen as school and confusion has occurred in distinguishing the responsibilities of the school according to the perspective of the left and right hand 'kingdoms'.

If the Lutheran Church of Australia wishes to involve its schools in a 'major mission strategy' (Stolz 1995:10), a number of practical issues will need to be addressed to ensure that practices are consistent with Lutheran confessional theology. The respective roles and areas of responsibility of the school principal and the 'school pastor' will need careful delineation if possible conflicts are to be avoided. This relationship will be even more complex than the relationship between chaplains (who are members of staff) and principals in Lutheran secondary schools, where there has already been considerable friction at times. Care will also have to be exercised in distinguishing between the compulsory nature of school worship and the voluntary nature of the worship of the people of God in word and sacrament within the school community. The 'school-church' will also have to ascertain how many of the other functions of a congregation it will assume and how to integrate people who wish to worship but are not members of the school community. Viewing the Lutheran school as a 'school-church' also raises questions of accountability in regard to government financial support for the school educational program. While, with care, consistency with Lutheran confessional theology can be maintained by the Lutheran school in respect to these and related issues, the emphasis on the Lutheran school as an educational institution cannot be lost if the Lutheran school is to retain its function as 'school'.