

THE PRINCIPAL AS SPIRITUAL LEADER IN THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL

Key theological principles

Viewed from a theological perspective, the Lutheran school context in which principals live out their vocation as principals is a complex and challenging one but also one which presents them with many opportunities and blessings.

1. All of the individuals who make up the community of a Lutheran school are spiritual people. However they express their need to experience awe, mystery, and a sense of the transcendent in very different ways. Christians believe that the community of the Lutheran school is also the context in which the Holy Spirit through the Word of God and the sacraments calls people to faith in God and nurtures the faith of those who already believe. Lutheran school principals, as part of their vocation, are spiritual leaders in their schools. While they have final responsibility for the spiritual life of the school, principals will in this area, as in other areas of their responsibility, delegate authority to others; in the area of spirituality, particularly to school or congregational pastors.
2. This responsibility as spiritual leaders is incorporated in the Lutheran understanding of the vocation of principal which recognises that God continues to work in creation using human beings to carry out his purposes. God gives individuals various gifts and abilities which they can use to serve others and he places them in situations where they can use and develop these gifts and help others to do the same. However, theology of vocation also challenges Lutheran school principals to recognise the need to maintain balance between the various areas of responsibility which they have both inside and outside the school.
3. Lutheran theology distinguishes God as working within the world in two ways – with the law and with the gospel, with justice and with mercy [‘the two hands of God’]. As spiritual leaders in their schools, Lutheran school principals are challenged to function clearly under the ‘two hands of God’, even though maintaining this distinction is very difficult at times. One the one hand [‘left hand’] it means that they are educational professionals who have the responsibility under God of ensuring that their school is the best place of education it can be and that it complies with all state requirements. On the other hand [‘right hand’] they have the responsibility under God as the spiritual leaders of the school to ensure that the Word of God with the gospel of Christ at its heart is clearly proclaimed in the school and informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities of the school.
4. Theology of the cross presents the paradox that with the eyes of faith given by the Holy Spirit, the love and glory of God is seen most clearly in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. As Jesus himself said, he came ‘not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ [Mat 20:28]. Being disciples of Christ is therefore a call to service as God in Christ has served us. As spiritual leaders in their schools, Lutheran principals will model Christian service and encourage such service in and through their schools. However, they will also recognise that it is in this area of their vocation as spiritual leaders in their schools that they may experience theology of the cross most keenly as they deal with difficult situations and times of suffering, tragedy or distress in their communities.

Implications for practice

A number of implications and responsibilities, challenges and opportunities arise from the principles and context stated above. These include the following:

1. **Principals**
 - as active communicant members of the LCA, able to articulate the core teachings of Lutheran theology and to provide leadership in witnessing to the Christian faith and in living out that faith clearly and openly in the school;

- to set aside time for nurturing their own spirituality, including the contemplative aspects of spirituality, through study of God's Word and an active prayer life;
- to recognise that the Holy Spirit works within the school community to call people to faith and to strengthen the faith of those who believe;
- to integrate their expressions of spirituality and their theological insights into their professional practice and activity;
- to participate regularly in congregational worship and school worship and in frequently leading school worship;
- to foster an active prayer life and study of God's Word in the school community together with the school or congregational pastor;
- to promote and lead in the spiritual formation of staff in the school and in the accreditation of teachers new to Lutheran schools;
- to value the teaching of Christian Studies in the school by ensuring that time, resources and in-service are provided for Christian Studies teachers;
- to lead by example in undertaking theological studies and in encouraging and supporting teachers in their theological studies and development;
- to demonstrate and foster an attitude of service in the school and in the world based on theology of the cross and to promote social justice under God's 'left hand' work in the world;
- to recognise the reality of sin in the lives of all members of the school community and to develop approaches in pastoral care and counselling based on a sound grasp of law and gospel;
- to cultivate a Lutheran ethos within the school by promoting the customs, celebrations, rituals stories and personalities which foster the values and beliefs central to the school and thereby help to create a community of hope, compassion and welcome;
- to work together collegially with the pastor of the school or congregation recognising the particular role of each in the school;
- to demonstrate commitment to the public teaching and practice of the LCA and to promote the ministry and mission of the LCA;
- to balance the various areas of responsibility to family, school, church, society, government and self which principals carry in their vocation.

2. School governance

- to support principals in their vocation and to provide opportunities for principals to grow spiritually through such options as retreats, time out, theological studies, mentoring and reflection;
- to pray for principals in their vocation, also as the spiritual leader of the school.

3. BLEA

- to ensure that there is an intentional, on-going program of spiritual and theological formation for principals individually and as a group;
- carefully to monitor principals who may be struggling in their vocation, particularly in their role as spiritual leader in the school, and to provide appropriate support, encouragement, and opportunities for growth;
- to identify and to provide appropriate preparation for potential principals;
- to work together with ALC in providing opportunities for theological study to prepare principals and to stimulate ongoing theological development for principals.

[M Bartsch
September 2014]