

Renewing Our Commitment to Lutheran Education—Proverbs 22:6

*"Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it."*

Friends in Christ, our nation is in the middle of a cultural revolution that has been brewing for several years. Although there are many political and social issues that divide our nation, there is a much more important battle being fought. It is a battle for the hearts, minds, and souls of our children.

The plans for the current battle were laid as early as 1918 when *The Worker's Socialist Federation* published a paper that accurately noted that "He who has the school has the future." The plan laid out more than 100 years ago was to indoctrinate children, to eliminate any public mention of God, and to rewrite history. Sound familiar?

Today, thousands of schools across the United States are teaching our children—starting in Kindergarten and sometimes as early as Preschool—that there is no hope, that there is no such thing as morality, that our founders were evil, and—worst of all—that there is no place for God in their lives.

Of course, as Christians, we realize that the current battle is a part of a much larger war that the devil has been waging since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Nevertheless, it is important for us to recognize that the battleground has shifted significantly over the last decade. While political and social debates in our nation traditionally took place within a framework of Judeo-Christian morality, such debates now take place within a secular—some might say post-Christian—culture.

Now, many of the divisions we face as a nation result from nearly opposite world views. As a result, it is much more difficult to find common ground than it was in the past. Although Jesus desires that we love all people, it is extremely difficult for Christians to find common ground with those who desire to create an earthly "utopia" in which there is no God and no respect for individual freedom.

So, how should we respond to these very real battle for the hearts, minds, and souls of our children?

Although there are a number of things I believe we can do—both individually and collectively—I would like to focus on just one of those things. Starting today, I pray that we will renew our commitment to Lutheran Schools. As Pastor Trevor Sutton wrote in his book, *Being Lutheran*, "Even though we have a heritage of clear confession, we have no promise for future faithfulness—no promise that heritage will continue."

In other words, as Lutherans, it is important for each of us to recognize that we not only have a wonderful heritage of educating our children about God's love and the hope that Christ provides to all who have faith in Him, we also have a continuing obligation—right here and right now—to teach our children what we believe and why we believe it. As God instructs us in Deuteronomy 4:9, "Be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."

Perhaps our obligation to teach our children and grandchildren is expressed best in Psalm 78. Here, God tells His people "to teach their children so the next generation would know [His statutes], even the children yet to be born, and they in

turn would tell their children." As a result, future generations "would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands."

Martin Luther called the fight over the hearts, minds, and souls of our children "a war with the very devil, who is out to secretly . . . destroy [us] without a battle—before anyone is even aware of what is going on." He feared that "the schools will prove [to be] the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, and engraving them in the hearts of youth." In fact, it was Luther's advice that nobody place their child in a school "where the Scriptures do not reign paramount."

Similarly, our Synod's first President, C.F.W. Walther, advocated that every congregation should establish a parish school. In doing so, he wrote:

"Humanly speaking, everything depends on [our parochial schools] for the future of our church in America. [A]ll church bodies in America have worked for their own dissolution from the time . . . they permitted the state to care for the education of our children. So, the most careful cultivation of our parochial schools is, and remains, after public ministry, the chief means for [the church's] preservation and continuation."

Walther also offered this rhetorical question to pastors who did not view parochial schools as an important part of their ministry—"How can someone who does not care about the *foundation* be seriously concerned about the *building*?"

Although our influence over public schools is limited, we are blessed as the leaders of the Kansas LCMS District to walk "hand-in-hand" with our member congregations as stewards of our parochial schools. As our website states, the Kansas LCMS District is "dedicated to providing a solid Lutheran

Christian education for our children and youth, in part by operating schools within the largest Protestant parochial school system in America."

We should give thanks for all of our Lutheran preschools and K-8 schools that are currently serving the children of Kansas as well as for our new high school in Wichita that will open next year. We should also give thanks for all of our teachers, staff members, administrators, volunteers, parents, and others who support our existing Lutheran Schools. And, let us not forget to give thanks for the many faithful Christian men and women who serve "on the front lines" by teaching or otherwise serving in our public schools.

As we give thanks for these blessings, it is important for each of us to honestly admit that many of us, including pastors, commissioned ministers, and lay members are—at best—"lukewarm" in recognizing the importance of Lutheran Schools. If we have any doubt, let's look at the facts. Since 2015, the LCMS has lost 641 parochial schools and nearly 150,000 students.

Closer to home, 70 congregations in the Kansas District operated a K-8 Lutheran School at one point in time. Today, there are fourteen (14) K-8 Lutheran Schools scattered across our State. Although our 44 Early Childhood Centers are doing a wonderful job and are essential in helping lay the foundation for young children, I would respectfully suggest that they do not serve the same purpose as our elementary and secondary schools in the development of mature Christians.

Friends in Christ, let us never forget that the devil continues to fight for the hearts, minds, and souls of our children. The importance of this fight was not lost on our ancestors and it should not be lost on us now. As Walther's writings so eloquently remind us, our Lutheran Schools remain—

second only to the public ministry—as the chief defense against these attacks and for the continuation of the church.

As we approach our 74th Kansas LCMS District Convention which is appropriately themed—"Proclaim, Teach, Share"—let us each prayerfully consider and reflect on these questions:

1. What can we, as a District and as individuals, do to actively encourage more families to send their children to Lutheran schools?
2. What can we, as a District and as individuals, do to enthusiastically provide additional aid and support to our existing Lutheran schools and to our students?
3. What can we, as a District and as individuals, do to vigorously promote and assist in the planting of new Lutheran schools across our state?

As our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ commands us, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14.)

Amen.

Dave Bruns

