



Standing Firm, Lovingly



The day had started like any normal day at work. Kids came through the door smiling and laughing. The teachers were engaged in faith-filled lessons and working to meet the needs of each individual learner. I was busy working in the office when my admin assistant tapped on the glass, indicating that she was transferring a phone call my way. When the call came through, it was a parent looking to tour our school, seeking admission for their child in one of our lower grades. I gladly invited them to come tour and see the place in action.

Later that day, the mom and child came through on the tour and saw all of the things that make our school a great place to be. After the tour, we sat down in my office and I gave them both an opportunity to ask questions about what they saw. The student asked some typical questions about lunch and recess, and then the mom piped up with a question. Out of the blue, she asked: “We’re a non-traditional family. My wife and I are married and would like to enroll our child. What is your school’s stance on same-sex marriage and how would we be treated as a family in your school?”

To give a little context here, the school to which I’m referring is located where there have been numerous challenges to organizations that do not openly embrace the idea of non-traditional families, specifically families with same-sex parents. As a Lutheran school, we stand firm on our doctrine, which teaches that homosexual behavior is sinful. However, our school was made up of families that had

both traditional and non-traditional backgrounds. The level of care in the delivery of my answer could mean the difference between putting the school on the six o’clock news for discrimination and showing the love of Jesus in a way that allowed us to stand firm, lovingly.

Thankfully, I had spent some time reflecting on my answer for when I would receive this question. Here are the thoughts that formed my response to the mom’s question.

1. Truth comes from the Word of God.

As I pondered the answer to this question, I knew God’s truth had to be my firm foundation. What does the Bible say when it comes to the LGBTQ+ community? Firstly, and most importantly, it’s vital to recognize that God clearly defines actions in this realm as sin. This isn’t me saying this — it’s the Word of God — all the way from Sodom and Gomorrah to what we read in Romans 1. We should never try to excuse sin or sugar coat the truth. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 TIM. 3:16). Stating that the LGBTQ+ lifestyle is sinful is a proper application of the infallible Word of God.

In today’s world, truth is under attack. Truth is labeled as “individual” and something

that each of us can define for ourselves. As Christians, we know that’s not the case, and the real fact is, if we don’t stand up for the truth of Scripture, no one will. Even as we face challenging questions and issues in society, we must remain faithful to the Word of God. In doing so, we will be blessed.

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2. Know who you are.

When you define yourself as a Lutheran school, having a statement of belief is critical. Your defined statement of belief will guide many things for you in Lutheran school ministry, and it also gives you a firm leg upon which to stand. As you share who you are and what you believe with those who enter your community, you are providing them with the choice of whether or not to join your Lutheran school family.

If we try to bend ourselves to accommodate those who do not share our beliefs, we start to lose focus on who we are and what we do. Of course, we would welcome everyone who shares our beliefs or who will allow us to share the Gospel with their children, but if someone wants you to change who you are to accommodate them, it’s not a good match.

3. Know whose you are.

When difficult topics like this come up, it’s easy to focus inward and start thinking about all of the negative outcomes possible. Will your decision about this family land your school in the cross hairs of the media? Will it define your school in a way that you may not want to be defined? What else could happen in a world that so easily labels things as discriminatory or exclusive?



Remember that God wants your school to succeed. You are there to share His love with kids and their families. God gives resources to your school, provides you with what you need as you need it, and is constantly feeding you through His Word. You were brought into God's family through the waters of Baptism, and through Jesus' redemptive work on the cross, He claimed you as His own. Remember, even in the hardest of times and the craziest of situations, you belong to God!

God didn't promise that our walk on this world would be easy. He didn't promise that we would never face adversity. He even said, "In the world you will have tribulation..." But He also said, "Take heart; I have overcome the world" (JOHN 16:33). We also read, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (MATT. 5:10).

God didn't promise that life would be easy, but He did promise to be faithful!

4. Have defined expectations for all those within your school community.

Some of the concerns that you may have about non-traditional families involve issues that you would want to address with anyone in your school community. For example, you wouldn't want any couple to be publicly displaying affection, so you should include something in your Parent Handbook or Code of Conduct that discusses that point across the board. Having clear expectations for parents, and asking parents to sign an agreement to abide by those expectations, sends a clear, up-front message about the culture of your school.

These defined expectations should be clearly rooted in Scripture. Putting Scripture references within the document shows alignment with your statement of beliefs. Any time you have the opportunity to show unity among the guiding documents of your school is time well spent!

5. Be ready to enforce the expectations you lay out.

It's one thing to write something down and have parents commit to it, but it's another thing entirely to ensure that the expectations are being enforced and applied equally to all. In some cases, this might mean that it's time for a difficult conversation with someone in your school community. However, my experience has shown that by the time I recognize something or have something brought to my attention, there are others who have noticed it too. If you don't act on the situations that are brought

to your attention, your inaction speaks volumes and minimizes the guidelines themselves.

Conversations where you have to draw attention to behavior that goes outside normal guidelines can be hard! That's why it's so important to constantly be nurturing relationships with families in your school. Let them know who you are and see what you do, and when you have to talk with them, building blocks of trust have already been established.

6. Remember your ministry targets.

When this family asked me about registering at the school, I had to think more and more about why I would not admit their child. The reality is that each of us is a sinner and has things that separate us from God. In this case, they were openly sharing their situation, and at the school where I was serving, we continually preached over and over that we shared God with kids and their families. If this family was willing to accept our parent and family code of conduct, they were in our ministry target! We all need Jesus, and if God was using our school to be able to share the truths of His Word with this family, we would be fulfilling our mission!

One of the criticisms that came through discussion about this topic was the "sphere of influence." What would happen when this child would share with her peers that she had two moms? What kind of conversations would that open up in the classroom? The reality is that the world is full of sinful things that will influence our kids. Lutheran schools are a blessing where we can openly talk about these things in the context of God's truth. This goes one step further to highlight our partnership with families in providing sound Biblical foundations for their kids to grow upon.

So, to wrap up the story, here was my response: "You and your family are welcome in our school! Yet to be fully transparent, we teach that homosexuality is a sin. We also teach that we are called to love one another as Christ loved us, so your child will be loved at our school. If this teaching aligns with your family's values, and if this is the place where you would like your child to learn, you are welcome here." The mom thanked me for my response and let me know she'd be in touch with me.

The next day, the phone rang again and it was the same mother who had toured the day before. She was excited to enroll her child, and later that month, that

child joined our school. This family ended up staying until their child graduated from eighth grade. A year after their child graduated, I got a phone call out of the blue. It was the same mom who had toured our school. She wanted to call and thank me again for the way that our school approached her family. She shared that she expected me to become judgmental with her in the tour and to share that they were not welcome in our community. It took her a day to respond and enroll. She went home shocked, and told her wife that there was a Christian organization that would love them and love their child. She knew full well that our Lutheran doctrine outlines homosexuality as a sin, but was beyond thankful that we would love their child unconditionally.

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Now I'm not positive that every one of the interactions we have in this regard will turn out the way this one did. What I can say is that we stood firm. We identified the sin, and we loved the sinner. We shared Christ with a child and with her family, and in turn, the parents respected what we had outlined and became an active part of our school community. My encouragement to anyone reading this is to consider how you might respond in your context, and be ready to give an answer about your faith.

Stand firm. Be bold. Be courageous, "for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (**JOSHUA 1:9**). "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (**JOHN 16:33**). And as you remain faithful in your service to God and to His people, remember that "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (**ROM. 8:28**). God is changing hearts and lives through your work. We may never see the end result of what we do, but all things are in God's hands, and His end result is greater than we could ever imagine.

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