

HEADING THE FAITH-FULL SCHOOL
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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for coming. It is a delight to see the range of you who have chosen to be here from many different traditions and histories that support faith-based Christian education. I'm particularly pleased that the Van Lunen Foundation trustees and staff can be with us for this event, which illustrates the strong partnership between the Van Lunen Foundation and Calvin College.

When you received your invitation for tonight and saw my title, "Heading the Faith-Full School", some of you may have thought that I meant to use the word "faithful", with one "l". You may have thought that some staff member in the bowels of the college system botched the spelling. But such is not the case. My choice of words did not involve a typographical error. Let me also assure you that I did not "copy". Only after I chose this title did I become aware that National Catholic Educational Association's 100th anniversary theme a couple years ago was "Faithful Past-Faith-filled Future".¹ As you can now imagine, my choice of "faith-full" as a hyphenated word with two "ll's" was a strategy for asking core questions about the mission of the Van Lunen Center. That is the central focus on my talk tonight, namely: What will the Van Lunen Center do to support the future of faith-full schools? What is the contribution that we aspire to make? I hope my address tonight will help us in exploring this mission together.

The Van Lunen Center exists "to develop executive management for schools of the historic Christian faith". In the language of the business community, this is the "core competency" that we are in the process of developing. This is our mission, our niche of contribution. However, to comprehend this mission we must have a deeper understanding of three words, and the circles that they represent, namely: 1.) schools 2.) management, 3.) and faith. Let's think briefly about each of these.

SCHOOLS, MANAGEMENT AND FAITH: THREE OVERLAPPING CIRCLES

Schools

One speech is insufficient to survey a global history of schooling and runs the risk of caricature. So let's briefly review the relationship of religious faith to schooling just in the United States. Let's visit five schools in a little over 250 years of U.S. history through their pictures to help us understand the current position of faith-based Christian schools.

Picture one: This painting represents a school in colonial times. What can we see when we look inside this school's doors?

Notice that the school looks very much like a home. Observe the fireplace hearth and the small group of children, likely family members and close neighbors, around it. Where homes were Christian, schooling closely intersected with the faith of parents and the commitments to one's neighbors. As Steve Vryhof notes in his book, *Between Memory and Vision*, schools in colonial America were happily valued as profoundly religious in nature. Schools were understood as places where "attitudes, loyalties, and values, none of which could be considered 'neutral' were cultivated."² Early schools in what became the United States embraced a Christian understanding of God and the role of the school in cultivating the faith and moral values of children. Applying language about the separation of church and state to their schools would have seemed quite odd to early U.S. settlers. For many early settlers, whether Anglican, Catholic, Congregational, Episcopal, Lutheran, Puritan or Presbyterian, schools were inherently connected to Christian faith. For example, Lutherans arriving on the East Coast in 1742, led by Henry Muhlenberg, quickly set up a "charity" school to educate the young in religious instruction and provide Christian education for their Pennsylvania neighbors.³

These early colonial schools were "full" of Christian faith and values closely tied to the beliefs of families. Now, by comparison, let's look at a picture of schools about one hundred years later.

Picture two: This is the portrait of a school in the mid 1800s. What has changed since colonial times? Look at the picture and note first of all that the school is its own building. It is no longer a school within the home. Second, observe the top of the building. The cupola looks vaguely like a church steeple but really isn't one. Perhaps this picture is a fair representation of what had happened to common schools by the mid 1800s.

It seems fair to note that the 1800s were deeply affected by the belief that schools could serve a public nonsectarian religion that was more Deist than Trinitarian. If God was indeed the more distant watchmaker of the Enlightenment, then the common school could be a non-sectarian, neutral entity based on reason in service of a young democracy. The school was to be "full" of character-building and virtues education as foundations for a democratic society. But the school was no longer expected to be "full" of faith. Like the school's bell tower which reminds one of a church steeple but isn't one, these common schools retained the memory of Protestant cultural assumptions and practices; but the foundations of faith were receding from their central mission. The purpose of the common school was now to be "full" of the cultivation of good citizens for a young democracy.

Pictures Three: What do we observe in these two photos of schools in the early 1900s? These two schools are both filled immigrant populations but of two very different types.

The left-hand photo of Zeeland Christian School illustrates the commitment of Dutch Reformed immigrant families that embraced a deep understanding of Scripture and their church's theological tradition. They followed the lead of Dutch theologian Abraham

Kuyper as he proclaimed that “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine’”.⁴ Inspired by his message and methods, these Dutch immigrants founded schools. They built the Calvinist day school movement quite quickly; and by 1920 they formed an association to support the network of Christian day schools they had developed.

Then in a subsequent post World-War II wave of Dutch immigrants to Canada a similar phenomenon greatly added to this movement. In both waves of immigration cultural insecurity in their new strange surroundings likely contributed to a desire for their own schools. But these schools also grew because they clung to their religious heritage, for the sake of the faith itself.

However, we should recognize that this Zeeland Christian School photo of the 1920s could represent one of a host of immigrant-based school traditions, each of which presumed that the cultivation of Christian faith required distinct schools in which such could occur. The stories of Lutheran and Catholic immigrants in the mid to late 1800s are similar. New waves of Lutherans, in many of their immigrant branches, carried with them a determination to include religious instruction in schools, whether in a parish or regional school model. They immediately opened schools across the Midwest United States.⁵ In parallel, many Catholics immigrant families first asked for inclusion of their faith and values in the common schools. But when they were rebuffed by leaders of the common school movement, they were not comfortable in such schools where visible Christian faith was at best submerged. Emerging Catholic schools of the 1800s were then denied public funding. So when the U.S. Catholic bishops gathered for the Third Baltimore Council in 1884, they agreed that the way forward was for every Catholic parish to develop its own Catholic school. As the drive for Catholic schooling accelerated out of their own immigrant experience, by 1904 a significant association for Catholic schools was born.

The right-hand photo shows another angle of schooling related to the immigrant experience. This is a picture of St. Monica’s Mission for Colored People in 1919. It is an Episcopal school for the children of “immigrants” who had not chosen to be in the United States, a place to education what were then called “colored” children. It was a school begun in recognition that some people had come to the United States under force, under dire conditions over which they had very limited control. I suspect that there was a strong sense of Christian social justice associated with this school, a sense of obligation to provide a faith-based schooling for children who might not otherwise have access to a quality Christian education. This is a faith-based school born out of consideration for the needs of our close neighbors.

These two photos illustrate the two principal reasons for the growth of Christian education around the beginning of the twentieth century. Faith-full schools were birthed both in the determination to educate one’s own children and the desire to similarly serve our neighbors. We should acknowledge that faith-based education did not represent the entire landscape of opinion among Christians about schooling. Many Christians who had arrived in America in earlier centuries endorsed the idea of common public schools and

worked within them. Yet a significant set of Christians continued to believe in the creation of distinct educational spaces dedicated to the intersection of Christian belief and learning.

Picture Four: What can we observe about the snapshot of the 1980s? Many of you remember these types of pictures, the quick shots grabbed with the little Kodak Brownie camera. Notice that the result is a picture that flatly blends the background and foreground and is often a bit blurry around the edges. For the Sheboygan Lutheran School in this photo, and many other schools like it, the landscape of Christian schools might be similarly described. It's not that the school itself was unclear about its vision; but the place of the faith-based school in its governmental landscape was now much fuzzier.

By the 1980s several twentieth-century court decisions had reinforced the American cultural idea that religion could be separated from education in the common schools. Court rulings in the 1960s about the appropriate role of prayer and religion in common schools had formalized rules in what previously had been a give-and-take environment. But in addition, by the 1980s several back-and-forth rulings about governmental support for resources and services in faith-based schools complicated the picture.

There were two results. By the 1980s the line separating common schools from Christian schools was a much brighter one. In the wake of the 1960s court decisions more Christians were convinced that they couldn't neatly box Christian beliefs as a private matter and the world of education as religiously neutral. More Protestants circles came to embrace schooling that was regularly connected to Christian belief. Some merged three smaller groups in 1978 to form a big association that became a significant planter and developer of Christian schools. Others associated with the newly merged Evangelical Lutheran Church of America made the development of early childhood education a church priority.

But at the same time the relationship of governments to faith-based schools became a fuzzy, blurry one. Governments could not be counted on to provide consistent direct support for Christian education. Christian parents and communities were on their own in supporting the faith-filled schools that they had begun.

Picture Five: Let's now look at two digital images of 2007. What do we see as we look at them? First, we see that schools based in faith did not wither away and die during the twentieth century. Instead, now, at the beginning of the 21st century, there are more than 20,000 independent schools in the United States, the vast majority of which are schools based in the Christian faith. Faith-based schools are a significant portion of our educational picture's foreground, providing for roughly 10% of the school population in the United States every year.⁶

Second, notice that in these pictures the schools are clearly in the foreground. Governments may be present but they are behind the scenes, sometimes as barriers, sometimes as competitors, and occasionally as supporters. But whatever the relationship,

governmental units in a pluralistic culture are now not in the forefront of the picture supporting faith-based schools. Those who develop the current substance behind the image of faith-based schools must get it right without depending on governments as the principal supporter of their efforts. If we, of Christian communities, want faith-full schools, then we must make them happen ourselves.

Third, when we look inside these buildings who are the children and youth? They represent a broader array of Christian faith traditions and a growing diversity of ethnic and cultural traditions. When parents value an education with a Christian foundation, they often chose the faith-filled school, even if it does not represent their closer church tradition. The growing diversity within the community of the Christian school is a good feature of the current photo.

But fourth, look at the buildings in these pictures. They present a twenty-first century era in which we admit that effective schooling for a world that is “flat”, in a global economy highly dependent on substantial knowledge and skill, is not cheap.⁷ We expect professional teaching and administration, appropriate facilities and an excellent program. To thrive in an era when most of the expenses for “faith-full” schools are born by tuition-paying parents and their churches, schools must carefully balance costs, prices and resources.

Yes, the image of the faith-full Christian school in 2007 is indeed a digital one; and being a digital image has both an upside and a downside. The upside is that such schools have a greater capacity to save the substance and change it. Such pictures can be cropped to become more focused and promising. They can travel and be recreated and re-tooled in many global communities. They can be less bounded by the past and more responsive to future hopes and needs. The downside is that the digital picture is one that needs regular refreshing; and it is indeed less protected from unknown environmental forces, not yet in even its peripheral vision, that can corrupt the picture.

For example, here are some questions among the first group of our Van Lunen Fellows on which they are creating substantial projects. How does a school head keep the promise of a faith-full Christian education alive, in a school filled with students, when the governing congregation votes to close its doors? How does a faith-based school reconnect to churches that it left by the wayside several decades ago that are now essential to supporting its future? How does a school reinvent its governing board to represent traditional parents, neighborhood parents, community leaders and needed donors?

The saving, cropping and enhancement of these digital pictures of faith-full schools for children and youth is an essential feature of the work to which executive administrative leaders in these schools are called. It is now to this second circle, the one that intersects school with management that we turn our attention.

Management

Let us simply agree that thriving Christian schools require committed, visionary, knowledgeable and skillful executive leaders who work faithfully with teachers and staff to achieve the school's mission. But what is required in the 21st century to use the knowledge and tools of management in the complex intersection of needs, interests and resources among teachers, parents and communities? It takes great commitment but also a lot of managerial knowledge and skill. The knowledge and tools of management, gradually developed for more than a century, must be brought to the school as an enterprise.

We should understand the application of management ideas to schools as a third wave of management development, a wave just cresting now. The first wave of deeper management ideas grew in the early 20th century, beginning with Frederick Taylor's early ideas about scientific management related to industrial production. Taylor was interested in how Henry Ford could efficiently produce a Model-T at an affordable price for a large number of Americans. For all the faults associated with his ideas, early twentieth-century studies of managerial efficiency and then human relations in the workplace lead to new and still useful ideas. When these were coupled with the planning and decision-making sciences emerging during WW II, a trio of frameworks then supported a more sophisticated approach to organizational management.⁸

By the early 1960s a second wave of management arose. This wave intertwined executive management education with managerial practice through research about planning, finance, human motivation, marketing and organizational systems.⁹ Executive management education was no longer an education in "how-to" procedures but an education about planning, governance, financial systems, decision-making, marketing and conscious organizational change. It was an education that worked with ideas and concepts but not simply in abstracted form. The goal was an education that applied such ideas and frameworks to real challenges. On a personal level I was blessed to participate in this second great wave of change. When I looked for the right place to study management in the later 1970s, good business schools had reinvented their teaching about organizational life. In completing my M.B.A., I benefited from this significant intersection between ideas and application.

The third wave, in which management is now applied to not-for-profit organizations began in the 1980s, and that tsunami has been building ever since. The goal is to extend the intersection of good management ideas into the needs of hospitals, social services and yes, schools. In his latest efforts, noted business researcher, Jim Collins, has written "Good to Great and the Social Sector: Why Business Thinking is Not the Answer"¹⁰ to focus on such not-for-profit applications. But the title of his book is a twist on the one that many in the business community might think is appropriate. Business leaders might say, "But I thought that business thinking is the answer to what schools now need!" Jim Collins recognizes that good management is essential in the social sector. But within it he also understands that schools have their own missions, affecting how management is appropriately applied. The challenge before us now is to adapt and apply good

management to the special nature of schools, particularly the faith-based schools, on which we are focused.

So the goal of the Van Lunen Center is to help executive managers in schools learn about exactly that: good management concepts and skills intertwined with the special nature of schools. We hope to help administrative leaders of faith-based schools, many of whom were never well trained to swim in these managerial water, become excellent lead swimmers. We want their strokes to be straight and strong. We want them to have the capacity to go the distance for faith-based schools. We support this vision by educating them, through our Van Lunen Fellows program, in excellent executive management skills applied in the context of the Christian school. Management is the second circle of the Van Lunen Center's focus and commitment.

Faith

But there is third circle, the circle of faith. It is the most important one. Parents and neighbors choose faith-based schools when they discover that these schools are indeed "faith-filled". Without such a focus, why should Christian schools exist in the 21st century? This third circle is essential to the mission of our schools, insuring that they are distinctively Christian. But what does it mean to develop such a school? Let me make several observations about what it may mean to be a faith-filled school in the 21st century.

First, the faith-filled school is a school that wants young people to come to full maturity in Christ as God's Son. Listen to these words of John Paul II, from his address to Catholic high school students gathered in Madison Square Garden:

“...The Church wants to communicate Christ to you so that you will come to full maturity in him who is the perfect human being, and, at the same time, the Son of god...And because actions speak louder than words, you are called to proclaim, by the conduct of your daily lives, that you really do believe that Jesus Christ is Lord!”¹¹

This is a hope that the faith-filled school will have a deep “heart” for the essence of the Christian faith and the role of Christ in that faith.

Second, the faith-filled school is a school that believes in rethinking our contributions to the kingdom that is under Christ's lordship. Consider these words of Nicholas Wolterstorff, a deep philosophy of Christian education and long-time faculty member of Calvin College and Yale University.

“in...building on the traditions we have inherited, we must rethink and restructure the education we offer so that it does indeed become education effective for life in that kingdom who...Lord is Jesus Christ.”¹²

This is a vision for faith-filled schools that have a well developed “head” for thinking about the ways in which Christians should do their work in this world, a head that provides its graduates with the knowledge and skill that are needed to be effective for the sake of the kingdom.

Third, the faith-filled school is focused on developing an ethic of service to societies that need what their graduates can do. List to Jim Drexler, a professor at Covenant College and the editor of a brand new book about faith-based schools that we are using in the Van Lunen Fellows Program.

“Seeking to bring all thought and activity under the lordship of Christ, Christian school students must be passionate about their God, their lives and their call to service.”¹³

The hope here expressed is that the faith-filled school desires students and graduates who serve Christ in how they live. This is a faith-filled school with “hands” of service to a needy world.

Note that each of these leaders emphasizes the lordship of Christ. This is a wonderful convergence around the foundation of faith-based schools. Together we understand that the work of the faith-based school is to bring student hearts to fuller maturity in Christ, to frame student thoughts about effective contributions and to prepare student skills and attitudes for lives of service. We have much in common in our understanding about the mission of faith-based schools because Jesus is Lord of all creation.

But there is one more angle of the Van Lunen Center’s work that is based in faith. Not only must faith be embedded in the mission and vision of our schools; but for our particular contribution we must also intertwine Christian foundations for school management into these efforts. We must help senior leaders to manage as if faith matters. Executive management is not a generic commodity. Its understanding and practice are not value-free. Management contains assumptions about the nature of the person at work, decision-making, and life together in an organization. If we want administrative leadership for schools to be thoroughly Christian, then what Christian faith brings to the understanding of management must also be at the core of the Van Lunen Center’s work.

These common core commitments need not result in bland sameness among us. The Van Lunen Center does not presume or endorse such sameness as possible or desirable. We are all special members of Christ’s body of believers who bring special gifts and historical experiences to our understanding of Christian schools. Thus, the goal of our work together is to explore our differences and learn from each other how the Holy Spirit has been at work through Scripture, the church, our thinking and experience in shaping the history and future of our Christian schools.

But we can learn from each other. How much richer our faith-based schools will be when we learn together about how we shape faith-filled education for the children,

youth, families, churches and communities with whom we work? When we use Christian theologians, philosophers and educators to consider the mission of faith-based schools, whether their names are: John Calvin, John Comenius or Frederick Froebel; Nicholas Beversluis, Clarence Joldersma or Gloria Stronks; Arthur Holmes or Richard Hughes; Martin Luther or Mel Kieschnick; Jacques Maritain or Terry McLaughlin

Now add the experience of mature Christian administrative leaders such as: Patrick Bassett, Bruce Lockerbie, Lori Glynn and Marlene Lund; and the voices of Christian thinkers about management such as: Helen Alford and Michael Naughton; Bill Hybels and Max DePree; William Diehl and Laurie Beth Jones

In this convergence of effort about schools, management and faith you likely recognize only some of these names. But know that they form a chorus of Christians from reformed, evangelical, Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal and multi-denominational backgrounds who actually sing quite well together, even when we sing different parts.. How much richer we all are with such abundance!

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once noted,

“...how inexhaustible are the riches...for those who...live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians!...”¹⁴.

Yes, we are not the same; but we will mature much more faith-full schools as all of us bring what we know and experience to a common place of learning and development.

CONCLUSION

So there you have it...the intersection of three circles that represent the picture to which the Van Lunen Center will contribute: schools, management, and Christian faith. This is the core of our Center’s mission.

As a voice from this community, Henry Zylstra, said over fifty years ago,

“The question after all is not one of how little we can get by with and still be essentially Christians. The question in education is one of how strong, how aware, how full, how rich we make this profession.”¹⁵

In the end our goal is to support the fullest profession of Christian faith possible in the lives of our schools and their graduates.

I have come from a tradition of faith-based schools in Kalamazoo, Michigan from kindergarten through college. I am very grateful for how these schools have shaped my life as a Christian. My husband and I also wanted a Christian education for our children, so they too could develop their faith in every area of life. They are now grown and married; but we know that Christian schools were very important partners with our home

and church in providing a full rich faith foundation for our children. I want such opportunities for many more children and youth in our churches and neighborhoods. But to support such full professions of Christian faith, we must intersect these three circles, schools, management and faith, very wisely. The Van Lunen Center is dedicated to supporting such a vision.

Earlier this summer, while thinking and planning for tonight, I was calling this event an inaugural. But then our assistant, Yvonne Ferwerda, found this last picture. I've been thinking about changing my language ever since. I like this picture because there are lots of little tents, like our individual schools in all their multiplicity, in this campground.

But look now at the biggest tent. It is a striped one of red and white that is much larger and spreads its image much broader and deeper than any of the small tents in its vicinity. This big red and white striped tent reminds me of the God who as a Creator has had a tabernacle among us since the beginning; of the God who shed real red blood for us in Christ Jesus; and of our God who leaves the tent flaps open so his Holy Spirit can blow through. This is God's Big-Tent that allows us to do our work together in shaping the future of faith-filled schools. No, this is not an inaugural. This is a dedication, to the Trinitarian God of this Big-Tent. That should be the reality of the picture that we are now creating in our schools. So let's pray and work with the Holy Spirit to fill this big Tent of schools with ones that are well managed but rooted in our faith. Thank you.

Endnotes

¹ See National Catholic Education Association, Retrieved on September 7, 2007 from www.ncea.org/assets/2004annualreport.pdf.

² Vryhof, Steven C., *Between Memory and Vision*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004, p. 33.

³ Kieschnick, Melvin, "A Brief History of Lutheran Schools", Retrieved on September 7, 2007 from http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners/archives/060304_06.html.

⁴ Kuyper, Abraham, quoted in translation, "Sphere Sovereignty", in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, James D. Bratt, ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998, p. 461.

⁵ Kieschnick, *ibid*.

⁶ This is a rough estimate generated from statistics about the number of U.S. faith-based schools and their average enrollment in relationship to the total school-age population.

⁷ Reference is taken from the title of a book by Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

⁸ Daft, Richard L., and Marcic, Dorothy, *Understanding Management*, Ch. 1, Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western, 2006.

⁹ Two reports were independently published in 1959 but reached similar conclusions about business education. See Robert A. Gordon and James E. Howell, *Higher Education for Business* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), and Frank Cook Pierson, *The Education of American Businessmen* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959).

¹⁰ Collins, Jim, *Good to Great and the Social Sector: Why Business Thinking is Not the Answer*, San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 2005.

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks to the American Church*, Harper San Francisco, 1992, p. 37-38.

¹² Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Beyond 1984 in Philosophy of Christian Education", Edited collection by G. Stronks and C. Joldersma, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002, p. 82.

¹³ Drexler, James, "Introduction: Getting the Focus Right", in *Schools as Communities*, Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design Publications, a Division of ACSI, 2007, p. xx.

¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Harper San Francisco, 1954, p. 20-21.

¹⁵ Zylstra, Henry, *Testament of Vision*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958, p. 143