

Building the Enrollment of a Parochial School Through Children of Communicant Members

[Pastor-Teacher Conference, Wayne, Michigan, January 1964]

By Richard C. Scharf

Scripture says, “Suffer little children... to come unto Me.”—Matthew 19, v.14. Kretzmann explains that this means that “every encouragement should be given the children that they may learn to know and love their Savior.”¹ It is certainly quite reasonable to expect that we Christian Day School teachers and pastors do just that, give *every encouragement* possible to the children of our communicant membership so that they may learn to know and love their Savior more dearly. For those of us who have the blessed privilege of serving congregations that maintain Christian Day Schools, this encouragement surely takes the form of building or increasing our Christian Day School enrollments. Since it is quite unreasonable to think otherwise, we will assume that all of us agree that this responsibility of encouragement belongs to each of us—pastors, principals, and teachers. Therefore, I will not dwell on why we wish to build our Christian Day School enrollments, but let me lay before you some ways and means we might utilize to accomplish this end. Let me emphasize that I will not be so bold as to suggest that these are the only or even the best ways to build our enrollments. Rather, let my purpose be, that somehow, by the grace of God, I might serve to provoke each of you to some pensive reflections upon your own efforts in this direction.

In attempting to give you “food for thought,” we might speak of one, the direct encouragements, as the “main course,” while the other, indirect encouragements, might be referred to as “dessert.”

These, by no means logically ordered suggestions, I offer for your digestion.

While direct encouragements to our communicant members and their children to avail themselves of the blessed opportunity of Christian education can be varied and will certainly differ individually to meet specific needs, let me point out that it might be well for each faculty, (and by faculty, I wish to include the pastor, the spiritual leader of the entire membership) to collectively reflect upon its combined efforts at enrollment building and thereby plan and strive toward the same goal.

I believe a survey should be made of all families having children of school age within a congregation at least once, to determine what reasons are being used for not sending children to the Christian Day School. Perhaps this can even be done periodically, say every three or five years. It might be done by the faculty itself, by the Board of Education itself, by a stewardship visitor’s group itself, or by one or more of these agencies working together. It might also be designed to gather other information or could be more limited in scope.

I believe every congregation that maintains a program of Christian education ought to have a definite system of keeping record of children within the congregation. While Concordia offers a card system that is to my liking for this purpose, a home-made system might be just as adequate.

It would be well for every school to have some system of contacting children who become of school age each year. A system that has worked well for us the past several years is this. The preschool Sunday School teacher and the Day School kindergarten teacher make the initial home visit to the prospects, inviting the parents to continue the Christian education of the child, begun in Sunday School, on a full-time basis in the Christian Day School. The child and parents are also invited to attend a “kindergarten visiting day.” Simultaneously, the pastor sends a letter to the homes of the prospects, further urging the parents to continue the Christian education of the child in the Christian Day School. At a report meeting of the Board of Education, the results of these home visits are reviewed, and follow-up visits are made by teams of Board members, the principal, or the pastor, as the case may dictate. Let me emphasize that we should never minimize the work of laymen in this respect. It may be that consecrated and gifted Board members may be able to do as much, yes, perhaps even more, toward encouraging other communicant parents to benefit themselves and their children through the Christian education their congregation maintains.

¹ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary on the Bible*, New Testament, Vol. I, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.

Similarly, a modification of this same system might be used in follow-up visits after reviewing results of a congregation-wide survey of the type mentioned earlier.

At the “kindergarten visiting day” parents are given an opportunity to see a sample of the Christian kindergarten. This day also affords yet another opportunity for the pastor and/or principal to say a few more words of encouragement to those parents yet in doubt, using such Scriptural exhortations as may apply, and also explaining the practical aspects of such Christian training.

Also, a definite procedure should be followed in contacting new families coming into the congregation. Whether the pastor makes the encouragement to send the children to the Christian Day School, or the names of new families are turned over to the Board of Education or principal for a school contact, can best be decided by the individual boards and faculties working together in harmony.

Certainly we cannot overlook the importance of the pastor’s sermons encouraging attendance at the Day School, for where better can the many admonitions of the Lord to “train up a child in the way that he should go” (Proverbs 22, v.6) be used. As spiritual counselor of the entire flock, the words of the pastor and the preaching of the word from the pulpit in a divine worship service as related to Christian education, too, bears fruit, and as promised, “shall not return... void” (Isaiah 55, v.11). While many opportunities to insert an exhortation to send children to the Christian School undoubtedly present themselves throughout the sermons of the church year, I feel that several definite sermons on Christian education or “school sermons,” if you will, are in place. Perhaps even the timing of these very sermons may prove effective.

The promotion of a formal Eighth Grade Graduation Service, complete with guest speaker, and invitational publicity of the same to the entire membership, might also lead some to the blessings of a Christian Day School education.

An informational pamphlet, designed to promote the individual Christian Day School, other school tracts available from publishing houses, Day School papers or bulletins, a few words by the pastor in the weekly church bulletin or monthly newsletter, or good newspaper publicity made available to the membership, might in some way encourage enrollment in the Day School.

A good, active parent organization with a well-planned program and definite goals may arouse interest in some for the Day School.

As “topping” or as “dessert” to the “main course,” we might also refer to some more indirect ways of influencing our membership positively toward Christian education.

We can be sure that as Christian Day School teachers our willingness to “pitch in” on other congregational efforts, whether they be specified in our call or not, our zealotness in doing our best at other responsibilities within the congregation, such as organ playing, choir leading, youth work, Sunday School teaching, etc., our attendance at church functions and divine worship, our whole Christian attitude and life within the congregation is being watched.

Even our very appearance, whether we be neat or sloppy, clean or dirty, whether shoes are shined, pants are pressed, etc., is certainly observed. I would not care to accuse anyone of forbidding little children to come unto Him as the disciples apparently did. Yet, through neglect of appearance or shirking of God-given responsibilities could we possibly do just that, forbid... hinder... one of those little ones?

Indirectly, too, our very teaching may have an influence upon the building of our enrollment. If good things about the school are brought home by the pupils and again passed on by the parents to the other members, if the pupils our schools produce are living examples of that love for their Savior, if these pupils become good, useful citizens of our communities, and especially of our Christian congregations, then certainly others will wish to experience the blessings of a thorough Christian education. If we can instill in the hearts of our pupils, as well as their parents, by the teaching of the Word of God and the conversion of the Holy Ghost, a deep love for their Savior, they, too, will be prompted to witness for Christ and will draw others within the congregation to the Christian Day School.

While some of these last may be very subjective, indeed, I believe that their influence is felt and we must certainly reckon with them if we wish to have our enrollment grow.

In concluding this paper on building the enrollments of our parochial schools, I would be first to admit that I have not exhausted all the materials on this topic, nor have I gone into as much detail in explanation of certain thoughts as perhaps I might have. But, if in some way, I might have led you to reconsider, reflect upon, re-evaluate your own enrollment building program, perhaps I have served some good. We are living in an age where “the devil will certainly try his art and tempt some to despise the Word of God, . . .he will seek to turn the children from education to the service of Mammon.”² While Luther with these words undoubtedly spoke of a situation somewhat different from ours, I believe that by inserting “Christian” before “education,” this quotation has meaning for us also. It behooves us, then, to use every means at our disposal to combat this evil foe, Satan, and bring also these little ones to Christ. That brings me to the last, but certainly not the least, or not least used, means of building our enrollments. That means I am speaking of is prayer. We have much to pray for and I could not begin to enumerate the many ways in which we can ask for the Lord’s blessing that will affect the building of our enrollments. I mention this only because I think we often forget the effectualness of prayer and perhaps even neglect prayer when it comes to praying for enrollment growth, etc. While the results of some of the other methods of building our Day School Enrollment may not be so apparent, of the results of prayer we can be sure, for He has promised “All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” (Matthew 21, v.22)

² F.V.N. Painter, *Luther on Education*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.