



Professionally Speaking



Values

All schools teach values, but these values may vary significantly from school to school. Therefore, it might be helpful to define the term as a starting point for discussion of the implications for Lutheran schools. Values are “the principles and beliefs that influence the behavior and way of life of a particular group or community” (Encarta Dictionary). Even though the topic of values can be controversial, most schools share values like excellence, effort, continuous achievement, respect, responsibility, partnership, safety and so on. Divergences emerge from the foundational beliefs that underlie the values and how they are interpreted and applied.

Lutheran schools are grounded in the values of the Lutheran Christian faith, which are succinctly summarized in the “solos” of the Lutheran Reformation. (*Sola* means “alone” in Latin.) *Sola Fide* means that believers are saved by faith in Jesus alone, without the deeds of the Law. *Sola Gratia* means that salvation comes through grace — God’s undeserved love — alone. *Sola Scriptura* means that God’s plan of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone is properly described and imparted in Scripture alone. By extension, the *Sola Scriptura* principle relies upon the Holy Scriptures as the sole source and norm of Lutheran doctrine.

Beyond these foundational Reformation principles, prospective and constituent families also want to know what their individual Lutheran school values in its day-to-day interactions with students. Published examples of core values gleaned from a sampling of Lutheran school promotional materials include: faith in Jesus Christ, relationships grounded in Christ’s love and forgiveness, academic excellence, excellence in teaching and learning, Christian nurture and outreach, faith integration in every subject, realizing potential, service that glorifies God and serves mankind, Christian discipline and forgiveness,



intellectual and moral leadership development, operating a safe learning environment, wise stewardship of the resources God has provided, use of technology in learning and so on.

While some of the values noted above are common to all schools, most are unique to Lutheran Christian schools. The three “solos” of the Reformation place foundational Lutheran school values at crosscurrents with the beliefs and values that undergird secular schools. Most of the divergent values between Lutheran schools and their secular counterparts can be traced to applications and implications of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Subsequent rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court have parsed the specifics of what Thomas Jefferson described as “a wall of separation between church and state” — no prayer, devotional Bible reading, worship, evangelism or celebration of religious holidays in

public schools. Based on Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20), Lutheran schools embrace these expressions of Christian faith as cherished values. Thus, the First Amendment is a two-edged sword. It forbids public schools what it guarantees Lutheran schools.

Lutheran schools answer Pontius Pilate's profound question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38a), with the *Sola Scriptura* value "your word is truth" (John 17:17b). Applying the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, secular schools do not value truth based on the revelation of Holy Scripture. Instead, they value the belief that truth is rational, discovered through scientific investigation. While Lutheran schools value, respect and teach reason and scientific methodology, they value the ultimate truth revealed in Scripture above human reason and discovery. Thus, Lutheran schools are free to teach that God created the universe and everything in it by the power of the same Word that defeated Satan and earned eternal salvation for all who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. Similarly, Lutheran schools accept, respect and value the timeless and unalterable precepts of Holy Scripture over the ever-changing vicissitudes of public opinion, societal mores and political correctness.

The Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment requires that secular schools value all religions equally, giving preference to none. Sometimes ridiculously extreme interpretations of that principle have resulted in replacing Christian holiday references with "non-offensive" secular terminology. Intentionally or not, such legally and politically correct applications of the Free Exercise Clause teach agnosticism, atheism or universalism (the belief that all religions are essentially the same and that all religious paths lead to the same god, known by whatever name).

Here again, biblical Lutheran values stand in contrast to secular values. Lutheran educators are free, indeed commissioned, to teach the truth as Jesus taught it in John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me." It has never been more important for Lutheran educators to understand, cherish and teach the values that give expression to Jesus' Great Commission to "make disciples of all nations" by "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Rely on Jesus' promise: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19–20).



I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

– John 14:6

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