

## **Best Practices in Urban Education Summit**

### **Introduction**

On May 10 and 11, 2011, the Center for Urban Education Ministries (CUEM), an initiative of Wheat Ridge Ministries, in partnership with the Chicagoland Education Foundation (CLEF) hosted 13 individuals from across the country in a roundtable summit on successful models in urban education.

The summit came about following extensive research through the CUEM's Charlie Project, and with the goal to share best practices and support those in the field. The summit is intended to be the first step in establishing a network of support and resources for urban Lutheran and Lutheran-led schools throughout the country. The sharing of ideas with the broader Lutheran education community is the ultimate goal.

During the past ten years we have seen rapid decline in the number of students attending Lutheran schools in our cities and a decline in the number of schools serving these students. Rather than dwelling on why our Lutheran schools are failing, we chose to spend our time asking, "What makes urban Lutheran schools successful?"

Participants represented schools and other ministry partners in the cities of Los Angeles, Saint Louis, Chicago and New York. The two days ended with a tour and participation in chapel services at Holy Family Lutheran School in Chicago, a very successful urban Lutheran school.

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### **Goals of the summit included:**

- Share the stories of successful models of Lutheran or Lutheran-led urban schools.
- Identify key elements that make these schools successful.
- Identify individuals to serve as mentors to others seeking to replicate successful programs.

### **Format of the summit:**

- Each participant introduced themselves and provided a 30-minute overview of their organization or school model.
- Discussion/questions/suggestions followed each presentation.

### **Models Shared**

#### **Schools serving students with special needs**

- The New LIFE School, Bronx, New York

This state-funded special education program serves students ages 10-21 (grades 5-12), with a variety of academic and/or behavioral disabilities. Of the students currently enrolled 75% are diagnosed with a mental disability and 25% percent are on medication. The school is under the umbrella of Lutheran Social Services of New York, but since it is a state of New York contract school, it does not teach religion. Fully approved by the New York State Department of Education (NYSDOE), The New LIFE School fills the void in the educational system for students with special needs whose academic requirements cannot be met in a public school setting. These students are referred to the school by the NYSDOE, and the state of New York pays The New LIFE School \$27,000 per student annually. The school offers two kinds of diplomas: (1) an Individual Education Program Diploma which allows students to enter a vocational school, and (2) a High School Diploma which allows college entrance. This year the school will begin an after school program which will allow the teaching of religion during non-school hours.

### **Lutheran-led Charter Schools (Public Funding)**

- Better Learning Academy, Saint Louis, Missouri  
This will be the first faith-based initiated charter school in Missouri. Set to open in September, 2011, the Academy will be housed in a building originally operated as a Lutheran school by Bethlehem Lutheran Church. The school closed 35 years ago and has housed a Head-Start program since then. Bethlehem began its community involvement and regrowth with Better Living Communities, a 501(c)(3) organization which helps redevelop old housing and builds new construction residences. The church is well respected and trusted in their neighborhood. In order to further serve the community, it was decided to open a charter school; from inception to opening, the process has taken three years. The school board consists of Lutheran leaders from the community. Although religion cannot be taught during the core school day, there will be a wraparound program after school until 6:00 p.m. The school will offer a three-pronged experience: Spiritual, Educational and Cultural. The congregation expects that the staff will model Christ from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and teach Christ from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m.

### **School Consolidations**

- Concordia School System, Los Angeles, California  
This plan began as a discussion between two high schools and has resulted in the merger of seven Lutheran schools to open in September of 2012. The schools are all within a 25-mile radius in the San Fernando Valley, outside of Los Angeles. Through this consolidation, there will be five campuses (a sixth is currently under consideration). Because higher enrollment is expected at each school, teachers will instruct in their field of interest as opposed to teaching all courses. This will decrease teacher lesson preparations to three or four per day as opposed to seven or eight per day most currently prepare. Concordia School System has also increased salaries to nearly the district level and benefits will be provided – something most of these teachers have not had in the past.
- Unity School Association, Chicago, Illinois

Through the consolidation of four grade schools, this new school will consist of two campuses, Unity East and Unity West. It has been a year in the making and will open in the fall of 2011.

- New Hope and New Luther High School, Chicago, Illinois  
These two schools will consolidate to serve students in preK-12 at the former Luther South site. The school is working to secure bussing for students from the New Hope neighborhood to the new school site.

### **Lutheran Schools Supported by Philanthropy**

- Holy Family Lutheran School, Chicago, Illinois  
Holy Family School grew out of a school in the Cabrini Green Public Housing Projects in Chicago. Volunteers raised money to fund the church school in that neighborhood since the congregation didn't have the means to support a school. They have grown and reinvented themselves to become the mission they are today. Holy Family School is not supported by a single parish – they have built a team of 60 churches (mostly Lutheran and Episcopal) that support them, recently adding Saint Gregory Episcopal School that was about to close. The annual cost of education per student is \$7,200 of which parents pay from \$500 to \$2,900, based on a sliding scale.

The school enrollment is 290 students in preK-8. Statistically, 98 percent are African-American and 2 percent are Hispanic; 87 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch; 80 percent of the students come from single parent homes. Holy Family School boasts 20 percent more classroom time than other Chicago schools. The school now receives \$500,000 in government funding through Preschool for All Kids (\$4,000/student) and Titles. Out of a budget of \$2.6 million, about \$1.5 million is raised through donations and gifts.

### **Organizations**

- Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation, Bensenville, Illinois  
CLEF was founded in 1993 by a small group of Lutherans committed to keeping Chicago's Lutheran schools open, with viable options for families across the city. What began as an organization that simply provided financial assistance has become a true partner to the schools, providing financial, administrative and professional development assistance. The mission of CLEF is to "partner with Chicago's Lutheran schools to ensure that every child in Chicago has the opportunity to experience a quality, Christian education." Today, the organization distributes more than \$1 million to Chicago Lutheran schools every year. CLEF serves as the fundraising and professional development arm for 29 Lutheran schools in the inner-city. CLEF helps foster sponsoring relationships between individual schools and congregations.

As has happened in many large cities across the country, Chicago has lost Lutheran schools due to economic issues. Professional development opportunities, teacher

scholarships and other administrative assistance have become a growing area of service by CLEF to our schools.

- Association of Christian Schools International — Urban Schools Department  
ACSI is the world's largest organization of Christian Protestant schools. Of the 50 poorest counties in the United States, 47 are rural. This led ACSI to use URBAN as an acronym for Under-Resourced Behind-Academically Non-white students. Eight percent of ACSI's 4,000 member schools in the nation serve an URBAN population. ACSI offers products and services to these schools, including a textbook series, about 20 annual teacher conventions, 20 annual administrative conferences and student activities such as spelling bees. Nationally recognized accreditation and teacher certification are offered through ACSI.
- Lutheran Schools Association, Bronxville, New York  
The Lutheran School Association is a pan-Lutheran organization with 65 member schools for which they serve as partner, advocate and facilitator. The schools are grouped into geographic clusters to support each other and pool their Title funds. The member schools consist of 36 free-standing preschools which are partially funded through Universal PreKindergarten (state funded half-day programs), 25 elementary schools and 4 High Schools – 2 of which are engaging with elementary schools. LSA encourages these schools to participate in LSA's Educational Planning Process, an intensive two year strategic planning process for schools and churches.
- Urban Teachers Institute, Concordia University-Wisconsin, Mequon  
The purpose of the Urban Teachers Institute is to transform urban classrooms to become places of academic success, strong values and true security. Their four-pronged plan includes: preparing students for urban classrooms through monthly meetings, graduation with an urban education minor; assisting administrators by researching effective school practices and recruiting and preparing future urban teachers; supporting teachers by providing coaching and research based strategies; and serving as a resource for urban education issues.
- The Lutheran Foundation of Saint Louis, Missouri  
The Foundation supports 37 Lutheran elementary schools and 4 Lutheran high schools in Saint Louis and the surrounding region. There were 20 Lutheran elementary schools in the city of Saint Louis and by the end of the 2011-12 school year only 3 will remain. The mission of the Foundation is to support Lutheran schools of excellence. They have learned that money alone is not the solution as schools have failed even where major funding has been invested.
- The Center for Urban Education Ministries, an initiative of Wheat Ridge Ministries  
The purpose of CUEM is to connect leaders of Lutheran congregations, schools and agencies to live out their vocation by encouraging and supporting the development of innovative and sustainable educational opportunities which bring health and hope in the name of the healing Christ to urban youth and families. Through its Charlie Project,

the CUEM has encountered many successful urban schools and is currently working to start a school which engages with its community through the building of community enterprises.

## **Conclusions**

- There are many possibilities open to Lutheran churches that wish to provide education in their communities. The church school supported by a single congregation is no longer the predominant successful model in urban areas.
- Development of successful wraparound before and after school models is important for those schools which accept public funding.
- Lutheran churches need to be encouraged to embrace and support traditional Lutheran schools, Lutheran-led schools and Lutherans teaching in public schools.
- Strong and effective leadership is key to a successful program.
- Lutheran social service agencies may be potential partners in community schools serving special needs students.
- New and creative ways of funding schools need to be shared and developed.
- Loyalty to a church school is no longer relevant for young parents who currently seek the best academic and quality programs for their children. This has clear indications for underperforming schools.
- Schools need to have the 3R's: academic rigor, resources, relationships.
- Churches and schools must be invested, connected and respected in their communities.
- Understanding the needs of and engaging the community in new starts is critical.
- Rather than selling vacant school properties, the church should think "out of the box" about how those assets might be developed.
- Starting a Lutheran-led charter is a massive undertaking but well worth the results.
- Parents are vital partners.
- Partnerships with Lutheran universities is one key to success in education for urban Lutheran or Lutheran-led elementary and high schools.
- School consolidations take much preparation and must have "buy in" from the sponsoring congregations. Consolidations need to improve what was done before.
- We must be proactive as a church rather than reactive when it comes to our schools.
- Collaboration between schools, both locally and nationally, needs to be facilitated and encouraged by the church bodies.
- Supporting organizations cannot "save" schools, they can only support them.
- Schools must be open and ecumenical while still centered on Lutheran theology and vocation.

## **Summary**

This gathering was important to begin the discussion between like-minded urban educators. Connections were made, resources and ideas were shared. The CUEM will continue communication with the participants to cite progress and share ideas. Other leaders of innovative urban programs will be invited to form an expanded group when reconvened next year.

## Meeting Participants

Pete Anzalone, Principal, The New LIFE School, Lutheran Social Services of New York, Bronx, New York

Brian Becker, Vice President for Ministry Programs, Wheat Ridge Ministries, Itasca, Illinois

Robin Doeden, Executive Director, Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation, Bensenville, Illinois

Cathy Rodgers-Edmonds, Better Learning Academy, Hyde Park, Saint Louis, Missouri

Vernard Gant, Association of Christian Schools International, Urban School Director, Colorado Springs, and Cynthia Gant, Colorado

Steve Gerner, Director – Urban Education Institute, Concordia University-Wisconsin, Mequon

Tom Grunow, Co-Founder, Cornerstone Stewardship Ministries, Portland, Oregon

Jim Handrich, Center for Urban Education Ministries, Advisory Council Chairperson, Retired Principal of Hong Kong International School

Jon Laabs, Executive Director, Lutheran Education Association, River Forest, Illinois

Marlene Lund, Executive Director, Center for Urban Education Ministries, Wheat Ridge Ministries

Linda Mitchell, Executive Director, Lutheran Schools Association, Bronxville, New York

Ann L. Vazquez, President and CEO, The Lutheran Foundation, Saint Louis, Missouri

Susan Work, President, Holy Family Ministries, Chicago, Illinois



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