



# NLSA Powerful Practices



## Hales Corners Lutheran School, Wisconsin Securing a Supportive Pastor

**H**ow does one create a healthy and growing parochial school in today's day and age? Calling a senior pastor to lead your church and school is one of the most important decisions to establish that growing and healthy school. Once the senior pastor is secured, having a team ministry is key in having a supportive pastor. Seeking the man of God who leads the church and school begins with prayer. I think that if one gets caught up in the task of calling a leader, prayer often gets put on the back burner. This is a congregation's opportunity to join together in praying that God leads the call process. I believe that a healthy parochial school is not sustainable without a healthy church. This means that the process of seeking God's will in calling a senior pastor is paramount to the long-term, sustainable excellence in our schools. Certainly, exceptions of healthy schools without healthy churches are present in our church body; however, I would challenge if their success is sustainable.

Research indicates that the leader in any organization makes the difference in the success of that organization. For example, at our growing and healthy school, the governance model of policy-based governance mandates that the pastor is the leader of Hales Corners Lutheran Church in Wisconsin. As the spiritual leader of the church, the senior pastor is also the leader of the school. A successful connection develops when leadership is clear and agreed upon by all people. Hales Corners Lutheran Church and School began its path toward success when the pastor created a culture of positive team ministry. It's easy to say communication is important and also easy to take shortcuts when our tasks overwhelm our schedules. Pastor Keith and our pastoral



*Rev. Keith Speaks, senior pastor, reads a story to children.*

team have been so open to getting involved, and they seek ways to connect with school families. Open communication is important in looking for ideas and ways to increase connections. Sometimes a pastor wants to be supportive and needs specific ideas for involvement, just like it's good for all administrators and pastors to get out of their offices and spend time in the hallways and classrooms.

It is critical that leaders of the church know and believe the mission and ministry of their church as they begin their process of calling a senior pastor. It is quite difficult to "train" a leader in our system within the intricacies of a church and school. Knowing who you are is critical to success. For many years, our church and school focused and had unprecedented success with the motto,



**Left:** The Rev. Leon Jameson, pastor of Youth and Family, baptizes an infant at Hales Corners Lutheran Church. **Right:** The Rev. Chad Kogutkiewicz, associate pastor of Discipleship & High School Youth, visits Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, with students.

“lower the threshold, raise the bar.” This philosophy was to welcome people right where they were, regardless of background. When our former senior pastor retired, the Board of Directors made the decision to seek a leader who would continue the focus of welcoming people where they were and spending significantly more time with raising the spiritual bar of our parishioners. This was one of the ways we as a church determined some of the qualities and characteristics we were looking for in our next senior pastor.

Our church began the process of seeking the man who would lead our church and school after a long and healthy run from our retiring senior pastor. Leading a large church and school is different from leading a smaller church and school — not better, just different. Our Board of Directors established a call committee with this thought in mind. As a committee, they met and narrowed a list of candidates through their interviews. The committee went on a road trip to different locations to visit and the listen to the pastor preach in his environment. That process resulted in Hales Corners Lutheran calling a pastor from Michigan to shepherd our congregation. We were convinced that he was the right choice for us. He declined our call, which left our church devastated. How can someone we were so convinced would lead us tell us “No”? It was our arrogance showing. God had a much different and better plan. We began the same process again and the result was that Hales Corners Lutheran called Rev. Keith Speaks to be our senior pastor.

One of the first things that happened when Pastor Speaks joined us was a re-evaluation of our mission and

ministry focus which caused us to create a new ministry statement. Now our statement is **“As God’s family we are Called and Gathered to Worship, Grow and be Sent to make a difference in the world for Christ!”**

To make a successful transition, a relationship needed to be developed between this new-to-us pastor and the principal. As principal, I understand that my role is to lead from the middle of the pack. The senior pastor’s voice dictates agreed-upon mission and ministry within our church. It is critical for the pastor and principal to be leading the mission and ministry in concert with each other. The process typically takes a great deal of time to build the kind of lasting relationship necessary. At Hales Corners Lutheran, we were not given the luxury of “time” to develop that relationship. A crisis quickly arose which necessitated he and I spend significant time praying, planning and executing a plan. That crisis caused great stress for our church and school, including faculty and staff. While the crisis caused our pastor and I to become quite close in a short amount of time, I do not recommend that you create a crisis to create that relationship. In the years since that first crisis, we have grown to trust each other in our work through the Wisconsin Choice program and the blending of our campuses, and that is reflected in our appreciation of each other. We have been able to stand together in financial challenges. Our cost per student has risen dramatically. This could have been a situation in which Satan could divide and conquer our priorities. Instead, we face reality together! When Pastor and I disagree, we always disagree in private. The church and school both lose when a public quarrel happens between the pastor and the principal. Having unconditional love and respect for

one another dictates that we do everything within these boundaries to keep Satan from dividing and conquering the ministry by dividing the two core leaders. We spend a great deal of time in discussion of church and school direction, which means together we can shape mission and ministry within the church and school. In this manner, I can lead from the middle of the pack.

No matter how humans mess with the call process, I believe that God gets the person that He wants to serve in that location. As humans, many times we do not understand why. As Christians, we have faith that God is indeed in control and will use His servants in the way that He sees best. One key to a strong relationship is recognizing that the pastor and principal of the church have egos. Having an ego is not bad. Letting that ego control the situation results in leadership by emotions instead of sound decision making. As leaders, our egos must be checked at the door to enable us to find God's will, not our own.

Overall, when the church has a supportive senior pastor and principal on the same page, excellence in Christian education can occur. Our pastors understand what "ministry of presence" means to our school families and



*The Rev. Christian Wood, associate pastor, reads a story to children.*

faculty. Their presence among us is critical to a successful supportive system. The reverse is true as well. If the principal and teachers are not invested in the church, support would be difficult. Through the years, God has richly blessed Hales Corners Lutheran with strong pastoral leadership, whether through the senior pastor or our associate pastors. Our team ministry approach has enabled our church workers to serve our church and school families as together we seek to grow and be sent to make a difference in the world for Christ.