

Resolutions encourage Lutheran ethos of schools, address decreasing enrollment

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Floor Committee 8 (on Parochial Schools) Chairman Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy, right, sits with the rest of the members of the committee as their resolutions are presented to the LCMS convention July 13. (LCMS/Michael Schuermann)

By Sarah Reinsel

MILWAUKEE (July 13, 2016) — All four resolutions on parochial schools were passed with resounding voice votes on Wednesday at the 66th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

“Our schools are a signature ministry of our identity as a teaching church,” said the Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy, chairman of Floor Committee 8 — Parochial Schools. “Historically, many of our older churches began with schools. Some churches actually were preceded by a school ... My guess is many of us here at some point spent some time in a Lutheran school.”

Despite 458 Lutheran schools having closed since 2005, Nadasdy reported that there are still 1,173 LCMS early-childhood preschools, 804 elementary schools, 91 domestic high schools and three international schools, with a total of some 200,000 students attending these schools.

Resolution 8-01

Resolution 8-01 encourages a continuation and strengthening of a Lutheran ethos for all Lutheran early-childhood, elementary and high schools.

“We use the word ‘ethos’ in the title of this resolution to refer not only to the identity of our schools, but also to their culture, character and strengths under God’s grace,” Nadasdy said.

“Lutheran ethos is who we are, but also how we are with one another, what we can expect from one another and what we can promise those who come to our schools. [Resolution] 8-01A is meant to provide teachers, administrators and boards with some markers or descriptors of what a Lutheran ethos looks like in one of our schools.”

Some of these markers of the Lutheran ethos include general recommendations for curriculum, such as daily use and regular memorization of Holy Scripture and the Small Catechism, and encouragement for all pastors, teachers, administrators and parents in their involvement in their parochial schools.

Additionally, this list includes points such as “A joyful affirmation and use of the historic, liturgical orders of the church in the worship life of students at school and home,” and “a lively integration of our Scriptural and confessional worldview into all the arts, sciences, and academic disciplines.”

James Scriven, an advisory delegate and education executive for the Synod’s Northwest District, opposed the resolution, expressing concern that it was too narrow and could potentially exclude ministry to families and children from other denominations or religions.

“This proposed resolution unfortunately seeks to require our schools to conform to a very specific style of Lutheran identity, which is, I feel, dismissive of the wide variety of communities in which we serve, putting a one-size-fits-all upon the schools in Lutheran ministry,” Scriven said.

“One of the very strengths of our schools is, throughout many areas of the country, they are an open and welcoming place for a wide variety of people ... We get to minister to all of them through our Lutheran schools. While sometimes our congregations will struggle to be able to bring in and impact other kinds of families, our schools are amazingly successful.”

Resolution 8-02

Resolution 8-02 responds to the prediction that “40 percent of the current Lutheran school administrators are anticipated to retire within the next five years.”

To remedy this upcoming issue, the resolution encourages more efforts to recruit and educate new administrators.

The resolution also seeks more funding for SLED (School Leadership Development), a program under LCMS School Ministry that “recruits and equips administrators for LCMS schools.”

Resolution 8-03

Resolution 8-03, “To Support the Quality and Sustainability of Lutheran Schools through the Work of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Lutheran Schools,” recognizes the need for a blue ribbon committee to do research on “the reason for the decline in the number of schools and in total student enrollment.”

As mentioned above, since 2005, 458 LCMS schools have closed, with a resulting enrollment decrease of some 99,000 students.

Other tasks of this blue ribbon committee will be to “identify alternative models for funding Lutheran schools, with an emphasis on making schools affordable for all families,” and examine classical education, online education, flexible scheduling, hybrid homeschooling and international student ministry as means of enriching and augmenting Lutheran schools.

The blue ribbon committee is expected to present its findings at the 2019 LCMS convention.

Resolution 8-04

Resolution 8-04, “To Preserve the Religious Freedom of Our Parochial Schools,” recognizes the increasing threat of federal and state mandates and encourages all Lutheran schools to “maintain their commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.”

The resolution also thanks the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) for its preparation of the “Protecting Your Ministry” document, which assists schools in protecting their religious freedom in legal situations.

“This resolution simply cautions our schools that they not compromise their religious freedom in the face of increasing infringement of the government in their life together,” explained Nadasdy, “especially as it relates to policies and financial dependence on government programs and aid.”

The 66th Regular Convention of the LCMS is meeting July 9-14 in Milwaukee at the Wisconsin Center convention complex under the theme “Upon This Rock.” Among convention participants are some 1,125 clergy and lay voting delegates.

Sarah Reinsel is a senior at Hillsdale College and an intern for the LCMS convention newsroom.

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