A discussion on the leadership of the principal and the pastor in the Lutheran school community

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Tania is the head of the School of Theological Studies (STS)1 at Australian Lutheran College. The article that follows draws on her doctoral research, an exploration of the contributions of principals and pastors to the mission of Lutheran primary schools. A future article in LTJ will present the research on how primary principals and their local supporting pastors are working together, including their missional actions in and for the school community.

This discussion focuses on the leadership of the principal and pastor of the school community. Leadership has been defined variously, in relation to the CEO, to the head of a department or section, or to anyone who takes the initiative to change things (Schein 2010). The broad area of school leadership will be developed through the filters of leadership preparation, approaches to leadership, leadership dimensions, and leadership challenges.

Leadership preparation

The growth of Lutheran schools after the Second World War together with the decline in the numbers of Lutheran students and staff relative to the total school population have brought about important changes in the dynamics of Lutheran schools. Where once they were considered nurseries of the church (Zweck 1973) and the prevailing metaphor used to describe Lutheran schools was nurture (Jennings 2007 and 2009), the declining percentage of Lutheran students and staff meant that Lutheran schools were no longer able purely to nurture fellow Lutherans. The prevailing metaphor became one of both nurture and 'mission'. This is reflected in many of the policies and much of the literature regarding Lutheran schools (Bartsch 2001, LCA 2006, LCA 2006, Jennings 2009).

The changing purpose of the Lutheran school together with the increased complexity of principalship (Cranston and Ehrich 2009) has led to the need for targeted leadership preparation. The difficulty of attracting and retaining suitable leaders for the role of school principal in Australia (Starr, in Cranston and Ehrich 2009) has also been felt in the Lutheran school system. Added to the general societal reluctance of teacher leaders to step up to the rigors of principalship, there is the limited and declining number of teachers with the spiritual and theological training necessary (Belmonte 2007) and required (Lutheran Education Australia [LEA] 2009) to lead a Lutheran school. The Board for Lutheran Schools (now LEA Ltd) recognised the need for suitably prepared future

1 STS is the school that has responsibility for the theological education of the laity at ALC
leaders with the introduction of part-scholarships to study for a Postgraduate Certificate in Educational Leadership with units from both Australian Lutheran College (ALC) and Australian Catholic University (ACU). The study component of the scholarship was combined with a program of mentorship and developed into a Leadership Development Program (d’Arbon, Cunliffe, Canavan & Jericho, in Cranston and Ehrich 2009). LEA has provided training for principals and aspiring leaders through ongoing provision of the Leadership Development Program (the sixth iteration begins in 2016).

The importance of principal preparation should not be underestimated. Research on the effectiveness of school leadership preparation programs recommends stronger ties between schools and universities, authentic and ongoing school-based experiences, and less emphasis on management and more emphasis on instructional leadership (Barnett 2004). School leadership preparation also needs to include the religious dimension (Belmonte 2007). Though the preparation process is

... essentially an educative process, it requires much more than the mere acquisition of knowledge and/or the transmission of facts. Leadership formation programs should challenge principals to make judgements about significance, ‘rightness’ and ‘wrongness’ when faced with dilemmas and paradoxes that have ethical and moral implications. (Duignan, in Duncan and Riley 2002, 172,73)

Faith leadership is a fundamental element in the leadership of Christian schools. The faith leader is one who ‘understands the mission, the vision, the set of beliefs (purposes) of the school, and nourishes a world view that embraces the staff, the students, and the community served by the school’ (Wallace, Ridenour et al. 1999, 108). Despite the importance of faith leadership, US Catholic secondary principals rated their formal preparation to be faith leaders as inadequate (Wallace, Ridenour, et al. 1999). This view of inadequate leadership preparation has implications, beyond the Catholic secondary sector, for leadership preparation for Australian Lutheran schools. Another United States study of three Catholic elementary schools found that the school principal was a key figure in fostering critical spirituality² (Scanlan 2011). In research on the culture of Lutheran schools in Queensland, Marks (2000) found that perceptions of leadership and its influence on school culture showed the greatest variance across the questionnaire sample. He concluded that ‘the professional development of school leadership personnel in understanding, assessing, and developing school cultural perceptions of all stakeholders within the school is an imperative for the strengthening of each school’s culture’ (2000, 294). If faith leadership is considered to be the competency that distinguishes Christian school leaders from public school leaders, then preparation for faith leadership is an area that requires further addressing.

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² Critical spirituality is considered the joining of spirituality with social justice or the aligning of the individual’s inner dimension with action.
Teachers in Lutheran schools are expected to meet accreditation standards as required by the Lutheran Church of Australia’s staffing policy (LCA 2006).3 Further to these requirements, leaders in Lutheran schools are also required to complete the Graduate Certificate in Leadership from ALC, or equivalent (LEA 2009). The above pathway for the training of leaders ensures that Lutheran principals have a minimum standard of theological and leadership training.

In contrast to LEA’s accreditation process, there are no defined post-graduate pathways for the ongoing training of pastors within the Lutheran Church. Though there are many avenues available to pastors for personal professional development, and opportunities for post-graduate study through ALC, or other education institutions, the graduate qualifications received from ALC are deemed to be sufficient to lead a church community. Pastors receive the same basic leadership preparation whether they work in a small community with one pastor as the only paid employee or whether they lead in a large community with several pastors, multiple employees and teams of volunteers. A lacuna may exist between the leadership preparation of pastors and the reality of their leadership in the local Lutheran school.

**Approaches to leadership**

Lutheran principals and pastors exercise leadership in the Lutheran school. Analysis of the various approaches to leadership is vital, for leadership is an important contributor to the formation of cultural cognitions within schools (Marks 2000). Industry approaches to leadership have filtered into school leadership with the language of strategic planner, strategic leadership and strategic management (Caldwell 2002). Strategic leadership is one form of managerial leadership.

Authentic, or ethical, leadership (Schwahn and Spady 2001, Duignan 2003, Starratt 2004) is a term that has been used to describe leaders who are morally responsible, present and proactive. Authentic leaders lead with purpose, meaning and values, building relationships with people and striving to develop themselves as self-disciplined leaders (George 2003). They continuously reflect on their practice and encourage reflection in others (Blase and Blase 2004). The process of deep reflection on the self, or the nurturing of a leader’s moral consciousness, has been described as an essential step in the leader’s professional development in the area of moral leadership (Branson 2007). Those who lead schools need to have moral depth and a well-articulated platform for the moral work of learning in the school, as well as a clear sense of how to proactively engage teachers and students in an authentic process of learning (Starratt 2004, 136).

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3 The minimum requirement—accreditation as a teacher—currently asks teachers to complete the equivalent of six days orientation over their first three years of employment in Lutheran schools. Teachers of Christian Studies are required to complete a ten day orientation program for Christian Studies, known as Equip, or four units of study through ALC.
Related to authentic and moral leadership is socially responsible leadership (Duignan 2005, 11,12). The outcome of authentic, or socially responsible, leadership is ‘an integration of espoused values and lived behaviour in the leader and in the group’ (LEA 2005). Authentic leadership is leadership that results from living out personal, professional and cultural values.

Transformational leadership (Bezzina and Wilson 1999, Spady 2001, Standen 2008) has been used to describe a leadership approach that seeks to build school capacity by growing a collaborative school culture which fosters teacher development and commitment to the organisation. Transformational leadership seeks to transform the attitude and actions of others. The literature also speaks of enlightened leadership—leaders who seek openness as a fundamental principle of leadership (Houston, Blankstein et al. 2008). Transformational and enlightened leadership seeks to build school capacity.

In recent years discussion on distributed leadership (Harris 2008, Standen 2008) and shared leadership (Bezzina 2007) has come to the fore. Leadership sustainability is another key dimension to educational leadership (Hargreaves and Fink 2006). Sustainable leadership requires: depth (it matters), length (it lasts), breadth (it spreads), justice (it does no harm to and actively improves the surrounding environment), diversity (it promotes cohesive diversity), resourcefulness (it develops and does not deplete material and human resources), and conservation (it honours and learns from the best of the past to create an even better future) (Hargreaves and Fink 2006).

There is growing recognition beyond the moral/ethical and functional dimension of educational leadership to the spiritual. Spiritual leadership is a complex concept that encompasses servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977), religious leadership (Coughlan 2009) and transcendental leadership (Neidhart and Carlin 2011). The principal, as spiritual leader, is one who ministers to the needs of the school he serves and the term servant leadership is used to describe the approach to leadership (Sergiovanni 2007). Servant leadership comes from the call of Jesus in Matthew 20:26–28. Servant leadership

4 Socially responsible leaders:
- critique and challenge assumptions and taken-for-granted norms that condone or encourage injustices and inequalities
- make deliberate intervention to challenge inequities (material and attitudinal), even in the face of majority opposition
- use power as a moral force
- model ‘deep democracy’, especially through forms of shared leadership
- connect leadership to pedagogical principles that promote and support authentic learning and teaching
- serve others through their collaborative leadership
- understand that the tension between economic rationalist and market-driven imperatives can be mediated through ethical, moral and socially responsible policies and practices (Duignan 2005, 11,12)

5 The characteristics of distributed leadership are: vision is a unifying force, leaders have expert rather than formal authority, collaborative teams are formed for specific purposes, communities of practice emerge, individuals perceive themselves as stakeholders, the organisational goals are disaggregated, roles and tasks are distributed, and enquiry is central to change and development (Harris 2008, 112).
leadership 'takes a holistic view of the relationship of leaders and followers and the tasks they share' (Fryar 2001, 8). The servant leader's 'core identity and core values determine his or her attitudes and actions' (Fryar 2001, 9).

The servant-leader is servant first ... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead ... The difference [between servant first and leader first] manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. (Greenleaf 1977, 13).

Servant leadership is connected to distributed leadership and moral leadership, and involves relationship and followership (Ruwoldt 2006).

Religious leadership involves not only the leadership of the religious education program of the school but also the spiritual formation of staff (Coughlan 2009). In his study on the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape, Coughlan (2009) found that the clergy focussed more on the ecclesial dimension of the principal's role while the principals and employing authorities used the language of pastoral leadership to describe the principal's role. 'The spiritual development of staff must be a priority task of an authentic Lutheran School spiritual leader' (Grieger 2010).

On a continuum of leadership approaches (Neidhart and Carlin 2011), spiritual, or transcendental, leadership is considered the highest level, with transactional leadership (leadership that focuses on effectiveness, efficiency and achievement or 'effective management of the status quo' (Neidhart & Carlin in Cranston and Ehrich 2009, 111), described as the lowest. Transformational leadership is placed in the middle of the continuum. Transcendental leadership comprises three dimensions of spirituality: consciousness, moral character and faith. In a discussion document on spiritual leadership in Lutheran schools, Grieger (2010) suggests the spiritual leader needs to ensure that they take time out for personal spiritual renewal, connect the school meaningfully with the church and Lutheran heritage, look to and lean on the Gospel, and build a Christian community. Research on Christian Parent Controlled Schools in Australia recommends that principals be given appropriate professional development, because of the difficult nature of their leadership, that 'gives priority to theological or transcendental values which require translating into a schooling context' (Justins 2002, 262). Understanding of the spiritual or faith leadership dimension of the principal's leadership role is still evolving. Deliberate and systemic spiritual formation is needed as school leaders struggle with the increasing expectations placed on them to undertake faith leadership roles in the parish and wider community (Neidhart and Lamb 2009, Neidhart in Engebretson 2014).

Leadership dimensions

Lutheran Education Australia, in their current document, Leadership framework for Lutheran schools (LEA 2005), have articulated five leadership dimensions: spiritual
leadership, authentic leadership, educative leadership, organisational leadership, and community leadership. Of note, for the purpose of this discussion, is the focus on the spiritual dimension, that is, ‘on living a Lutheran understanding of God’s mission for the world with the intention of influencing and enriching the lives of students, staff and other members of the school community’, and the focus on community leadership, that is, ‘on achieving a culture of solidarity and patterns of cooperation that encourage human interdependence as a means to achieve the mission of the school community’ (LEA 2005, 5). The role of the Catholic school principal, as viewed by governance and by the principal him/herself, reveals consensus on the importance of the principal as community leader and as ‘a person of vision, a model of the desired qualities and values of the community and a model of personal authenticity’ (Coughlan 2009, 162).

Leadership frameworks from a variety of educational authorities are acknowledging the spiritual dimension (Catholic Education 2005, Regan 2007, CEO Sydney 2010). In the tidal forces of school leadership, Albinger (2002) encourages leaders to find and articulate to significant others and reference groups—the groups whose perspectives we use—the perspective, beliefs and information from the past to inform the present. ‘If we have reflected on our values and beliefs and have a healthy sense of self, we should be able to find a place to stand’ (Albinger 2002, 13). Spiritual leaders are to ‘develop a community of life and worship’ (LEA 2005, 5).

Little research has been conducted regarding the pastor’s leadership within the Lutheran school community. The policy document, The role of the pastor in the Lutheran school, says that ‘it is desirable that every Lutheran school has a school pastor so that the connection between the school and the mission of the church is reinforced and supported’ (LCA 2002, 1). The document uses terms like partnership in ministry and speaks of team spirit and relationships with the school team, listing under the leadership role the following responsibilities: (1) to develop an understanding of the LCA, its identity and purpose, (2) to remind people of their Christian commitment—the leader’s prophetic role, (3) to build the Christian ethos and morality of the school, (4) to build links between congregation and school(s), and (5) to build links with other ministries of the LCA (LCA 2002).

The generally accepted model for church leadership in Lutheran churches is servant leadership (LCA 2002). The practice of leading out of service aligns with St. Paul’s view of the church as a community of equals since all are sinners and all are, at the same time, saints. Lutheran theology points out that the universal church and the local church are not defined by hierarchy or structure. Lutherans ‘have been most reticent in according those who are ministers of the gospel a special, elevated status as representatives of the church as an institution’ (Hebart 2009, 164).

It is important that both principals and pastors reflect on their approaches to leadership. ‘There is a need for Australian school leadership scholars to avoid simplistic “solutions”, lists and adjectival leaderships. It makes no sense ... to apply the same leadership style all the time’ (Cranston and Ehrich 2009, 424) or in all settings. When principals see their role in terms of managers rather than educators, they risk concentrating on structures,
procedures and the smooth running of the school to the detriment of the students (Starratt 2003). There is a danger in thinking of educational leadership as one preferred theory or approach, but rather principals and pastors need to hold their values as a light to guide their decision-making and reflect on the school's culture as a mirror to assess integrity and authenticity.

**Leadership challenges**

The challenges facing Lutheran school and Lutheran church leaders in working together can be categorised into the following areas: managerial, relational, spiritual, and community. One challenge identified anecdotally by pastors and principals is the adjustment required by pastors when moving from the flexibility and self-determined nature of congregational ministry to the timetabled structure of school ministry. All leaders are also challenged to be proactive, begin with the end in mind and put first things first (Covey 1990). They are also required to reflect regularly on their work and their workplace. One of the reasons that Catholic principals make regular appraisals of their school leadership is the 'strained relationships between principal and priest, and a lack of understanding and confusion as to the precise nature of the school-parish relationship' (Belmonte and Cranston 2007, 19). Lutheran schools and churches are no exception to these kinds of relational challenges. The Board for Lutheran Schools found it necessary to write the policy statement, *Relative responsibilities of pastor and principal within the Lutheran school* (2001), to clarify the roles of leaders. The document calls for pastors and principals to exercise openness where 'both pastor and principal must understand and accept the other as striving to achieve the same goals. Such openness will exist if the principal is church-minded and the pastor school-minded' (2001, 3). The LCA further defines the role of the pastor in the policy, *The role of the pastor in the Lutheran school* (LCA 2002). The policy describes the school pastor 'as a key link in leading people from the world of the school into a permanent worshipping community' and further elaborates that this 'partnership in ministry should not be left to chance' (LCA 2002, 4). In order to be a key link between school and church, the pastor must have a good working relationship with school leadership and the school community.

The spiritual leadership of principals has been recently debated in Lutheran circles. The principal is seen as the spiritual head of the school *family* (Bartsch 2006). The term *spiritual head* has been widely debated; some have perceived that designating the principal as spiritual head elevated his/her status above the role of the pastor. This is despite the clear message in the role statement for the Pastor, who is employed in the Lutheran school, that he 'is responsible to the principal and comes under the jurisdiction of the school council' (LCA 2002, 2). Anecdotally, not all principals are comfortable with being labelled the spiritual head of the school. Some of the challenges of spiritual leadership include (1) being the public face of the school and therefore open to public scrutiny, (2) the agony of making decisions without being able to disclose publicly the full facts of the situation because of issues of confidentiality, (3) balancing the various areas of responsibility of the
principal as part of his vocation, and (4) making the best use of school pastor(s) to support the spiritual development within the school (Bartsch 2006, 38).

Belmonte adds to this list of spiritual challenges the expectation that Catholic [or equally, Lutheran] principals 'are expected to lead not only in the more traditional sense of school leadership, but also as drivers of Catholic [Lutheran] identity in their schools' (2007, 2). Education is described here in terms of a moral enterprise and there is a call on leaders in Catholic schools 'to be committed to make their lives Christ-centred—to take the persona of Jesus as a paradigm on which to frame and construct their professional lives and their moral and metaphysical commitment' (Aspin and Chapman, in McMahon, Neidhart et al. 1997, 259). When faced with the myriad of demands in education to measure and inform and pander to individualism (or to follow the latest trends), spiritual leaders are called to stay close to the Gospel and take a stand (McCutcheon 2008).

When Christian school leaders from two US Christian school associations were surveyed regarding the areas that needed research the topic that received the most concern and response, which was specific to faith-based schools, related to the linkage between school mission and practice (Boerema 2011). The challenge for Christian school leaders continues to be the closing of the gap 'between the mission of the Christian schools and the way they attempt to bring life to that mission in the day to day activities of the school' (Boerema 2011, 44).

Not only are principals and pastors expected to be relational and spiritual leaders—as well as organisational leaders, servant leaders and particularly in the case of principals, instructional or educative leaders—but they are also challenged with being community leaders. Here community is defined as a socially organised and interdependent group who are bonded around shared values and relationships (Sergiovanni 2007). The prevailing metaphor for the Lutheran school and church community is family. Sergiovanni (2007) addresses the different constructs of communities when he writes of covenantal communities and uses the German terms Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.\(^6\) Covenantal communities 'have at their centre shared ideas, principles and purposes' (2007, 2). Therefore Lutheran schools and Lutheran congregations aim to be seen as covenantal communities through their shared core values, mission and vision and aim to be viewed as Gemeinschaft.

A challenge of Lutheran pastors and principals is to grow and build this family-modelled community. Though it is a role of all family members to be responsible to the family and all community members to behave responsibly within and for the community, the ultimate responsibility for holding the family/community together belongs to the leadership. And there is always more to do.

There is more that the local church could do in terms of involvement with the schools within their established regional boundaries, if not with priests, then

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\(^6\) **Gesellschaft** refers to an organisation or society with its corresponding structures and hierarchy needed to function efficiently. **Gemeinschaft** is translated as community and is seen through the metaphor of the family.
perhaps in the involvement of pastoral workers, pastoral associates and youth workers in the schools. (Frijo 2009, 237)

There is more that the Lutheran Church can do to build bridges and remove barriers to the church community and similarly there is more that the Lutheran school can do to bridge the gap between school community and church community. And ultimately it is the principal who shapes the culture and climate of the school community (MacNeil, Prater et al. 2009).

The Lutheran school community is also affected by structural and human resource factors. Research in Queensland Lutheran schools showed that the type of school (primary, secondary or foundation to year 12), its size and the percentage of Lutheran teachers and Lutheran students have an effect on the culture of the school (Marks 2000). ‘These are important results for administrators and policymakers in ... Lutheran schools to consider in order to optimise the culture of the schools’ (Marks 2000, 303).7 Ethical dilemmas raised by principals have been categorised into: conflicts of interest, conflict between the individual and the community, conflict among the dimensions of a code of conduct, conflict between justice and mercy, and dealing with a supervisor’s directive (Cranston and Ehrich 2009). In dealing with ethical dilemmas, the importance of understanding values and culture comes to the fore.

Another challenge of community leaders, beyond the internal management of the community, is addressing the perception of the community of those outside, or those in the wider community. Lutheran pastors should be encouraged to be ecumenically minded and return to their Reformation roots where Lutheranism had the character, not of a ‘break-away’ church, but of a movement within the Church ‘with the duty of reminding the Church what the centre of the Christian faith is and where it must find its orientation in its Christian teaching and its practice’ (Hebart 2009, 165). Principals have to counter the perception of Lutheran schools for Lutheran students. With only 15 percent of students having a Lutheran affiliation (LEA 2014), the principal needs to promote the school as a Christian school providing a Christian education which is informed by a Lutheran ethos.

At the 2000 Synod of the LCA, the *Hand-in-Hand Schools and Mission Vision Statement* was adopted. It was resolved that ‘Congregations and schools are encouraged to be more intentional, diligent, sensitive and flexible in responding to ... mission opportunities’ (LCA 2000). This resolution provides important challenges for the leaders of schools and churches. How can the LCA best respond to the mission opportunities that are present in schools? It is recognised that principals and pastors are at the forefront of the response; however, there is not a clear understanding of what spiritual or faith leadership is or how to go about such leadership in the context of the school (Neidhart and Lamb 2009). The principal and the local Lutheran pastor are well placed to mentor and support each other. A mutual support network is the ideal, but what, in practice, is the reality?

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Research is needed regarding how principals and school pastors work together and how principals and pastors work within the school context.

Leadership in the context of Lutheran schools provides challenges for principals and pastors today. ‘There is no person or role more vital to the Catholic mission and identity of a school than that of its principal’ (Neidhart in Engebretson 2014, 143). The same is true for Lutheran schools. LEA must continue to prioritise leadership development of principals and aspiring leaders, with a focus on spiritual leadership, in order that our future leaders are skilled in the ‘ongoing dialogue between leadership theology and leadership action in a Lutheran education environment’ (Ruwoldt 2015, 9). The Lutheran Church of Australia must step up to the challenge presented by the resolution at the 2009 General Convention of Synod which encouraged the College of Bishops to create ‘programs of professional development for pastors’ (LCA 2009). Programs of professional development for pastors in specialist ministry areas (e.g. chaplaincy in schools and aged care) are particularly important. It is contended that the leadership development of pastors whose ministry includes a school, and pastors-in-training who wish to specialise in school ministry, should be a priority area.

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