



NLSA POWERFUL PRACTICES



St. John's Lutheran School, Arnold, Missouri

Making the Grade: Taking Average to Excellent

The letter “C” often gets a bad rap, particularly in education. “C” is not good, nor is it great. It’s passing, certainly, but there’s nothing compelling about it. It’s ordinary. Average. Common. Ho hum. But it doesn’t have to be that way. We’ve taken the letter “C” and actually made it extraordinary. Excellent. Outstanding. By implementing three areas of focus — all that begin with the letter “C” — we’ve turned a school and church’s relationship that very well could be average into something much, much more. At St. John’s-Arnold, we strive to focus on the most important things, and these things just happen to start with the letter “C”. By doing this, the rest falls more easily into place.

Please don’t misunderstand: we are not perfect. We live in a sinful world, and St. John’s is not exempt. We are also not suggesting that this is the end all and be all to a happily ever after. Like in marriage, we work hard at our relationship to ensure that both parties are treated with mutual respect and understanding. But, much like your church and school union, our relationship is unique. And the strategies we employ are not difficult or complex. However, they are practical and serve as constant reminders of our greater purpose as a church and school: to teach God’s children, reach God’s world and grow God’s church.

Yes, these strategies work for us. But, in the end, it’s not about us. It’s about curious minds and lost souls. It’s about nurturing hearts and equipping hands. We’re sharing our strategies in the hope that they might benefit your ministry in some small way. And the secret to our success starts and ends with three important “C”s: Christ-centered, culture and collaboration.



Pastor Andy Becker and school children enjoy popsicles on the playground.

CHRIST-CENTERED

When we said it wasn’t about us, we meant it. It’s about the Father. And the Son. And the Holy Spirit. It’s as simple as that. Being Christ-centered isn’t unique; it’s almost a given. It’s so close to common that it could easily be overlooked. But it’s crucial that this element is your lens through which all the other details are viewed. A Christ-centered perspective makes things much sharper, more clear and more in focus. There are three specific ways that we keep Christ in the center of all we do:

- **Chapel.** Every Wednesday morning, the school children gather in our church’s sanctuary for a half-hour chapel service. The church and school take turns planning and leading the service. Sometimes, the school children are even involved in chapel preparations. But, by gathering together for a brief time on a weekly basis and sharing the responsibility of it, we worship together. We keep the focus on Jesus and are refreshed and rejuvenated because of it. Yes, we are two distinct ministries, but we are working together as one whole, for one purpose.
- **Bi-weekly staff devotions.** Every other Wednesday afternoon, the church and school staff take time to reconnect with Christ and each other. Typically, there is a topic at hand presented in the form of a devotion. This topic can range in subject matter, but always comes

back to Christ, our helper and healer. The church and school staff unite by sharing and praying about both personal and professional celebrations and challenges.

- **Leader involvement.** Even though our school is located in an entirely different building, the principal of the school and the pastors of the church share turf. It is not uncommon to see the principal assist with Holy Communion or help lead a worship service. Similarly, the pastors are just as visible in the school. They are often guest teachers for religion classes. They sometimes join students for lunch. And they can even be found at the occasional “Popsicles with Pastors” gatherings. And like our leaders, teachers and church staff help with and support each other in other areas too.



Church and school staff worship together

CULTURE

Making good music requires more than just a stupendous singer. Or a praiseworthy piano player. Or a commendable conductor. It requires all that talent ... working together. The same can be said about excellent church and school relationships. It takes more than a dedicated principal. Or an understanding pastor. Or terrific teachers. It takes all those things — along with a culture of cohesion — to create praiseworthy harmony. Ultimately, culture is determined by the beliefs, attitudes and actions of the individuals within that culture. At St. John’s, we look for team members (in all of our church and school positions) who possess the characteristics that complement our culture.

- **Faithfulness.** We cannot truly claim a Christ-centered focus without team members who have Christ in their hearts. First and foremost, our team members have faith in God and a desire to live out His will on earth. They care deeply about the ministry of the church and school. Their passion for Christ shines through their words and actions. As a result, our team is made of people who love Jesus, love the church and love the school. In addition to being faithful to Christ, they are faithful to each other. They trust, support and genuinely care for each other.

- **Team player.** At St. John’s, we are in this together. We work together, we play together, we worship together and we pray together. We face opportunities and challenges together. We split the work. We share the tasks. We overcome the difficulties and we celebrate the successes. We are better together, and stack our team with people who complement each other, confide in each other and commit to each other.

- **Evangelistic.** Jesus tells us to go and make disciples of all nations. Our church and school ministries take this command seriously. We proclaim it in worship and we teach it in our classrooms. We want every person we touch to know that eternal salvation has been won through Jesus. But we cannot obey this command by keeping silent. We look for team

members who are called to boldly share love of Jesus in word and deed every single time.

COLLABORATION

Henry Ford once said, “Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” St. John’s Church and School have been together many years, 169 years to be exact. The length of this relationship is impressive, but we’ve grown along the way. We’re at a point where the church and school have truly become one in their efforts to make these seemingly separate ministries one entity. We’ve worked hard — together — to implement a culture of collaboration and

cooperation. And, over recent years, we've collaborated in the following ways (and more!) to make our ministries stronger ... together.

- **Shared vision.** The purpose of St. John's Church and School is to teach God's children, reach God's world and grow God's church. St. John's School is an integral piece to the first part of that purpose. Because of that, the church invests in the school and subsidizes its important ministry because it is, essentially, the church's ministry as well. Our church and school want to reach every person with the love of Jesus and we consider the school an obvious mission field.
- **Shared initiatives.** Because we can reach so many people through the school, we collaborate in determining new ways to grow its ministry. Every other year, the school hosts an auction to raise funds to assist with tuition or capital improvements. The church supports this endeavor. Last year, we raised about \$80,000 together. But it's not just about raising the money to make the school ministry more viable. We recently realized there is a disconnect between the school and our own church children between the ages of birth and preschool. To fill that gap and ingratiate church children into our school at a younger age, we devised a campaign to do just that. We continuously strive to work together to make the most of every opportunity God sets before us, all while being equipped with the resources to execute.
- **Continuous communication.** To meet our lofty goals, we must continuously communicate and collaborate our intentions. To that end, we hold a weekly lead staff meeting during which we share what is happening not only in school ministry, but all the subsets of the church ministries as well. It is a chance to inform, but also an opportunity to determine ways our initiatives can intersect so that the lead staff is united in



Pastor Andy Becker baptizes a kindergartner with his classmates in attendance to celebrate with him.

efforts before they are communicated to the rest of the church and school staff and the congregation. In addition, we hold a yearly staff retreat. The retreat is an opportunity for church and school staff to gather for an entire day during which we can determine our goals and how we can best reach them together.

At St. John's, we do our best to make the conditions ripe for an environment that is conducive for our three most important "C"s: Christ-centered, culture and collaboration. Leadership supports those "C"s and church and school staff members rally around them. The same spirit of working together permeates all team members, leading to a shared church and school ministry that grows and flourishes. We are intentional in connecting our church and school together in ministry. We are blessed to be in ministry at St. John's, celebrating the gifts that God has given us to work together. We pray that our thoughts, ideas and suggestions might be helpful to you as you look to build God's Kingdom by taking average to excellent at your church and school.

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