



Shaping the Future



- Spring 2020 ▾
- Letters ▾
- Features ▾
- Networks ▾
- Resources ▾
- Convocation
- LEA Home

Advance your education at

through master's and doctoral programs including:

- Nationally recognized education leadership programs
- Master's programs in educational technology and more
- Our newest MBA specializing in school business management

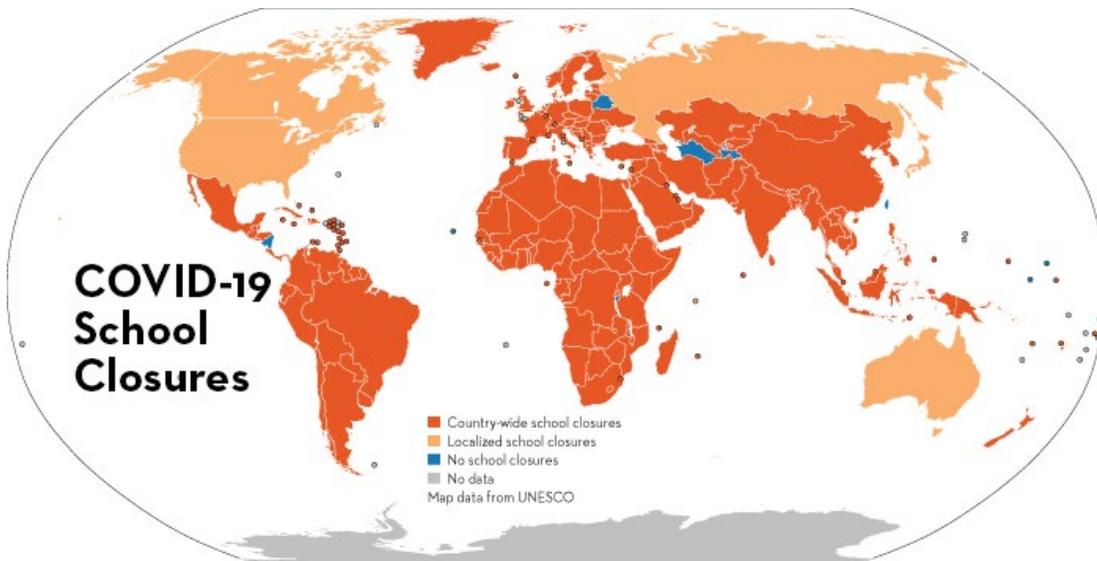
Traditional and online options offered!
www.CUChicago.edu

New Hope for Lutheran Education

by Jonathan Laabs

There could not be a better time to highlight *hope* as the theme for Christian education in the Lutheran church, in the United States of America, and around the world. It might also be the most challenging period in which to discuss it. At the time of this writing, the world is engaged in a war against an invisible foe: COVID-19, popularly known as the coronavirus. At the end of the first week of April 2020, more than 180 countries on every continent had been affected, with the total number of cases already reaching in excess of 1.5 million individuals and resulting in over 90,000 deaths. The numbers are predicted to climb for many more weeks as the world seeks ways to contain the spread of the virus, create antidotes, and ensure that it does not return.

How could there possibly be hope in all of this?



The effect of COVID-19 on the entire world has been unthinkable. Aside from the tragic illness and loss of life across the globe, virtually every industry, home, community, and education agency has been dramatically impacted in a very short time, causing a significant negative impact on the economy and forcing decisions never before seen by national and state leaders. In an effort to enforce various forms of physical distancing, almost every state in the USA has enacted some form of “stay-at-home” order and has limited the numbers of people who can gather in one place. This is mirrored around the world. Every reader of this article has in some way been personally affected by inability to physically attend church, send children to schools, participate in public events, or perhaps even stand in line at grocery stores because of occupancy limits.

How could there possibly be hope in all of this?

In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic came the celebration of Easter. What timing! While confronted with a new virus that has no known cure, challenged by new suffering, separation, and inconvenience, and even faced with the potential for death itself, we have reason to rejoice in Christ's triumph over death through the Resurrection. Christians around the world, as “Easter people,” are reminded every day of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (NIV): “Where, O death, is your

**"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"**

LEA Podcasts

free
A LEA membership benefit
Non-members \$40

Sign up now!

Review, Reflect, Resolve

What adjustments to routine have been most difficult for you?
How have you helped others to adjust?
How will all these adjustments make you a better servant to God and His people?

Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of **Shaping the Future:**

[Let Music Take the First Chair](#)
by Jeffrey Burkart (Feature)

[Yes! Change Is Possible \(Even at a Lutheran School\)](#)
by Jill Schmitzer (AMDnet)

[Teaching at a Christian School in a Communist Country](#)
by Naomi Vogt (GLEnet)



victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Jesus has conquered death. He is risen He is risen indeed! Halleluiah! What more hope could there possibly be?

Hope through Christian education

The Easter hope that we celebrate every day compels us to *live* that hope in everything we do. This is especially true through challenging times in our sinful world and even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lutheran schools and other Christian schools around the world have been created to provide teaching about and practicing of Jesus' love for His people. They are vehicles for sharing the Good News of salvation with children, youth, and adults. Prompted by Martin Luther and others through the Reformation, the organization of schools available to all children as extensions of the home for Christian education has taken many forms around the world.

Lutheran schools have always had a certain amount of freedom and autonomy to serve children and families in their communities, while also maintaining a responsible relationship with the government. Parents have choices about where to send their children, and Lutheran schools have been among the best options for this important decision. This option has usually come with a great deal of extra cost. In the past, this cost was covered extensively by local congregations, but the reality of school funding today is that it now needs to be covered by a combination of tuition, third source support, and, in some cases, money allocated through the government. Parents are facing the difficult decision of if and how they can send their children to a Lutheran school. They often know the benefits and desire that their children experience all that Lutheran schools have to offer, but they are challenged by the higher costs of tuition and sometimes accessibility. Their hopes are blocked by conditions over which they have no control.

[Parents] often know the benefits and desire that their children experience all that Lutheran schools have to offer, but are challenged by the higher costs of tuition and sometimes accessibility.

New hope brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic

It may seem impossible to be hopeful in the midst of a global crisis. However, the weeks of experience during the pandemic that Lutheran schools have encountered brought to the surface the very reason that God has been using those schools. New lessons have been learned and new opportunities have been created. Despite the significant and often unknown challenges endured by congregations and others responsible for running Lutheran schools, God has opened doors for the future of Lutheran education and new hope for the educators called to ministry at each.

Despite the ... challenges endured by congregations and ... Lutheran schools, God has opened doors for the future of Lutheran education and new hope for the educators called to ministry at each.

Following are just a few observations about how Lutheran schools have made a big difference in the lives of students, families, and communities during this disruptive global challenge and how new hope shines brightly for the future.

Teachers and administrators have identified new ways of carrying out the mission of the school.

This has not been easy. New procedures and delivery systems are essential to facilitate teaching and learning when students are separated from the school building. Normal instructional methods simply cannot work. Despite VERY little time to plan and prepare, educators who already have a very close working relationship in the school have banded together to find new creative means of making things happen. For some schools, this was a new experience, while others had previously had a taste of "remote learning." The positive attitude and commitment of Lutheran educators made a big difference in their making changes to carry out their ministry under circumstances that were beyond their control. While in many ways, the ability to pull together in times of crisis was not a surprise in a Lutheran school environment, lots of new learning about how this can be done was accomplished in most places, and there is a renewed spirit of exploration.

Educators and administrators discovered new tools to carry out teaching and learning from a distance.

Most educators, of course, had certain previous experiences with various forms of technology, but dependence upon these tools has now risen to a new level. Literally every educator in locations where students were not allowed to be physically present in the school building has needed to implement multiple alternative tools, some of which were readily

*"Where, O death,
is your victory?
Where, O death,
is your sting?"*

— 1 Corinthians 15:55





Siena (6) and Zoe (4) participate in prayer from home with Sue Guebert, second grade teacher at St. Paul's Lutheran School, Orange, California.

available and others that needed to be acquired. The learning curve for new tools had to be very fast, not just for the teacher and students, but also for parents. Multiple new applications were brought into the teaching and learning process. Though a specific brand name (and only one of many similar tools), *Zoom* seems to have been elevated to verb status to indicate the online connection made between students and teacher or among faculty members in meeting mode. This sudden burst in use of technology tools will not

go away. When children are allowed to return to a physical school building, there will be a significant new level of technology application to enhance learning.

Parent engagement rose to a new level. In most cases, this has been a necessity, as students have been required to stay at home.

These circumstances have certainly caused a disruption of schedules in many homes and have created a number of new challenges. However, many parents have learned more about what their children are learning and how they can help them in the process. Teachers have also found new ways to communicate with parents, often daily. Parents will want much of this to continue, even after their children are back in the regular school environment. Administrators and teachers will take advantage of these newfound relationships to continue to build the home/school connection. Creative schools and congregations have also identified additional ways of reaching families outside of the school learning environment. Adult education, youth programs, and Sunday School have all been added as part of the holistic approach to Christian education and are not likely to go away when the pandemic ends.

Everyone now recognizes the reality of a new normal.

People have developed a new appreciation for maintaining safe and healthy work and home environments. "Wash your hands" has gone far beyond parental admonition and has entered the mainstream of social etiquette. Being prepared by sanitizing *everything*, maintaining a respectful "social distance," and being sensitive to the needs of others are all habits that are likely continue, at least to some degree. People in general have stepped forward to help each other at levels never before seen on such a wide scale. It is in the DNA of Lutheran educators not just to teach such respect and love (as Jesus has taught us), but to practice it in school, at home, and in the community. This time of crisis and uncertainty has



been a perfect opportunity to show Christian compassion, and it has been appreciated and modeled at many levels in society. The opportunities for Lutheran schools to be the places of learning and practicing these expressions of love will only increase over time.

Lutheran schools are still all about relationships. God first loved us, and we teach how He has taught us to love each other. We can model that love in our families, in our congregations and schools, in our communities, and in our global contexts. It is indeed ironic that the distance between people imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought people closer together. Professional church workers needed to focus on different ways of carrying out their ministries while remaining focused on their mission. To do that has required new ways of relating to each other and working as a team. Parents were forced to explore new ways of managing their family time and activities, while growing closer to the teachers and administrators who have, by necessity, been spending more time (though virtually) with their children and even with parents themselves! Our society as a whole has embraced the need to work better together, be more understanding and accepting, and make changes that are better for the common good.

Our society as a whole has embraced the need to work better together, be more understanding and accepting, and make changes that are better for the common good.

Christian schools around the world are among the best places to both teach and practice what God has taught about how to relate to each other in response to His abundant love. That is the source for *new hope* amidst the chaos and despair in a world plagued by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is another reason to shout out with joy every day, "He is Risen Indeed. Halleluiah!"

Dr. Jonathan Laabs is executive director of Lutheran Education Association.

Map from Wikimedia Commons/public domain, UNESCO. Photos © Aaron Burden/Rawpixel, Ashley Klitzing, iStock/Maria Symchych-Navrotska.



ShapingtheFuture is published three times a year by Lutheran Education Association and distributed to members of LEA. All material included in **ShapingtheFuture** is the property of Lutheran Education Association and may not be reproduced without permission.

Executive Director: Jonathan C. Laabs, Ed.D.
Director of Publications and Communications: Ed Grube, LL.D.
Editorial Team: [Ed Grube](#), [Sharon Stadtwald](#)
Art Director: [Kathryn Brewer](#)

Copyright © 2020 Lutheran Education Association.

Lutheran Education Association 7400 Augusta Street, River Forest, IL 60305-1499
Phone: 708-209-3343 **Web site:** www.lea.org **E-mail:** lea@lea.org



To submit copy, letters to the editor, or media for review, contact [Ed Grube](#)
For **ShapingtheFuture** advertising rates and schedule, contact [Jonathan Laabs](#)

