



Christ Community Lutheran School (CCLS), St. Louis, MO

“It builds a positive, Christ-centered culture for our school.”

About five years ago, CCLS’ Executive Director Jonathan Butterfield was searching for a way to infuse meaningful character education into a CCLS education. With its Bible-based, Lutheran heritage, CCLS already had a strong religion curriculum in place. Butterfield was looking for a way to **connect Lutheran doctrine with actions**, specifically training students to make the connections themselves. He was hopeful that character programming would provide a common language for teachers, students and parents to make those important connections.

At the time, the trend toward educating “the whole child” was producing a growing variety of character-focused curricular materials in the education marketplace. Butterfield examined many of the available materials and found them lacking one important thing: a connection to *purpose*. “Many of the programs felt humanistic, cheering kids on to better behavior, convincing them they could do it. There was no connection to *why* we should keep trying to improve our actions. **We wanted to teach that behavior has a purpose – God’s purpose.**”

The Lord has a way of connecting people and fulfilling needs. He connected Butterfield with Jack Preus and Rev. Matt Hoehner, two Lutheran educators who were developing content for the Christian Character Formation Project. Butterfield examined what Preus and Hoehner were developing and was thankful for the connection because **the project seemed to fill in the missing piece**. The goal of the Christian Character Formation Project is not virtue itself; rather, to form character in a way that helps Christians understand Greater Purpose – a context larger than any individual. For the Christian, Greater Purpose is bringing glory to God by making him known in the world.

That goal drew Butterfield in. Within that context of Greater Purpose, the Character Formation Projects helps students explore three very important questions: *Who am I?* (Identity), *Why am I?* (Purpose), and *How shall I live?* (Actions). “There is nothing more important than teaching kids about their **identity in Christ**, their **purpose of making God known in the world**, and **how these truths play out in their everyday actions** to advance the Greater Purpose of God’s kingdom,” Butterfield says. “With the Character Formation Project, we feel we have found the real deal: a process and content that is culture-changing at our school and grows the character of our staff, students, and families.”



Who am I?



Why am I?



How shall I live?

One More Thing?

Like most schools, CCLS was not looking for “one more thing” and did not have a surplus of time or money to add new programming. As CCLS considered using the project, its leaders weighed how to balance new programming with the solid Lutheran religious education materials they were already using. Ultimately, Butterfield and his team determined that a program designed to intentionally build Christian character was **a good complement to the traditional Lutheran religious curriculum** they were using. It had the potential to fill the gap they thought was missing between academic knowledge of Christian doctrine and everyday actions and decision-making. “Christian character undergirds how we view ourselves and the world around us, and ultimately influences the choices we make in every aspect of our lives,” Butterfield says. “Yes, it is ‘one more thing’ for our staff to take on, but arguably it is the most important thing we do.”

After a period of training and integration, Butterfield says the Character Formation Project has become the critical component to accomplishing the school’s Christian mission. “It’s an intentional yet affordable tool for growing Christian character, and **it has provided a convenient instructional framework** for everything CCLS does during the school day.”

Getting Started

CCLS began using the Character Formation Project by **gradually phasing in its use**. First, Butterfield attended an in-depth training for early adopting schools. Then, during the 2015-16 school year, approximately 10 CCLS leaders and staff members began small group character studies, working through and discussing a selection of lessons together. This took place from October to February. Out of that group of leaders, several agreed to pilot the program with students from March to May of 2016, becoming familiar with the materials for their respective grade levels and providing feedback. These leading teachers presented their evaluations at end-of-year staff meetings, where school leaders formally introduced the program to all teachers on staff. Teachers were encouraged to become familiar with the materials over the summer and think about how they would implement CFP in their own classroom during the 2016-17 school year.

When teachers returned for the 2016-17 school year, they trained together, brainstormed together, and then each teacher described how character formation was going to look in his or her classroom. **CCLS did not prescribe the exact days or number of minutes of instruction**. Once the teachers were introduced to the program, it was up to each teacher to determine how best to use the content in the classroom, and when to do it. “Some teachers taught the content during a reading or study time, some along with the religion class, some alternated with religion class. Though each classroom and grade level looked different, the expectation was that you were using it,” Butterfield says.

When the 2017-18 school year began, CCLS had a school-wide scope and sequence for character formation, so the lesson schedule was the same for everyone every week. Still, each department and classroom used the material differently. “Our experience has been that the middle school uses the character formation lessons more extensively, while the younger grades give more time and emphasis to the religion curriculum and weave in the character formation content.”

A Teacher's Experience

"Hands fly up!"

When Rachel Klug heard that CCLS would be adopting the Character Formation Project, her first thought was, "Oh no... Another thing to learn." The second-grade teacher had many questions: *How would we fit this into our day? How does this fit with our current religion curriculum?* "Once we dove into it, we realized the depth of the material and its power to deepen our conversations," Klug says.

Klug credits the character formation process and supporting materials for getting the conversations going. First, the materials help tell a story. (Klug and some fellow teachers shared a Google slide presentation containing the weekly story, songs, video and prayers tailored to various age levels.) Then, the discovery process brings the story to life. **"Being able to think like the main character, then show it in the video and feel what is happening in the situation, is very valuable,"** Klug says. "We ask the students, 'What would you do?' When I ask that question, hands fly up! They are relating the Bible story to their life."

Although the conversations vary by classroom and age group, Klug says she and her fellow teachers zone in on the seven virtues. "The virtues have become cohesive for the whole school – we all are speaking the same language."

The seven virtues taught in the Christian Character Formation Project have been exhibited throughout time by countless Biblical characters and contemporary Christians. They are *Justice, Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, Self-Sacrifice, Diligence, and Courage.*

"The **kids really open up** when you ask them to tell you about a time they had to have courage," Klug says. "It might be something simple, like 'last night when I went to the store.' Or it might also be something more difficult, like 'when my brother had a seizure and I didn't know what was going to happen.'"

The lessons learned last for more than the block of time they are taught, Klug notes. "I remember a time when our students had to run the half-mile for physical education, and some students were concerned they wouldn't finish. I was able to remind them that we talked about praying and having courage in the morning character lesson. I said, 'So let's say a prayer, have courage, and go run the half-mile!'"

Deeper, relevant conversations help a teacher get to know students on the heart level. "It strengthens our community," Klug says. "We all have to live and work together, and the kids get to know each other and pray for each other."

In her classroom, Klug starts the day with the character material for the morning devotion. Religion is taught later in the day. Although the character lesson and the religion lesson do not always correlate, there is often opportunity to connect the character virtue with the religion material.

Klug says the Character Formation Project is meeting a need to clarify Christian doctrine, reinforce our identity as children of God, and discuss what that means for our actions. "It's made me a better person, too. Whenever I have a conflict, I intentionally remind myself that we are all dearly loved children of God, and because of that, I practice Christian virtue."

CCFP FAST FACTS:

- ✓ An affordable licensed set of content and programming for Christian educational settings
- ✓ Centered around a research-based process for growing character from the inside out
- ✓ Training programs teach the process
- ✓ Content is plentiful and user-friendly for teachers with low prep time

"There is more intentionality in language..."

Outcomes

Butterfield is pleased with the numerous positive anecdotes and enthusiasm for the Character Formation Project at CCLS. And, when Butterfield begins a new assignment at Lutheran High School South in St. Louis this fall, he plans to introduce the Christian Character Formation Project there, too. Butterfield summarizes the following positive outcomes at CCLS since using the Character Formation Project:

Meaningful conversations

"Every day our teachers have conversations in every classroom, from 2-year-olds to 8th graders, about their true **Identity** as children of God, loved and saved by Jesus, and how they have a **Purpose** to make God known in the world, and then finally what that looks like in our **Actions** as we love God and serve others. This content and process is as good as gold for our Lutheran schools."

A common language

"It gives us a common framework and language to use in teachable moments. For example, one day we had a speaker come in to present to one of our classrooms, and the students were a little rambunctious during the presentation. I saw our teacher pull the students aside later and go through the character virtues for that situation. *What should respect look like, and what did it actually look like in our classroom during that situation?* I see and hear these kinds of stories all the time from our teachers, now that we have a common framework on which to build our school culture and accountability."

The shared language has proactive, positive benefits for the CCLS community, too.

- A CCLS parent told Butterfield that her child observed selfless behavior at the mall and repeated the virtue definition to her. "My son was pointing out what good Christian behavior looks like," she said.
- Another parent wrote to tell that her son observed integrity on display at a baseball game. "You guys are doing GREAT stuff... and it's paying off!" she said.

"There is more intentionality in language than we've had before," Butterfield says. "We can use the virtues and shared ideas to shape our school culture." Klug adds, "It has brought our school together. It has helped us unite around a common Christian vocabulary that is irreplaceable."

Adults growing with students

Klug says she is growing in her character as she teaches the program. "It has made me more aware of who I am – a child of God – and what that means for my life purpose and my actions. In my interactions with others, I find myself intentionally saying, 'This person is a child of God and I need to respect that.' It's a great reminder for me."

CCLS sends a "Family Character Connection" newsletter home with students so that parents can review the character lesson at home. Butterfield says, "I hear from families that they look forward to it every week and use it as family devotion material."

A differentiator for the school

CCLS points to their intentional program for growing Christian character as a reason to choose CCLS. The CCLS website says, "We cherish the privilege to form Christian character just as highly as the opportunity to develop academic abilities." It goes on to say, "There is nothing more important that we do in our Christian school than teach kids about their **Identity** in Christ, their **Purpose** of making God known in the world, and how these truths play out in their everyday **Actions** to advance the Greater Purpose of God's kingdom."

Butterfield was recently a presenter at a school marketing and enrollment conference for admissions coordinators at Lutheran schools. “We emphasized the importance of **differentiating your school**, and the Character Formation Project was the example I used for CCLS. To differentiate is to highlight the things you do well. We do Christian character formation really well because **we have a formal, intentional program integrated into everything we do** at our school. Character is not something we talk about – it is who we are, and that makes us unique.”

Christ Community Lutheran School (CCLS) has four campuses in Missouri – Crestwood, Glendale, Kirkwood and Webster. CCLS is home to 665 students ranging from age 6 weeks through 8th grade. Five Lutheran churches make up the association that supports and manages CCLS and its mission to provide an educational setting where Christian values are at the heart of everyday activities. Along with modern technology and resources that promote academic excellence, CCLS considers it a privilege to help form Christian character in its students. Intentional character formation programming is delivered through the Christian Character Formation Project.

The **Christian Character Formation Project (CCFP)** is a Biblically based journey that equips and trains children and the adults around them to live Christ-centered, fulfilling lives for **Greater Purpose**. Lutheran schools have a unique opportunity to join the project’s “Lutheran Initiative,” which is tailored to complement a distinctly Lutheran education and provide opportunities for Lutheran schools to share experiences, learning from one another.

Contacts:

John A. Crabtree, Jr., PhD
National Director of Training and Implementation
The Character Formation Project
317-440-6291
john.crabtree@mycharacterformation.org

Ellen Bartling, PhD
National Director of Content and Operations
The Character Formation Project
262-542-9546
Ellen.bartling@mycharacterformation.org