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The rich heritage of St. John's Lutheran School in Lanesville dates all the way back to 1861 when the school first opened.

How does any school remain vital for such an amount of time? Inevitably there are ups and downs but thanks to the hard work, dedication, and most of all the faith of so many it may be safe to say that the current trend seems to be an upward one as shown by steadily increasing enrollment figures.

St. John's Lutheran School has undergone three building campaigns since 1861; one in 1938, a second in the 1960s, and the most recent one was completed in the late 1990s and there have been countless other changes over the years.

Enrollment seemed to peak around 20 years ago with 145 students signed up for grades K-8. From there figures changed, and slowly a decline set in until in 2008 a mere 62 students had signed up to attend St. John's.

Of course there was some concern. However, that same year the St. John's school board made a decision that would seem to set them on a new course.

After years of things being somewhat the same they decided to make a drastic change.

So with prayer and consideration, the decision was made to cut the yearly tuition in half. School officials felt that this was the direction the school needed to move in. Figures were run and if they had to put words to the huge step of faith it would be these, "If God would send us 25 students for the upcoming year, we would be at about the same place financially as we were with only 62," according to principal Pam Eisert.

And what seemed a reward for following their leading, stepping out in faith with the new lower tuition rates, 24 new students enrolled that summer to attend the following school year.

Eisert remarked that she even received a letter from the state upon turning in her enrollment figures asking her if they had been reported correctly with such a jump from the prior year (from 62 students in 2008 to 82 in 2009).

And as of August 8, 2012, an impressive 141 students have been enrolled so far to attend St. John's for the 2012-2013 school year which is more than double the figure from four short years ago.

In addition to the step of lowering the tuition rate in 2008, St. John's has been able to offer some other amenities that make the school an attractive alternative for those desiring to send their children to a private school.

There is now a bus route from Corydon to Lanesville whereas in the past it was the parents'

responsibility to transport all children to and from school.

There is also a van waiting at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church at 7:30 am each morning to bring children to St. John's from the Georgetown, Floyds Knobs, and New Albany areas.

This allows parents to get their kids to school on time as well as to get to work due to the convenient location (just a little over a half mile from I-64).

Once the school day has ended, the van also takes students to Grace Lutheran School in New Albany where afterschool care is offered.

The new transportation system alone allows many more students the chance to be educated at St. Johns.

St. John's also boasts having skilled and caring teachers, some of whom teach two grades in the same classroom.

St. John's is one of the few schools (even of the Lutheran schools) left in the area where this is the case.

Eisert said it is that way for many reasons and that it does seem to build responsibility in students as they have to learn to manage their time and complete their assignments while the teacher works with the other class.

St. John's has begun the process of forming individual classrooms for each grade. Grades K-2 are each in individual classrooms, hosting 21 kids in kindergarten, 8 students in first grade, and 15 students in the second grade classroom.

Eisert commented that she believes the current vision of the school is “to grow to the point where we are single graded classrooms and full classrooms.”

In addition to transportation and teachers, St. John's offers many other programs and classes such as: Spanish for K-8, Band for 3-8, a handbell choir for 5-8, and vocal choir for K-4. Drama is also offered in the way of a fall play each year for grades 5-8 and a spring musical every other year that students in grades K-4 are able to participate in.

St. John's is a very active Destination Imagination (or D.I.) school. There were 5 D.I. teams last year. According to Destination Imagination's web site, “D.I.'s core program is an educational program in which student teams solve open-ended challenges and present their solutions at tournaments. It stands among the world's most progressive institutions in creativity and innovation, and it seeks to revitalize the educational experience of students around the world.”

Every student in the school also writes a book each year as they did with the Young Authors program (the program itself is no longer offered) and participates in a Fine Arts festival.

Students in grades 3-8 have the option of participating in cross country, track, and basketball. In other words, students are encouraged to challenge themselves physically, mentally, creatively, and in many other ways in their time at St. John's.

There is also a fully functioning day care offered at St. John's for all ages.

The community is always welcome at all St. John's events to support their students.

Some upcoming events are: September 28 – Fall Drama Presentation; October 27 – Annual Church Supper; November 4 – St. John's Fest.

You can call the school for more detailed event information or visit their website at www.stjohnslanesville.com.

Eisert mentioned that many times has she been approached by parents about the option for St. John's to offer a high school in addition to the grade school.

While Eisert said that would be a plus for students, it is just not a viable option for one church to also support a high school.

“The costs are just too high,” Eisert added.

Eisert is grateful for a church body that believes in educating children as the church pays roughly 80% of all school expenses.

She said yes tuition covers some, but not nearly enough of the expenses. Another change that has taken place over the years is the shift from mostly member's children attending the school to enrollment of non-member families outnumbering those of members.

Eisert said that makes the school more of a missional school than in years past and that “good things bring unique opportunities with which we need to pray and find out what it is God wants us to do with those opportunities.”

Eisert is grateful that it is because of the families and the members of St. John's Lutheran Church that the school has remained here for 150+ years.

Enrollment at St. John's, as mentioned, is open to both members of St. John's Lutheran Church as well as non-members. There is a tuition discount offered for those who are members.

In a society where religion has become such an offensive subject, it would be easy to wonder if that controversy ever becomes an issue with St. John's teaching so many children about Jesus on a daily basis.

Eisert said that at enrollment each non-member family is informed as to what the Lutheran church believes, even given a Catechism 'which explores the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine (taken from Concordia Publishing House website).

Rev. Christopher Truelsen is also available to answer any questions that students and/or parents may have at that time as well as throughout the school year.

Eisert said that she encourages parents of children who may come home with questions about something they have been taught in any area of the curriculum to openly address them with the school so that a positive discussion can take place.

She added that has taken place at times in her experience over the years and it makes for a great environment for everyone, an open door policy where the school works with the families to educate and care for their children.

Students attend a chapel service every Wednesday at 8:15am.

Parents as well as other family members are welcome and highly encouraged to attend chapel with the students.

With a concern for where the world will be (in relation to the different atmosphere students today face as opposed to those five, ten, or twenty years ago) in a few years, Eisert said it is important to “get them grounded in their faith so they know they don't have to branch out in all those weird ways to find happiness.”

Eisert herself has quite an extensive teaching background.

She started her teaching career in 1975 as a teacher at St. John's.

After thinking she might be a stay at home mom, she went back to teaching for the Lanesville Community School Corporation for 17 years.

And in 2001, St. John's welcomed Eisert back as the first full time principal. Eisert is herself known for being an outstanding teacher but as principal she is interested in knowing and forming relationships with each student and their family.

There was a recent need for a sixth grade math teacher so Eisert did take on that responsibility a couple of mornings each week in this her twelfth year back at St. John's.

St. John's has a lot to offer both students and their families. It is a place where learning and the care of each and every student is of the utmost importance and families are involved every step of the way. In the words of Eisert, “We are a Christ-centered school with an academic

St. John's Lutheran School – Christ Centered, Education Focused for 152 years”

Written by George Browning

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focus.”