

## What is a safe school?

LCRSS OFFICE →

It is hard to imagine what it might have been like to wake up in the town of La Roche, Saskatchewan on January 23, 2016. Few people outside of Saskatchewan even knew that the town existed just the day before, but by the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> that had changed: **the tragic school shooting that took place in the quiet little town was front page of every newspaper** in the country. Those of us reading the story can only pray that the families and people involved will come to know that this event was not a random act of violence, but part of a loving plan.

A 'loving plan'? How is that possible? We understand that the events in La Roche are horrific. Precious lives are lost and a young man is suffering for his alleged actions. **There is nothing 'good' about what happened in La Roche that day- how can we think it is part of a 'loving plan'.**

The truth is, we don't know exactly. We don't know how tragedies such as these are part of a loving plan. However, we trust that God does, and we have faith and experience as proof.

**We have (faith) God's word**, Romans 8:28, to be exact, where Christians confess that, "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." We rest in this promise; it makes us feel safe, even though it does not protect us from harm. We know that sorrow, pain and hardship serve the same purpose as joy, pleasure and ease: our good.

Experience tells us the same. When **we give our lives to the Lord we know that though we want our good times to shape us, it is our hard times that hone us – and drive us back to the Lord's loving arms.** What a comfort that is! And we pray that it is the Lord's loving plan for the people in La Roche to receive that comfort.

While we may not understand what it was like to be part of a shooting at school, we do know what it is like to be on the receiving end of cutting remarks, name calling, and the brokenness evident in the lives of others. **What's more, if we have a hard look at ourselves, we will probably find that we have been on the giving end of bitterness and strife as well.**

We do not know what drove the shooter to enact the brokenness of his life upon the La Roche community: all we see is some of the aftermath. We have acts of brokenness in our schools too. Maybe not physical acts like this one,

but **brokenness does not need a knife or a gun to make itself known.** It is found in the words we use- or don't use, it's in the looks we give- or don't give, and it's in the actions we take- or refuse to take. We've read Matthew 5, we know that Christ equates murder with anger, insults and simple name calling. It makes one wonder what acts of murder happen in our schools every day, and, when we are honest with ourselves, what acts of murder we have committed during our own school years.

So, **do we install metal detectors, have the police walk the school, have random locker checks for weapons and declare our schools safe?** We could..., but that would only give a false sense of security. Physical acts of violence inspired by anger are rare in most schools, and rarer still in ours. Non-physical acts of violence are another matter however, in any school. How do we build safe schools?

What if we were to **focus on three things: Love, understanding, and consequence?** We need to love- and not just because it covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). **Love is Christ's command for how we treat each other, no matter how visibly broken the 'other' is** (John 13). There is no partiality in this command; we are not to give more love to the victim and less to the aggressor, we are to love them both as Christ loves us.

We **understand that the student who physically acts out his or her brokenness is no more or less sinful than the one who does not physically act it out.** Sin is a great equalizer in that way, we all suffer from it the same, we just manifest it in different ways.

**Finally, if we focus on our love and our understanding of how broken we all are, we could make it result in quality consequence for those acting out their sinful impulses** (whether one is causing physical or psychological wounds). Why? So we all come to better understand God's love for us.

Man sinned, and the consequence was Jesus' death. Since he took the eternal consequence of our sin on himself, we show our thankfulness by not shirking the temporal consequence of our sins - even when we know the sins themselves are eternally paid for. We continue to work to teach this to our children, and allow them the opportunity to feel what it means.

We pray for the people of La Roche, the victims and the accused. And we pray for our children, that they may suffer little of the brokenness of life. **Finally, we pray for the willingness to love and understand each other and so be willing to work together. Consequently, we can build truly safe schools.**

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# Government update



## League of Canadian Reformed Schools Committees:

Assistance for the Special Child (ASC)

Compensation Committee

Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Educators (CARE)

Government Contact Committee (GCC)

Pension Committee

Professional Development Committee (PDC)

The Ministry of Education (MOE) tasks the **Private Schools and International Education Unit (PSIE)** with the task of "coordinating the inspection of private schools in Ontario and overseas, (they are to) **validate and inspect private schools to ensure compliance with Ministry policy** and provide other supervisory services as required." (<http://goo.gl/dhoUwt>)

According to the private schools contact list on the MOE website, there are 1159 private schools in Ontario and nineteen Ontario registered schools overseas. With such a large number of schools, one would expect that there would be a battery of school inspectors needed. In fact, according to the Ontario government telephone directory, **there are only fifteen people employed in the PSIE office.** Of these, two are policy analysts, two work on program coordination (a coordinator and an assistant), two are administrative assistants, one is in charge of the international schools, one is a manager, and six are inspectors.

If the PSIE inspectors were to visit each of the 1159 schools, each inspector would need to visit about 193 schools in a year, that's one school every other day in a 365 day year. Unfortunately for the inspectors, a school year does not run 365 days. It only has 194 instructional days on average. That means that **if the six inspectors hope to set foot in every private school in Ontario, they each have to visit one school per day, starting on the first day of school and finishing on the last- with no holidays, and no breaks.**

If Ontario were not so large geographically, and the inspectors remained healthy all year through, this might be possible. As it is though, one can understand that not every school can be inspected every year.

The MOE solved a bit of this dilemma by having all

private schools undergo a standalone 'opening inspection'. **Once a school passes the opening inspection, only those schools granting an Ontario Secondary School Diploma receive scheduled inspections** (most have one every other year) to ensure the quality of the courses which lead to an OSSD. This brings the number of schools who receive inspections down to 444, or 222 per year (assuming that they split the list).

**This means that the six inspectors are each responsible for 37 schools in a year**, which works out to about one inspection every week, if one were to start right after Labour Day Weekend... They are busy people doing important work.

**Two LCRSS schools are receiving MOE inspections this year:** Guido de Brés, in Hamilton, and Providence Reformed Collegiate, in Komoka (Emmanuel Christian High School, in Fergus was inspected last year). Well before the actual inspection takes place the inspectors receive information packages about the program offered, the courses taught, and the perspective they're taught from. During the actual inspection (scheduled for the spring) They will speak with the principal, and visit a number of classes before they write their final report.

One can only wonder about the different things these inspectors see on what must be whirlwind tours of inspection. **Let us pray that they see our schools for what they are. Institutions where excellence in education is enacted every day.** It is enacted not because we feel pressure to conform to MOE's academic expectations, but because we see value in their *academic expertise*. Expertise that, when grounded by God's Word, leads to excellent schools.



## The ASC Committee

The **Assistance to the Special Child (ASC) Committee** is a League committee which has been mandated to **research programs for the benefit of children with special educational needs and assist teaching staff in preparing them.** They are also called to **operate workshops and seminars for parents and teachers**, and to report on its activities.

The work of the ASC Committee is a blessing for our schools because **its membership is a blend of educational leaders and parents who have an interest in the education of children with special needs in our communities.** ASC works to distribute information pertaining to its work in a number of ways. It sends out a quarterly newsletter, gathers books and information dealing with the teaching of children with special needs, and promotes best practices inside the LCRSS system.

The **ASC Committee sponsors professional development for LCRSS teachers** such as the annual CRTA Teachers Convention, and a learning day for those serving our schools as educational assistants. They do this to provide those employed by LCRSS

schools with seminars and workshops specifically geared toward teaching children with special needs in our schools.

**For parents, the ASC Committee organizes bi-annual gatherings for parents with special needs children in our schools.** During this meeting parental contacts are made, challenges are discussed and support is given for those to whom the Lord has given children whose needs are not easily met inside the regular classroom of LCRSS schools.

**The ASC Committee also works to bring all parents and teachers together once per year with a learning evening.** This year, the plan is to have a panel presentation based around the topic of childhood anxiety and depression. The panel will feature a medical professional, a minister, and a parent followed by small group discussion. **Lord willing, this discussion will be held in two locations. On April 14<sup>th</sup>, at Cornerstone Christian School in Guelph, and on April 28<sup>th</sup>, in the Grassie Canadian Reformed Church building. Both are set to begin at 7:30pm.**

## League of Canadian Reformed Schools Executive:

**Gerald Boot,** Chair  
**John Vanlperen,** Vice-Chair  
**Leanne Van Bostelen,** Recording Secretary  
**Amy Hoogstad,** Treasurer