Lutheran Education

In This Issue.

Departments

Here I Sit ... New, Nervous, Novice

by O. John Zillman

As they pack up the rental vans, as they do every August, parents are asking questions like, "How about the plaid couch and love seat in the living room? (Which somehow looked good in 1992 but maybe he'll take it with him so we can buy a new one.) You wanna take those?"

Old "college cars" (Grandma's old Buick Regal) are being traded in with the "Cash for Clunkers" vouchers for new, fuel efficient wheels.

"Yes, you can stay on our cell phone family plan for now."

"Mom, what's a co-pay?"

"Son, that 'Church's Plan' is a good deal—get in on it right away."

You'll see them first in church with one or both parents and wonder if they're visitors. Then they'll show up in your school building, maybe walking around with the principal. They'll sorta slip in quietly and you'll see them in the classroom that belonged to Mrs. So-And-So who retired last year, sitting at the desk looking a bit lost. Or they'll be scrubbing desks, cleaning out cabinets or putting up "Back to School" bulletin boards. They'll be trying to figure out the computer in their classroom that's at least a generation older than the laptop they had in college (or if the technology grant came through this summer, they'll already know the features of the new one). It'll seem like they eat a lot of fast food. They'll make a lot of trips to the restroom, hoping no one notices. They're The Rookies and they're your new colleagues.

They're coming. And to some degree, these are the ones who the people in Teacher Education might admit are "marginally prepared and scared to death." Oh, of course we gave them the best we could give them—they had to earn it, actually—we screened them the best we could, gave them lots of pre-professional hours, good learning theory and methods, solid Lutheran doctrine, an understanding of child development and the broad liberal arts plus

that semester of student teaching during which they had to fly solo for a number of weeks. But it's just not the same as the real thing and we all know it.

We told them what to wear—or not—that tattoos shouldn't show and that teachers don't walk around checking their text messages all day long. They know there will be a honeymoon—for awhile—and that there's wisdom in the old adage, "Keep your shoes shined and your mouth shut" for the first six months. Don't be "buddies" with your students, keep your head in the game, the last week in August is always hotter than blazes in your non-air conditioned classroom and that the parents of your students should be your allies, not your adversaries. And most important, that they should ask a lot of questions but should listen carefully to the answers so they don't have to ask again. Good luck! God's Blessings! Don't forget your alma mater!

They've also heard that they will have good mentors among their seasoned colleagues—and that would be you. So, as we hand off The Rookies from our teacher education programs to your building, your congregation, here are a few things that we know will happen because, after all, you're a good mentor:

They'll need a place to live—cheap, close but not too close to school and a welcome place to crash after the school day ends. Maybe you'll connect them with an older couple who has a dormered-out upstairs with its own tiny kitchen, bedroom and living space with maybe some yard work thrown in as part of the rent deal. But there might not be cable television or wireless internet access, the Twentieth Century luxuries that have become necessities in the blink of a technological eye. And, ideally, the landlords will be a bit hard of hearing because college friends will visit occasionally.

They'll like to eat someone else's home cooking. A Saturday evening cookout will be nice and you'll only ask them to bring brat buns. They won't have lawn chairs with them. They're more likely, however, to have brought their set of "bags and boards" along from home and will finally relax when they find they can beat the pants off you.

They'll think you're old. You won't overdo it with discussions of your children because even though they're going to *teach* children, the thought of *having* children is mind-boggling for a Rookie. You know they'll be checking out your house and thinking

"How'd they do this on what I'm gonna make and with $18,000 in college loans?" So the story about how your parents helped you out with the down-stroke so you could handle the mortgage will help a lot. You'll tell enough stories about their new church and school to help them start to feel like family but will avoid framing them as "the good old days" because you don't want them to feel as though all the good stuff passed them by. Rookies only have college stories now—and will want to listen to new ones because much of what we do is really built on stories that contain useful lessons and guiding principles of our faith and ministry. But you'll be careful to watch that their eyes aren't glazing over.

The corollary to this is that they'll really need to find a social network of people their own age—the gulf between even age thirty and twenty-two is large enough to swallow up music, technical savvy, slang, metabolism, college experiences and political views—you name it. It may take awhile until showing up to the Young Adults group and going to their new church feels more like friendship than part of their job. So you'll introduce them around and let them take it from there, then stand back a bit and listen, smile and recall that you, too, came into teaching with the attitudes, language, tastes and ideals of your generation and you'll likely have the same thought as your own mentors did who must have also smiled and said to themselves, "Geez, they're just kids aren't they?" And you'll FEEL old just for a minute or two (but when the school year starts, you'll be out there like the Tom Watson of Teaching and they'll be the ones shaking their heads and beginning to understand that "old" is more about attitude than it is about age).

They'll be scared at least at some level. Because what they're about to do actually scares a lot of people who would never set foot in a classroom full of rompin', stompin' fourth graders or sullen sophomores. And you'll help them understand that there are things that still scare you too: that angry parents can be intimidating and can leave you with adrenaline cramps in your lower back and shaky hands; that having a student hate you—and say so—is probably a more personal insult than any other they've ever heard from anyone else because young people go into teaching because they think students will find them likeable. And that the way to manage the things that used to scare you is to understand that things can get better with experience, working smarter instead of harder,

managing your time and taking shortcuts that don't shortchange. When they sit through their first Voters Assembly meetings and people talk about the budget and someone suggests that teachers don't really need raises because "they don't work all year and they get three months of vacation"—as if the teachers in the room are invisible—they'll come to you and ask in some roundabout way whether or not you think they'll have a teaching position next year. And you'll assure them that the Divine Call is a two-way deal, that congregations and high schools commit to their teachers on the same level as they expect teachers to commit to the ministry at hand and, if cuts are necessary, much effort will be made to do that in a way that doesn't immediately impact to the teaching staff. But you won't share the stories you've also heard, too, this last year of how struggling Lutheran schools have cut teachers' salaries first or have laid off the entire 1st through 8th grade faculty but kept the early childhood program. But that will get around to them eventually, too, and it's no secret that they have friends who are Rookie Teachers in public schools for forty grand to start (and will earn every dime of it) and this will look very inviting. More importantly, there is wisdom and faith in what my friend, lifelong Lutheran educator—and mentor—Lyle Kurth used to say, "I'm a wealthy man, I just don't have a lot of money." There are lots of ways to be wealthy—money is just one of them and you'll tell them, "I've always had enough." (But let's all take another look at those salaries, hey?)

They'll make mistakes. Hopefully not major, bone-headed ones but they'll mess up. They'll send a kid out in the hall because he's talking too much then forget that he's out there and, forty-five minutes later, ask the rest of the class where Greg went. (Yes, *mea culpa*.) They'll get mixed up on the daily schedule and have their kids all lined up in their PE clothes on music day. (That was somebody else.) They'll be late to a morning faculty devotion because…they set their alarm to 6 p.m. instead of a.m. by mistake and will come scrambling in with wet hair, wearing yesterday's shirt because there was no time to iron the one for today when they finally just woke up on their own and with a horrified "Oh, S-s-s-s-sugarplum!" realized the time. Hey, sugarplum happens. You'll just do the closing prayer yourself that day instead of asking them, like you'd planned. We've all done stuff like that and, now, it's just a funny story…sort of.

They'll amaze you. They have always lived in a world with personal computers and the internet. They can text faster than I can type and communicate that way constantly. (E-mail is s-o-o-o 2007…). They have had to learn an informal second language in order to do it, too, the implications of which can be linked to L. S. Vygotsky's notion of spontaneous and "scientific"/semiotic systems—and that's the educational psychology thought for the day. They have virtual social networks that are based on a different kind of relationship and they're okay with that. They play online games with people they'll never meet. They haven't waited around to be invited into the nuances of "adult" networks of social relationships—they've created their own online society instead and blown right by those of us who have yet to set up a social networking page. There is little patience for those of us who fail to acknowledge the power in all of it—all we need to do is look at what's happened in Iran this summer. They'll expect to be able to use that with their students who are also linked in (but may need to be reminded

> They'll work harder than they've ever worked in their lives but they soon find that they aren't alone.

that their online pages will need to be squeaky clean or, at least, protected. The Lutheran teacher "fishbowl" is now worldwide).

More importantly, they'll pull out skills and talents that weren't in the placement portfolio. The lovely French horn accompaniment from the choir loft on a Sunday morning—the Wind Symphony's loss being your congregation's gain—or the winning basketball or volleyball team will confirm what you knew all along. You'll start to look forward to tournaments again. And then there'll be this strange noise—sounds like giggling—coming from the otherwise morose middle school classroom that's actually a response to this young teacher's willingness to be a bit loopy with them, something that perhaps some of us have forgotten how to do. Or they'll lead the charge with youthful endurance that keeps them going through a week of outdoor education minus muscles that ache in the morning that will bring fresh perspectives and energy to a staff. Maybe we'll stop counting years until retirement for a while.

They'll work harder than they've ever worked in their lives

but they soon find that they aren't alone. They'll find that a fifty hour week is the norm, that there is such a thing as a "No Weekend Weekend" and that everyone manages it: teachers, coaches, DCEs, principals (make that a sixty hour week), pastors (ditto) and if they're a church musician they have pretty much kissed their weekends goodbye for the rest of their careers. But they'll also learn the necessity of managing their time and energy, knowing when to jog, when to sprint and that they, too, will finish the marathon. They'll need to understand the value of exercise and it'll help to see you playing in the weekly Monday evening pick-up basketball game or out on the tennis court with your spouse (Yes, you can use the Lutheran Teacher Health Club—the gym, tennis courts, weight room, etc. whenever you want. Free!) and that even though working out takes more time than opening a beer, it's better for you as a means of relaxation. So it's a good thing that you're already a model of moderation in all things (but if you still smoke, most Rookies will think it strange.)

They'll need to go home once in a while and will call it that until their wise parents start to refer to returning to that new little apartment as "going home" and their childhood home as "coming to our house." Not at first, but after a while because this is strange new territory and ties that bind need to be unwrapped rather gently.

They'll get to June and will have passed the Rookie test which will make that first teacher summer all the sweeter. You won't press them for much of the month of July because you know this faculty gets its summer work done without having anyone check up on them too closely. You'll get to see their pictures of the summer road trip with the college friends or what they wore to their roommate's wedding and finally see a photo of this bunch of close friends knowing that, over time, this will likely become a Christmas card relationship like many of your own college friendships. But you won't say it. If there's time, maybe you'll invite them to play some golf when you need a fourth. If they're good, you'll be complimentary; if they're not, you won't give advice unless asked. You won't talk about school stuff on the golf course but you will show mild disdain when they answer their cell phone for the third time and are holding things up.

They'll need to grow professionally. The first couple of years will be spent rounding off the burred edges of the Concordia

Bachelors degree—and we count on that on this end—but then it's really important to move on. Sure there are some increments in salary for doing so but the real value is in sitting in classes with other working professionals and is vastly different than undergraduate education. They'll need financial support for doing this but you'll tell them early on about the fund for professional growth that your school maintains. That you and most of the more experienced teachers on your faculty have a graduate degree and continue to go to workshops and conferences will be setting the bar for them. They'll have to make sacrifices to get it done but you'll see differences in their teaching and you'll let them know.

They'll stick with it and spend much of their lives in ministry. At least they're more likely to if they get the kind of mentoring you'll give them. You'll know its working when the next Rookie comes along and you see the Former Rookie in their classroom, giving advice, pitching in, helping them arrange things, inviting them over to their new, larger apartment or town house ("Hey. We're doing burgers—you bring the buns.) because the somewhat elderly landlord passed away and the family wanted to sell the place. You'll hear their encouragement, but will still have heart-to-heart discussions with them that are way past fear into the seeking of your wisdom; they'll lead the faculty devotion (and will have been early ever since, y'know, that one day…) and will include a prayer for a parent or student who you know has given them no end of trouble. They'll get to know your own children, maybe have them in their class and will have to shift between their role as your colleague and as your child's very professional, up front teacher.

Some of them will announce that they're getting married to the person that they've been dating since college, or even more fun, to another recent Rookie on your staff—discreetly handled but of *course* everyone had it figured out right away—and you'll all be invited to the wedding, dish out a lot of the good-natured, somewhat earthy ribbing that only happens between colleagues and will have a blast at the reception, even when it's time for you to graciously relinquish the dance floor when the deejay switches up the music—and volume—at 10 p.m. from "Twist and Shout," "YMCA," and "Electric Slide" to stuff that you don't know either. (But they'll have been watching your moves—you've still got it.)

Their babies will be baptized in this church that they never

chose for themselves because that's the way the Call works and it'll be fun to see them trying their best to be good parents. You refrained from sharing childbearing stories involving unexpected C-sections or months of colic and will just smile when you see their three-year-old giving them a run for it on Sunday mornings because you went through it, too, and there are times when you sorta' miss those days with your own kids who, now grown, live and work a thousand miles away.

Then, maybe, at some point, they'll need to have that heart-to-heart—your intuition tells you it's coming—in which they share with you that they know they're getting another Call and will probably accept it or are moving into another line of work or into the public sector because the realities of raising a family on their salary just aren't working anymore. They'll want advice but they'll want trust and prayers even more. They'll want to know they'll be missed but that people won't hold it against them because these ties, too, will be hard to unwrap. So, you'll do your best to stick up for them when others start playing the inevitable Guilty Traitor game because you've felt the sting of it yourself when you've accepted Calls along the way or your spouse has taken a public school position so you can keep doing what you're doing on a Lutheran teacher's salary. But you'll clue them in that some of those cold shoulders will stay that way for a long time and that's just how people can be and that while the "yes" or the "no" to a Call are yours alone to speak, they are not arrived at in isolation: God doesn't expect anyone to discern his will from the same point of view that He has in any circumstance—it's this thing we call faith that drives—no—*leads* everything whether for oneself, one's ministry or one's marriage, family or personal life. And they'll start to see this whole thing as similar to baptism, that there's an analogy here that's not too much of a stretch, of daily dying and rising and now, secure in that Grace, of also daily declining or accepting one's Call the actual location of which is secondary to the nature of the thing itself.

They won't forget you. Ever. They'll show up at your fortieth anniversary in ministry celebration; remember the stories you told them but politely won't mention how many times they've heard the one about Greg out in the hallway, the hospitality you shared, the confidences you kept, the pointers you gave and the faith that you had in them when they seemed like really just a

kid, marginally prepared and scared to death. Ultimately, you'll get to a place where you realize that they've outgrown you but that this close friendship is just the natural progression of things that grew through careful tending early on. The years between you that seemed to matter then are of little consequence now and never will be again. And we all know and tell the stories that have outlived those who first told them, and that's where this is eventually headed, so we learn them well now while we can.

They're coming. No, they've arrived. The Rookies—who desperately want to look like a Veteran Teacher—like you, actually—who, cast off from the safety of home and insouciance of college are in their classrooms right now, trying to figure out what to do first, and next, and next; worried about how they look to their students instead of how, yet, that their students are supposed to look when the teaching is done. They may be a long way from home and haven't yet gotten to know this new professional family very well.

You know what to do. *LEJ*

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Angry Hostile Parents—What to do?

by Steven A. Kaatz

P arent involvement is one of the great strengths of Lutheran schools. These involved parents volunteer in the classroom, coach, raise funds, pray often and do so much more. Unfortunately,

> There will always be the parent who, despite everything we may have done to be positive, helpful and involve them in the educational process, turns into a hostile person who meets you with all guns blazing. (Mamchak & Mamchak, 1980, p. 77).

Inevitably, teachers, principals, DCEs and pastors must deal with "parents who are angry, troubled, afraid, or just plain crazy" (McEwan, 1998). The purpose of this article is to offer practical advice to those who interact with such parents. Be warned: progress with hostile parents may be slow; "Parent involvement, like all human relations evolves; it cannot be decreed, and it does not happen all at once" (Henderson, Marburger & Ooms, 1986, pg. 46).

The key question is, "What roles do you expect parents to play?" Once that has been decided, then choose *where* and *how* to communicate the roles to parents. Role misunderstanding is at the root of many conflicts.

Henderson, Marburger and Ooms (1986) suggest five roles for parents. Lutheran schools will doubtless want to add one role focusing on spirituality.

1. **Partners**: Parents meet basic education and social obligations for their children.
2. **Collaborators and Problem Solvers**: Parents reinforce the school and help to solve problems.
3. **Audience**: Parents attend various school performances and activities.
4. **Supporters**: Parents volunteer assistance to teachers, the parent organization and to other parents.

5. **Advisors and/or Co-decision Makers**: Parents provide input on school policy and procedures on permanent or ad-hoc committees (p. 3).

Just as the school handbook contains expectations for student behavior, so too, it should contain expectations for parental behavior, including parent/staff interactions considered to be incompatible with school expectations. Ideally, the handbook also contains a form which parents sign, stating they have read the handbook and agree with the policies therein. A copy of the handbook is also placed on the school's website.

Who are these angry, hostile parents and why do they act this way?

There are several factors that can make parents become hostile and aggressive. Usually these are not shared with the target of their anger and hostility. These factors

> …Include financial stress, patterns of family violence, unstable family environments, previous negative school experiences, school personnel attitudes, a parent's mental instability, or even a feeling that he or she is actually losing control of his or her child (Jaksec, 2005, p. 19).

According to Jaksec (2005), one reason some parents become hostile is that they are not familiar with school expectations as discussed, above.

A special "danger "in Lutheran schools is that some parents expect perfect children in perfect rows behaving perfectly. There may be an honest disconnect between what the parent expects of school personnel and what the school personnel expect of themselves. What the parents really want is an educator who has a personal touch and who is "authentic." In her research, Jane Henderson, et al. (1986) offered this reminder:

> For the truly unreasonable parent, there is no easy answer. It is helpful to remember that what might be perceived as unreasonableness, may actually be fear and lack of trust in school people, or in institutions in general. Non-defensiveness and calm on your part can go a long way in calming that parent down (p. 62).

What about the parents who are not just angry or hostile, but "just plain crazy" or, more accurately, actually have a serious emotional or mental disorder? Milton Seligman (2000) describes characteristics of parents who may require professional care:

- Deep and unrelenting depression and/or anxiety, may be accompanied by insomnia, lack of concentration, nightmares; suicidal thoughts might be expressed.
- Indications that the family unit is threatened; comments about continuous significant, arguments, discussion of possible divorce or separation, family violence, substance abuse.
- Comments suggesting severe neglect of the child or physical abuse (p. 243).

While state and local regulations vary, in many states, teachers and others who work with children are mandated reporters who must report suspicion of child abuse to the proper social agency. Similarly, should a parent become out of control and a danger to him/herself or others, first responders to a 9-11 call are trained in mental as well as medical emergencies.

In each case, the parents' attitudes and actions present an opportunity to minister to families in obvious pain and to include these people in the prayer life of the school.

Difficult parents: Overview and Ideas

According to the literature, when dealing with angry and sometimes unreasonable parents, the most important thing is to listen without judging and to recognize that listening is not equated with agreement. Karen Mink, a public school principal in Aurora, Illinois states:

> I listen and then I listen some more… I have learned that many parents just want me to hear them all the way through. If you stop a parent before he has had a chance to say everything he came in to say it might appear that you don't really care to get to the bottom of the situation. It will appear that you want to defend yourself, your teacher or your school (Education World, n.d, pg. 2, 3).

An important procedural item is to consider who the angry parent will interact with first when entering the building and, most likely, it's the administrative assistant. It is essential that this person be trained to listen empathetically and to protect the principal and teacher from "attack." By listening, not judging, and asking some general questions, this office staff person can find out a great deal of helpful information, insights which can then be passed on to the affected parties.

A good administrative assistant can also "run interference"

when the parent wants to see someone "right now" and should be well-versed in the school's policies and procedures per the handbook or other published material. Sharing these may help diffuse parental anger. All such encounters with hostile parents must be documented.

An administrator may need a day or two before any parental conference to gather information from all those involved with the child at school; teacher, custodian bus driver, coaches, etc, It is vital to document any problematic behavior and actions taken as a result. Saying to any parent, especially one who is upset, "Your child is very disruptive in the classroom" is not adequate. The targeted faculty or staff member must be able to give dates, times, and a brief description of each episode. Specific suggestions for problem solving can be found in the author's monograph (2007).

The meeting with the parent must have an agenda in order to keep everyone focused but to which changes can be added. Parents should be greeted with a smile, good eye contact, and a firm handshake.

Principal McNeely of a middle school in Louisiana says, "I let them know I want to hear them out but that there are rules in my office. I expect them to behave like an adult and, if they don't, I will end the meeting immediately" (Education World, n.d. pg. 3).

No principal should allow any parent to verbally abuse any staff. Similarly, no school staff member should ever stoop to sarcasm.

> The key to working with an angry parent is to avoid responding in a hostile or defensive way. Such responses contribute to a spiraling negative encounter in which both parties accuse each of negligence and neither person listens to the other (Seligman, 2000, pg.228).

The parents should always be allowed to speak first. Waiting until the parent is verbally exhausted can be effective. By contrast, the faster and louder the parent speaks, the more slowly and softer staff should speak while keeping the focus on issues rather than emotions or personalities.

Questions and statements should be of the clarifying type, e.g. "Tell me more about that," "As I understand it, you feel our teachers give too much homework," "Am I correct in saying that

you would like more staff on the playground?"

Should the parent exhibit signs of mounting anger the suggestion can be made that all involved take a break, perhaps a walk, or the staff member(s) may excuse themselves to allow the parents to compose themselves. Further, setting a time limit is effective as it encourages participants to reach closure, puts an end to the endless, nonproductive, ever-circling conversation and gives time to make plans to reconvene, if necessary. At the end of the meeting, the leader needs to summarize. The summary includes the basic issues, the positions of participants and action steps, if any. The leader should thank the parents for their interest in their child, and in the school and its programs. A closing prayer which encompasses everyone's shared concern for the child is usually appropriate.

A memorandum of understanding should be sent to parents a few days after the meeting, stating the purpose of the meeting, a list of any interventions agreed upon, the conclusions, and an invitation to meet again at a specified time to evaluate the situation. To save time, a template can be developed for this, stating date, time, of meeting, participants, issues, conclusions, etc.

> Trying to help…pinpoint the exact nature of the complaint can be extremely difficult

Thus far, the assumption here is that the confrontation happens in person. Of course, angry, hostile parents can also use e-mail and/or the phone. The same general principles outlined above apply. It is not necessary to take a call "right now;" a savvy, well-trained receptionist can point the parent to a relevant part of the handbook, empathize with the parent, mention positive aspects of the school in response to a parent's negative phone rant, and schedule an appointment in a day or two.

No administrator should ever talk or e-mail a parent about a complaint regarding a teacher until that parent has approached the teacher; three way conferences calls are fine. Verbal abuse of staff or students or other parents is not to be tolerated and will result in the call being terminated. As in person, just listening goes a long way. Trying to help the parent to pinpoint the exact

nature of the complaint can be extremely difficult, but extremely helpful. Paraphrasing the parent's words is helpful as a way of checking one's own understanding. Whitaker and Fiore (2001) suggest having a structure and consistent approach to use on the phone, even a script.

Dealing with angry, hostile and possibly emotionally unstable parents can be mentally and physically exhausting. The words of Dorothy Rich (1987) definitely apply to Lutheran schools:

> Teachers play a significant leadership role in helping families move through difficult times. The school is a constant, a source of continuing support in a changing world. Teachers need not change the world in order to make positive changes in the lives of many families (p. 60).

The "Do" List

A number of helpful ideas can be reduced to a few short reminders.

- Thank the parent for coming.
- Begin with prayer. An extemporaneous prayer is not recommended as this can turn into warring petitions. One from the *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* is probably best.
- Provide adult sized chairs for all adults.
- Listen, and listen some more (see above section for an expansion on this idea).
- Focus on the problem, not on personalities.
- Ask how the situation can be improved, arrange for apologies if school personnel were in the wrong.
- Make only those promises that you can keep.
- Parents may have some practical suggestions which may serve as a springboard for action.
- Suggest a neutral place to meet if you feel the parent is hostile to "everything" about the church and/or school. Neutral locations include: a coffee shop, the public library, a food court, or a community center.
- Emphasize the "we" in the situation; "We all want what's best for Pat," "What do you think we can do to deal with this problem?"
- Document, document, document: if an incident is not documented it didn't happen.

Finally, whether in person or on the phone, all encounters

with parents who are angry or hostile should be handled with prayer, remembering that we are all children of the same Heavenly Father.

The "Don't Do" List

Just as there are a number of helpful behaviors to use when confronting hostile parents there are a number of things that may make the situation worse and which should be avoided:

- Do not take the parent's anger personally; the parent is probably upset about things you know nothing about.
- Don't attribute motives to the parents.
- The very act of becoming defensive impedes communication.
- Don't believe that you have to meet "right away" at the parent's insistence. Delaying the meeting will give you time to collect information and perhaps let the parent's anger cool.
- You do not have to meet with the parents by yourself. If you are afraid of the parents, or if you want administrative backing, moral support, or someone to take notes, having another person or persons attend the meeting is perfectly acceptable.
- Don't be afraid to terminate the conference if the parents become verbally abusive or appear to be on the verge of a physical attack.
- Don't arrange seating so the parent is between you and the door.
- Don't meet in an isolated area of the building.
- Don't meet parents alone if everyone else has left the building.
- Don't be afraid to show parents any notes you took during the meeting.
- The parent may attempt to steer the conversation to negative comments about co-workers or other parents. Don't take the bait.
- Finally, don't be afraid to apologize if you made a mistake that made a parent justifiably angry.

Be Proactive

There are a number of proactive steps schools and churches can take to avoid having an encounter with an angry, hostile parent to begin with:[1]

- Co-opting the parents is often effective. When the angry, hostile, parent does have a particular skill useful in church and/or school, then the parent can be asked to share the skill within strictly defined parameters.
- Inviting a parent to be involved in a chapel service or a career day may bond the parent to the school: seeing the operation from the inside is often revealing.
- Use an action group (not a committee) which includes representatives from all stakeholders to address a schoolwide issue. The group is given a measurable goal and a time limit within which to finish its activity. Being part of trying to solve a complex issue can sometimes diffuse anger or prevent it from developing externally. Recommendations from such action groups must be taken seriously in order to maintain the credibility of the school, though. It's worth noting, however, that, according to Seligman (2000), "…some interfering parents are appeased when given some small responsibilities to carry out; others become worse" (p. 234).
- Each teacher makes one or two brief posi-calls to parents with some positive news each week. In lieu of a phone call, an e-mail will do (as long as the parents have exclusive access).
- Early in the year, the principal may make a couple of such calls per week, coordinating names of students with teachers. "Posi-calls" allow parent and teacher or principal to get acquainted, hopefully before any negative calls need to be made. All these calls are documented.
- A variation of the above is to have students, especially in the elementary grades, address picture postcards home or, all students can write a short paragraph to parents about a school event or upcoming opportunity for parent involvement.
- During in-service days use role-plays or demonstrations to illustrate positive parent conferences. Include role-plays of conferences with angry, hostile parents.
- Evening office hours with the principal once a month may be appealing to some parents. Although by

appointment, these are more informal than other scheduled conferences.

- Similarly, once a month, the principal may host an afternoon tea where the conversation is strictly informal about general topics related to the school.
- Connect each new family with a more experienced family to give them hints, support, and advice about the school and its staff.
- Parent/child, or parent/faculty kickball, softball games or open gym nights can be offered throughout the school year on a regular basis.
- In elementary school, invite parents to read a favorite book or chapter to the students.
- Create a *Parent University* that uses staff and parent expertise to teach classes about computers, gardening, physical fitness, the basics of Lutheranism, etc.
- Offer parenting classes on issues like teenage development, drug prevention, cyber bullying, spirituality in children, etc.
- Have a *Parent Talent Night* during the school year.
- Hold several *Bring an Adult to School Days.* Students invite parents, grandparents or other family members into their classroom for part of the day.
- Adults and students may read the same book together or watch the same movie (or DVD) and then discuss it.
- *Mothers Teas* or *Fathers Breakfasts* can be hosted at which students prepare simple foods and provide entertainment.
- Cross-generational Bible study, especially between parents and children of the same gender can be true bonding experiences.
- Cross-generational events are important for all concerned and can yield positive results for the school and/or church.

Evaluate activities involving parents methodically and report the results to all stakeholders. Make sure that parents have a voice. Angry, hostile parents can be asked if they noted their complaints on evaluation forms.

Parents are the most important allies that educators have. Most have high hopes and expectations for their child, a strong

desire to be helpful and find much personal satisfaction in their child's achievements. While human nature may show its negative side at times, the professionalism of teachers and administrators can go a long way in creating collaborative partnerships and lasting relationships. ***LEJ***

Endnote

1. Many of the above ideas are adapted from *Building parent partnerships* (Gutloff, 1966), *Conference time for teachers and parents; A teachers' guide to successful conference reporting* (National Education Association of the United States, 1965) and *The administrators' guide to school- community relations* (Pawlas, 2005). Winterstein and Moser (n.d.) provide an evaluation form for conferences that can be used in Lutheran schools (p. 20). Evaluation forms for various purposes are provided by Pawlas (2005).

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TO: Lutheran School Principal
RE: Is Your School Healthy?

by Tim Mizelle

One of the most precious aspects of living is superior health. When a person's health fails, both work and play are negatively affected. So it is, too, with the climate of a school. If a school's climate—that feeling conveyed by the building and the interactions of members (Schein, 1992)—fails, then the effectiveness of the total organization is negatively affected.

In an era of school reform and improvement plans, educational leaders would do well to consider first and foremost the improvement of the climate of the environment to effect positive change; in fact, the concept of climate might be the most important element to bring about needed improvement and overall change. As Litwin and Stringer (1968) postulate, climate represents the most powerful leverage point available to principals to create positive change in their schools. With research to support it, school climate has been identified as a key element in the effective school literature with strong implications for optimal cognitive and social growth for young people (Galley & Suet-ling Pong, 2004). In other words, research has clearly demonstrated a positive correlation between a school's ability to restructure to its organizational climate.

The attributes of a supportive climate promoted in successful schools include the continual sharing of ideas, collaboration, egalitarianism, and practical application. In this type of learning environment, teachers share ideas daily regarding issues of instruction, curriculum, testing, etc. Teachers become involved in team teaching and other collaborative efforts. Teachers dispense with formalities to the point that the quality of ideas is more important than their source (Macneil & Maclin, 2005).

To claim that school climate is important to a school's effectiveness is an understatement of the highest proportions. For example, a positive school climate has been associated with fewer behavioral and emotional problems for students (Kuperminc et.

al., 1997). Additionally, specific research on school climate in high-risk urban environments indicates that a supportive and culturally conscious climate can significantly shape the degree of academic success experienced by urban students (Haynes & Comer, 1993). Furthermore, researchers have discovered that positive climate perceptions are protective factors for boys and may supply high-risk students with a supportive learning environment yielding healthy development and preventing antisocial behavior (Haynes, 1998). School climate research suggests that positive interpersonal relationships and optimal learning opportunities for students in all demographic environments can increase achievement levels and reduce maladaptive behavior (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Taylor and Tashakkori (1995) found that a positive climate is associated with increased job satisfaction for school personnel as well. School climate, therefore, plays a significant role in providing a healthy school atmosphere where students learn and teachers teach.

Although there is no consistent agreement in the literature on the components of school climate, the majority of researchers emphasize caring as a core element. School climate is usually defined in terms of a physical environment that is welcoming and conducive to learning, a social environment that promotes communication and interaction, an affective environment that encourages a sense of belonging, and an academic environment that advances learning and self-fulfillment (Gonder & Hymes, 1994).

In a welcoming physical environment, the school building contains a limited number of students. Those students are—and feel—safe and comfortable in all areas of the school property. Classrooms are orderly. School grounds are clean and well maintained. The noise level is appropriate to learning activities. Classrooms are appealing and engaging. Staff members have sufficient materials for an educational setting.

In an interacting social environment, teachers and students actively communicate with each other. Teachers practice collegiality. Teachers and parents work cooperatively as partners for the benefit of all concerned. Participatory decision-making is practiced as a common exercise. Conflict resolution is a priority in performance.

In a valued affective environment, the interaction of teachers and staff with all students is caring and respectful. Teachers and students enjoy a trusting relationship. Morale among teachers

and staff is high and contagious, reflected in students. A friendly atmosphere permeates the organization. The diversity of cultures represented within the school is not only expected but welcomed. A sense of personal contribution is evident among teachers, staff, and students. Parents perceive the school as warm, inviting, and accommodating.

In a learning environment, there is a major emphasis on academics where all types of competence are respected. Expectations for students are elevated, and students are encouraged to succeed. Student progress is monitored consistently and communicated to parents. Assessment results are used to evaluate and redesign teaching methodology. Achievement and performance are regularly recognized and rewarded.

Unfortunately, too many schools do not have a healthy climate. Four distinctive school cultures have been identified where the climate is less than ideal. The "family culture" is described as a school where the most important element is concern for each other. The "machine culture" is described as a school run like a well-oiled machine; in fact, precision rather than nurturing is the focus. The "cabaret culture" is described as a school with a circus-type environment. Relationships and status emanate from theatrical practices, and the school is "all show and no go." Finally, the "little shop of horrors culture" is described as a school where tension and stress proliferate, and the school is viewed as a prison where students have no choice but to function or try to escape (Delisio, 2005).

Perhaps the most detrimental climate to a school's ability to meet the needs of students is what e-Lead calls the "toxic culture." In a toxic culture, schools are characterized as a place of hopelessness, pessimism, and dogmatism. As the Center for Improving School Culture states, "If the fish in the aquarium are sick, do not blame the fish. Instead, check the water."

If a school is to take a serious approach to the improvement of its climate, the principal's responsibility must not be oversimplified or underestimated. Del Stover (2005) points out the importance of the principal when he writes, "…any serious look at school climate must lead to a challenging conclusion. Almost everything depends on leadership. Forget about fancy programs or interventions. Behaviors in a school are not going to change unless the principal understands how it works with the

existing culture and…(it)…evolve(s) it into a healthier one."

Attending to a school's climate does not happen overnight, nor without conflict. According to Rick Dulfour (2004), disagreement and tension are to be expected. The question schools must face honestly is not, "How can we eliminate all potential for conflict as we go through this process?" Rather, the central question must be, "How will we react when we are immersed in the conflict that accompanies significant change?" Principals who undertake a serious inventory of school climate need to fully understand that climate diagnostics is not a popularity contest. Astute principals will accept conflict as an integral part of the improvement process and instruct the faculty of the implications of the process. An old maxim says, "Sometimes, in order to heal, there must be hurt." With school climate diagnostics, sometimes in order to improve and change, there must be conflict and pressure.

School climate can be diagnosed through analysis and assessment. The majority of climate assessments use some variation of a Likert-scale. A five-point Likert-scale dominates the literature where the respondents

> …the central question must be, "How will we react when we are immersed in…significant change?"

answer questions as to the degree of climate indicators present. In reality, it makes little difference if an indicator is "somewhat present." If the indicator is not present according to the preponderance of the evidence, then the indicator needs improvement and must be addressed by the school leadership and faculty. Therefore, the following diagnostic inventory utilizes a two-dimensional scale. Each indicator is answered in the affirmative or in the negative. If the indicator is not present according to the preponderance of evidence, then the indicator is answered in the negative. *LEJ*

Lutheran School Climate Inventory

NOTE: *The author and the* Lutheran Education Journal *grant permission for duplication and use of this inventory to school administrators for its use as a school improvement tool. To avoid issues of research bias/contamination, the author is willing to have an on-site visit at the school to administer the instrument, analyze its findings, and report back to the principal. The author is also willing to administer the instrument the students at the school. Please contact Dr. Mizelle at tim.mizelle@ cuchicago.edu for further consultation.*

Domain: *School Building and Property*

1. Is the school welcoming to outsiders, conveying an identity? Yes No
2. Are school colors and symbols used with purpose and design? Yes No
3. Do teachers and students have a sense of ownership in the appearance? Yes No
4. Is litter present in the building or on the grounds? Yes No
5. Is student work displayed with pride in key places? Yes No
6. Do repairs get fixed immediately? Yes No
7. Do teachers and students show respect for custodians? Yes No
8. Is graffiti present in any area of the building? Yes No

Domain: *Faculty Relations*

1. Do teachers commonly collaborate on teaching issues? Yes No
2. Do teachers approach problems as a team with a collective mission? Yes No
3. Do teachers use their planning time constructively? Yes No
4. Do teachers speak positively of each other and administrators? Yes No
5. Do teachers display a high level of respect for one another? Yes No

6. Do teachers attend all faculty meetings?	Yes	No
7. Do teachers attend school events?	Yes	No
8. Do teachers assume leadership roles with enthusiasm?	Yes	No
9. Do teachers seek action to improve their instruction?	Yes	No
10. Do teachers have time to talk to each other?	Yes	No

Domain: *Student Interactions*

1. Do students feel a sense of community?	Yes	No
2. Do all cultures feel like valid members of the community?	Yes	No
3. Do students have a zero tolerance for "put downs?"	Yes	No
4. Do the majority of students attend school events?	Yes	No
5. Do popular students feel an obligation to serve the school?	Yes	No
6. Do all students feel safe and free from any violence?	Yes	No
7. Are student leaders validated and harnessed?	Yes	No
8. Do student athletes approach their role with a humble sense of honor?	Yes	No
9. Are students given ownership over decisions that affect them?	Yes	No
10. Do students assume responsibility for their own learning?	Yes	No

Domain: *Leadership and Decisions*

1. Does the school have a sense of mission that is shared by all members?	Yes	No
2. Does the school vision originate from the collective will of members?	Yes	No
3. Are decisions rooted in the school's mission?	Yes	No
4. Do the majority of members feel valued and listened to?	Yes	No

5. Is a sense of shared values purposefully cultivated?   Yes   No

6. Are needs selected on a priority system with shared decision-making?   Yes   No

7. Is there a high level of trust and respect in the school's leadership?   Yes   No

8. Does leadership demonstrate a high level of accountability?   Yes   No

9. Is the school leadership in tune with teachers and students?   Yes   No

10. Does leadership find a way "to make things happen" for the school?   Yes   No

Domain: *Discipline*

1. Is a school-wide discipline policy consistently applied?   Yes   No

2. Does classroom discipline feature consistency and high expectations?   Yes   No

3. Are classrooms positive places for learning?   Yes   No

4. Are student ideas and input maximized?   Yes   No

5. Does discipline occur within the lens of student needs?   Yes   No

6. Are teacher-student interactions supportive and respectful?   Yes   No

7. When a student is disciplined, is the focus on the problem behavior?   Yes   No

8. Do teachers successfully create a disciplined environment in their class?   Yes   No

Domain: *Learning and Assessment*

1. Are assessment targets clear and attainable for learners?   Yes   No

2. Do teachers accommodate varying learning styles?   Yes   No

3. Is instruction dynamic, involving, learner-centered, and challenging?   Yes   No

4. Do students work cooperatively as a team?   Yes   No

5. Are school-wide rewards focused on student effort and contribution? Yes   No

6. Do students self-correct peers who use abusive language? Yes   No

7. Do students speak about the school in proud and positive terms? Yes   No

8. Do students feel listened to, represented, and like they have a voice? Yes   No

9. Do students feel as though they owe their school a debt of gratitude? Yes   No

10. Do students feel like they are part of a larger community? Yes   No

Domain: *Community Relations*

1. Is the school perceived as welcoming to all parents? Yes   No

2. Does the school communicate to parents on key events? Yes   No

3. Does the school communicate an invitation to parents to attend events? Yes   No

4. Do service learning efforts promote positive community relations? Yes   No

5. Do parents and coaches work for the best interest of student-athletes? Yes   No

6. Are volunteers welcomed and appreciated? Yes   No

7. Are athletic and fine art events well attended due to promotion efforts? Yes   No

Domain: *Religious and Christian Foundations*

1. Are Christian values observed among the students? Yes   No

2. Are Christian teachings evident in all areas of the school curriculum? Yes   No

3. Are Christian values observed in activities sponsored by the school? Yes   No

4. Is Christian behavior modeled by teaching and administrative personnel? Yes   No

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Post-Supper Devotion

by Thomas Von Hagel

Editor's Note: As Lutheran Educators, we are constantly mindful of our task of leading young people to their Lord through our actions, our careful preparation for teaching, and in our understanding of the essentials of Christian faith and practice. The Lord's Supper is central to all of this and is not only a critical understanding to convey to our students but also for all of us as a most elegant expression of God's grace personally and in our community of faith. Tom Von Hagel's scholarly meditation here reminds us, reviews with us and leads us again to fully consider that which is central to our worship, a source of comfort and renewal in our ministry as well. OJZ

With the Nativity of the Lord, the Son of God becomes the Son of Man; the eternal *Logos* takes on temporal flesh and blood. The boundless is bound. This is true for the corresponding celebration in the Christian Church year. While the twenty-fifth of December is the single day set aside for this celebration, one day is simply not enough. And so, the church has provided the preceding season of Advent to prepare the people of God for his Son's birth and the symmetrical Sundays that follow in which to revel in this natal joy. The same can be said of the Sacrament of the Altar. Received upon the tongue, eaten and drunk, the true body and blood of Jesus are hidden under the bread and wine and received for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The boundless is bound. This gracious and merciful gift of God in this sacrament is beyond compare and exceeds understanding. Consequently, the church provides preparation and post-Supper devotion for the benefit of her people.

Most Lutherans are familiar with a very basic preparation and post-Supper devotion: prayers prayed before and following the Sacrament of the Altar. *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) provided two post-Communion collects in the Divine Service. The *Lutheran*

Worship (1984) included the previous pair in the Divine Service and added one pre-Communion collect and one post-Communion collect in "Petitions, Intercessions, and Thanksgivings." The *Lutheran Service Book* (2006) kept the two post-Communion collects from the two preceding hymnals while including a third. Moreover, it followed the pattern of the *Lutheran Worship*, providing two other alternate collects in "Petitions, Intercessions, and Thanksgiving" to be prayed before and after the Lord's Supper respectively:

> O Lord, our God, in Holy Baptism You have called us to be Christians and granted us the remission of sins. Make us ready to receive the most holy body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of all our sins, and grant us grateful hearts that we may give thanks to You, O Father, to Your Son, and to the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

> Blessed Savior, Jesus Christ You have given Yourself to us in this holy Sacrament. Keep us in Your faith and favor that we may live in You even as You live in us. May your body and blood preserve us in the true faith to life everlasting. Hear us for the sake of Your name. (*Lutheran Service Book*, 2006, p. 308)

Furthermore, another pair of collects is provided inside the front cover. While brief, these prayers mention numerous eucharistic themes: reverence toward and the real presence of Jesus, faith and forgiveness and life, thankfulness. They are not doctrinal treatises, but rather, call to mind biblical terms and images concerning the gift of the Gospel in general and specific to the Lord's Supper.

Some Lutherans are acquainted with Martin Luther's "Christian Questions with Their Answers." Their place in the *Small Catechism* has been questioned at times. At the same time, they are quite Lutheran in content and well prepare the Christian for a God-pleasing reception of this supernatural meal.

As noted in the title, the format follows that of the six chief parts of the *Small Catechism*:

6. *In whom then do you trust?*
   In my dear Lord Jesus Christ.
7. *Who is Christ?*
   The Son of God, true God and man.
8. *How many Gods are there?*
   Only one, but in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

9. *What has Christ done for you that you trust in him?*

He died for and shed His blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. (Luther, 1986, p. 40).

These four pairs of questions and answers adequately reflect the style and gist of the other sixteen. They seamlessly weave together doctrine and faith. In these four, the two natures of Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity serve as the basis for believing in Jesus and his garnering of salvation for sinful mankind.

Few Lutherans have been introduced to Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*. He strongly suggested the importance of a post-Supper devotion:

Not only must you make a devout preparation before Holy Communion, but also carefully foster your devotion after receiving the Sacrament. No less vigilance is required after Communion than devout preparation beforehand. (Thomas, 1952, 4.12)

This medieval theologian then noted a miscellany of components that comprise such devotion. Concerning this divine gift, it is "food and delight" (4.13) and "grace and generosity" (4.14). In addition, the Christian should foster a fervent desire for this heavenly gift (4.13-17), desire unity with Christ in this meal (4.13), wait upon this gift with a "firm hope and humble patience" (4.15), "yield yourself to God" (4.15) and simply trust in the divine promises connected to this sacrament (4.17-18). According to Thomas à Kempis, the Christian ought to continue to meditate upon this divine mystery and its effects upon the Christian life after it has been received.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem is another theologian not commonly known among Lutherans. This patristic bishop who preceded Thomas à Kempis provided a specific type of post-Supper devotion: a pair of homilies.

In his first nineteen catechetical homilies, Cyril instructed catechumens concerning the most basic doctrines of the Christian faith. He did so according to the outline of the Creed of Jerusalem and during the season of Lent. In conjunction with the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord, the catechumens were baptized, anointed, and communed. The previous Lenten instruction concerning these rituals had been minimal, primarily because they were too much to comprehend prior to their reception. Once the catechumens had participated in these rituals and been illuminated by the Holy Spirit, they were now fertile ground into

which the seeds of the divine mysteries could be sown. Of the five post-Easter mystagogical homilies, the last two addressed the Lord's Supper and provided the opportunity for those who for the first time had eaten and drunk this holy meal to reflect upon this most sacred experience.

Cyril guides the recently communed into a series of reflections upon the presence of Jesus in this sacred meal. Referring to the Words of Institution, he queries: "When [the Master] is Himself our warranty, saying, 'This is my blood,' who will ever waver and say it is not His blood?" (Cyril, 1970, Mystagogical Homily 4.1). Also, this sacramental presence of Jesus is a matter of belief and not flavor:

> Do not then think of the elements as bare bread and wine; they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Though sense suggests the contrary, let faith be your stay. Instead of judging the matter by taste, let faith have an unwavering confidence that you have been privileged to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. (Cyril, 1970, Mystagogical Homily 4.6)

Not unlike Luther, Cyril correlated doctrine and faith in his eucharistic ponderings. This patristic father also enumerates eucharistic types from the Old Testament and muses upon the symbolism of the liturgy. Again, two examples must suffice. Concerning the former,

…preparations and ponderings are not ill-advised. Faith seeks understanding.

Solomon's Old Testament words "eat your bread in joy and drink you wine with a merry heart" (Eccl 9.7) are interpreted as pointing to the New Testament: the Lord's Supper. Concerning the latter, the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer also points to the Lord's Supper:

"Give us this day our superessential bread." Ordinary bread is not "superessential;" but this holy bread is supperessential in the sense of being ordained for the essence of the soul. Not of this Bread it is said that it "passes into the stomach and so is discharged into the drain"; not: it is absorbed into your whole system to the benefit of both soul and body. (Cyril, 1970, Mystagogical Homily 5.15).

Not unlike Thomas à Kempis, Cyril recognized the spiritual benefit of numerous and varied post-Supper reflections upon the Lord's Supper. The boundless is bound in the Sacrament of the Altar: the flesh and blood of Jesus are given and received in the elements of bread and wine. The divine and eternal are caught up in time and creation. Understanding and preparation and spiritual musings are not necessary for reception of this sacrament:

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." (Luther, 1986, p. 29)

The divine mystery that we call the Lord's Supper is received in Christian faith. At the same time, preparations and ponderings are not ill-advised. Faith seeks understanding. For this there is catechesis and Luther's "Christian Questions with Their Answers," eucharistic prayers and homilies.

The Lord's Supper is the nourishment and hence, the source of life for each Christian and the entire Christian Church. It is a divinely instituted means of grace. It is commanded by the Lord, and a gracious promise is attached to it. It is celebrated regularly. Consequently, catechesis on this divine mystery is expectedly thorough. Also, Lutherans often utilize preparatory and post-Supper prayers. The import of the Lord's Supper necessarily leads the Church to surround it with eucharistic preparations and ponderings.

In addition to catechesis and prayers and sermons, the Lutheran Church already has Luther's "Christian Questions with Their Answers" to assist in preparation for the Lord's Supper. The following is a suggested post-Supper devotion.

A Post-Supper Devotion

1. *What should you do after eating and drinking the Lord's Supper?*
   I should rejoice and thank my dear Lord for this sacred meal and all of its benefits.
2. *What if you feel no thankfulness or benefit after receiving the Lord's Supper?*
   First, I look at Jesus upon the cross and see his torn flesh and his shed blood.
   Second, I remember the promise that my Lord attached

to his flesh and blood: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22.19) and "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26.28).

3. *Do you believe that Jesus died upon the cross for you?*
   Yes, I believe that upon the cross Jesus bore my sins and received divine punishment for them, thus, meriting the forgiveness of sins for me.

4. *Do you believe that Jesus' true body and blood are present in and received through the bread and wine?*
   Yes, his word is true. Jesus said, "this bread is my body, and my blood is in this cup." This is a most certain promise to me.

5. *Do you believe that the forgiveness of sins that Jesus earned upon the cross for you is actually given to you in his body and blood in the Lord's Supper?*
   Yes, I believe this gracious promise of Jesus.

6. *Is the forgiveness of sins the only gift from God that you receive in the Lord's Supper?*
   No, it is not.
   First, this sacred meal brings to remembrance the salvific work of Jesus upon the cross.
   Second, this banquet fully sates and quenches my hunger and thirst for righteousness.
   Third, the Great Physician dispenses the medicine of immortality.
   Fourth, the Bridegroom graciously invites me to be his bride, that is, to live in holy communion with him.

7. *Are there more gifts that God gives to you in the Lord's Supper?*
   Yes, the sacred Scriptures and the church fathers describe in various fashions the manifold blessings of this sacrament, for example, Psalm 23 and John 15.

8. *What other benefit do you receive in the Lord's Supper?*
   I leave the sacred table with joy and peace believing that the salvific work of Jesus has been accomplished upon the cross and its benefits subsequently given to me in this sacrament.

9. *How does the Lord's Supper strengthen your faith?*
   Faith is the work of God and not my own. The faith that

was first instilled in me in Holy Baptism receives Jesus' body and blood and then is fortified by the same.

10. *How does the Lord's Supper affect your relation with your dear Lord?*

The Sacraments of Baptism and the Altar teach me that I am completely reliant upon my dear Lord for life and salvation. Thus, I learn to despise myself and the world, and instead, deeply adore Jesus, and to trust in him alone as my Savior.

11. *How does the Lord's Supper awaken in you love for neighbor?*

The grace of God that is received in this sacred meal reveals God's love toward me and how I ought to act similarly toward others. As such, it gently coerces me to act lovingly toward others, even my enemies.

12. *What should prompt you to receive again the Lord's Supper and soon?*

First, my sin. I am in constant and continual need of divine grace and mercy.

Second, Jesus' own precious words. He commands me to receive this often. He promises to be present in this meal to nourish my body and soul. His loving invitation also incites fervent desire in my heart for this sacred meal. *LEJ*

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Book Notes: *Confirmation Basics*

Review by Kevin Borchers

Confirmation Basics. Mark S. Sengele, (Ed.). St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. 175 pages. Paperback, $19.99.

When Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20a ESV), He did not lay out for us a disciple-making methodology. That process comes in many forms. In our Lutheran church body, however, one of the more well-known programs found in our congregations and parochial schools to fulfill such commitments is an educational/disciple-making process called *Confirmation*.

A 2006-2008 study in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod found that pastors and other church staff, parents, and confirmands equally rate Confirmation as being very important (Sengele, 2009). That same study noted a wide range of feelings, however, as to the level of success those same participants subsequently experienced in making lifelong disciples of the young men and women who pass through our church and school doors. While there are some notes of joy and reasons to celebrate, many expressed concern and varying levels of frustration.

Concordia Publishing House (CPH) has recently added *Confirmation Basics* to their popular Ministry Basics Library. The publisher's Web site states, "*Confirmation Basics* explores a variety of educational models for teaching Confirmation. Learn the pros and cons of each model and discover which approach works best for you" (Sengele, 2009). Let me say from the beginning that this text is not a quick-fix manual for congregations that are struggling with issues in their Confirmation programs. There *is* no quick-fix solution. Instead, the editor and contributing authors provide a guide that can be used by congregations to evaluate

their Confirmation program and determine how they can better fulfill the lifelong ministry of making disciples for Christ to which we are called.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first section (Chapters 1-3), titled *This Thing Called Confirmation,* sets forth the historical and theological foundations of the congregational rite and provides an overview of how Luther's *Small Catechism* was developed. Readers are provided with a clear perspective as to the purpose of Confirmation instruction, as it stems from the early church's *catechumenate.* They will also be able to see how instructional traditions of and within the Rite of Confirmation have changed throughout history, some of which have contributed to the paradoxes and confusion surround Confirmation. As a tool, this particular section of the text would benefit readers by helping them to clarify the purpose of Confirmation instruction and the associated rite.

The second section (Chapters 4-9) called *Models for Confirmation,* provides detailed descriptions of six different models of Confirmation programming, including both instructional/disciple-making methods as well as the rite, itself. Each of the contributing authors describes how his or her congregation uses a particular model. Some models are more detailed than others are, but this in no way would inhibit readers from being able to grasp the concepts being presented. Most of the chapters in this section not only present the "how to" of the model, but they also include valuable resource examples and/or instructional guidelines that can be implemented by readers in their own parish programs. This section could serve as a resource buffet from which ideas could be taken and adapted for use in the local Confirmation program to meet the congregation's disciple-making goals.

The final section, *Beyond Confirmation Instruction,* looks at practice issues pertaining to Confirmation. Each segment raises common questions with which pastors, DCEs, and congregations are forced to wrestle:

- What time of year is best for a congregation to conduct the Rite of Confirmation?
- Should a person's Confirmation be based upon faith maturity, or is it considered an entitlement that a church member has when they reach a certain age or has

completed certain coursework?

- How can we keep Confirmation from being seen as "graduation from church?"
- How can we maintain or improve involvement of confirmands after they are confirmed?
- How can we involve parents in the Confirmation process in a way which agrees with God's formula for passing on the faith as presented in Scripture?
- How do we meet the educational needs of individuals who have special needs?
- Do we examine the confirmands publicly?
- Are there more effective Confirmation instructional methods besides lectures?
- When should a person begin receiving Holy Communion?

While included in the third section, the final two chapters raise some vital points about our youth and their future involvement in the Christian

> Just as schools review textbooks…discipleship curriculum…should also be reviewed.

faith and the Lutheran Church. This is the point at which many who are involved in Confirmation programming begin their discussions. "We've confirmed them, now what?" These chapters provide a realistic view of what is happening in youth and young adult culture, the potential outcomes for our churches as a result of youth and young adults being in that culture, and what we might be able to do to stem the tide of the Church potentially becoming just another irrelevant institution in the lives of people.

If the goal of Confirmation programming is to facilitate lifelong discipleship, as Jesus commanded and commissioned His Church to do (Matthew 28: 19-20), then Confirmation instruction is the curriculum through which we seek to impart the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve that goal. Just as schools review textbooks, curricula, and teaching methods in order to improve the instruction, Confirmation—our discipleship curriculum—should also be reviewed. *Confirmation Basics* is written to facilitate such a review of Confirmation instruction and programming in our congregations and Lutheran schools. The book's editor and contributing authors do not recommend specific changes, but

rather share personal insights and experiences as a means of encouraging others to review their own disciple-making processes. Examples of what is working in their settings are presented in order to spark ideas within the church at-large.

The goal of *Confirmation Basics* is not to set forth a standardized way of "doing Confirmation" in our Church. Its goal is to help us consider how each of us can improve our church's Confirmation program and ultimately do a better of job of fulfilling Christ's command. ***LEJ***

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Go … And Teach! Our Wonderful Students, Part 1

by Jane Buerger

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. Ps.139:14 NRSV

Years ago, when I was teaching high school mathematics in suburban Houston, I had the privilege (?) of working with a sophomore named Johnny. Johnny was a student in what the school district euphemistically called a "star" class. The typical route for students in that district included taking Algebra I in either eighth or ninth grade. "Star" classes were made up of students who were taking Algebra I as sophomores, juniors, or seniors. These students either had needed some remediation before taking Algebra I or else had failed the class at least once before. So Johnny was behind—at least in terms of what the district expected.

Johnny was very charming. He came to class with an infectious smile, greeting me each day with "Hey, Miss Buerger! How's it going?" Johnny didn't just walk into the classroom, he truly made an entrance, often swinging on the frame above the door. He eventually found his way to his seat but not without greeting and chatting with a number of classmates.

The problem was that, once in his seat, Johnny just couldn't seem to stay put. He was constantly finding reasons to stand up or at least to turn around to talk to the students behind him. When asked to sit down (please!) or turn around and pay attention, Johnny would always smile and respond, "Sorry!" but we all knew that it was just a matter of time before he would need another reminder. Fortunately Johnny's good nature kept things from getting out of hand. The other students loved him, and, strangely enough, he seemed to like me. Algebra wasn't his favorite subject, but he did manage to pass the course.

It seems kind of strange now, but during the early years of my teaching career, I think that we assumed that it was up to the student to adapt to the teacher's style of teaching and classroom management. We teachers were expected to provide remediation for students who were falling behind. In mathematics class, that meant students received more practice in doing the very thing that gave them trouble. I don't remember being asked to consider differences in how students took in information or in how they processed the information. I don't remember that we considered the possible effects of qualities that a student just couldn't control, such as gender, ethnicity, or brain processes. So I assumed that Johnny's inability to sit still, to pay attention to my careful explanations, and then to settle down to work on his assignment could be overcome if he would just try harder and "get serious" about the class. I assumed that all students, except possibly for those with severe disabilities, could process information in the same manner and that lack of success was due to a behavior problem.

> ...the goal of education should be to "help turn novice learners into expert learners.

Public school teaching meant attending the required professional development sessions, and sometime after my experience with Johnny, my colleagues and I found ourselves listening to a speaker who was describing various means of perception. She asked the teachers whether they had more confidence in information that they saw or in information that they heard. Most of the teachers favored receiving information visually, but there were some who put more trust in auditory reception. Many of us were surprised that there were differences; we assumed that the rest of the world received information as we did.

The speaker went on to discuss visual and auditory learners, and then she added a third category, the tactile-kinesthetic learners. The students in this third group feel most comfortable when they interact with their environment by touching and moving. As the speaker described their typical behaviors, such as touching the doorframe upon entering a room or having trouble staying in their seats, I remembered Johnny. His behavior reflected the way that

he interacted with his environment. The traditional high school classroom was putting up barriers which made his learning more challenging.

Yes, teaching would be easier if we could follow a "one-size-fits-all" lesson plan. It would be easier if all students had the same learning style and if that style matched the one preferred by their teacher. This is not the way, however, that our God structured His creation. Each of us encounters the world with our own unique features. Some of these features are built into our genetic code; others come from our cultural, ethnic, and home environments. As humans, none of us chooses our DNA or the culture into which we are born. All of these factors work together to make each of us unique in God's creation. In the words of the psalmist, each of us is "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Ps.139:14)

In the language of the Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2008), the goal of education should be to "help turn novice learners into *expert* learners—individuals who know how to learn, who want to learn, and who, in their own highly individual ways, are well prepared for a lifetime of learning." As Lutheran teachers we would see this as enabling our students to use their God-given talents in grateful service to their Lord and His world. Since we know that these God-given talents (and challenges) vary from child to child, we should be especially attentive to meeting our students in a way that provides for multiple modes of perception. We must make sure that what we are teaching is accessible to visual, auditory, and tactile-kinesthetic learners.

If we look to the example set by our Savior, we see that Jesus did use multiple methods of presenting His message. Much of His teaching comes to us from his sermons and would reach auditory learners. The command "Let anyone with ears listen!" appears eight times in the Gospel (for example, Matt.11:15 NRSV).Visual methods were also used. An example comes from Jesus' words addressed to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." (John 19:26).Tactile-kinesthetic examples include miracles, such as the miraculous catch of fishes (Luke 5:1-11), Peter walking on the water (Matt.14:28-33), and the feeding of five thousand with five loaves and two small fish (Luke 9:12-17). Jesus, the Master Teacher, employed a variety of sensory methods in order to reach His students.

Multi-Sensory Strategies, a Lutheran Education Association monograph written by Susan L. Lewis (2003), describes characteristics of visual, auditory, and tactile-kinesthetic learners, along with strategies and sample lesson plans for working with these groups. To summarize, *visual* learners benefit from the use of pictures, graphs, and PowerPoint presentations that accompany a lecture or discussion. *Auditory* learners will benefit from class discussions and oral explanations. *Tactile-kinesthetic* learners (such as Johnny) might do better if they are allowed to stretch or move during the class. Games and manipulatives are also helpful. Combining these activities into a lesson can add welcome variety for all students and can provide each individual learner with an activity that engages his or her own unique style of perception.

This article has been concerned with the methods in which information gets to the student's brain (Wolfe, 2001). This is, of course, necessary for learning to happen. What happens next, what the student actually does with the information, is also affected by qualities that the student brings to the classroom. Some of these, such as the effects of gender, culture, and methods of processing information, will be considered in future articles during this coming academic year.

As we meet our students, we will find some that are more challenging, probably because these students possess qualities different from our own. Given the changing populations in today's schools, it is important to meet each child as evidence of the amazing diversity of the Creator's hand. Each child is "fearfully and wonderfully made" and deserves our love, respect, and best efforts.

Finally, here is the end to the story of my experiences with Johnny. Several years after I had Johnny in that algebra class, I left the Houston area, but I did come back for a visit. A former colleague and I stopped at a local grocery store. Johnny was working there, stocking shelves and organizing shopping carts—a job that suited his kinesthetic style very well! Johnny smiled (as always) and gave me a wonderful hug. In spite of all those reminders (Johnny, sit down!), he seemed genuinely happy to see me. I suspect that he has done well in life, given his personality and hands-on approach to the world. He certainly provided his algebra teacher with a powerful lesson about the diversity in God's creation! *LEJ*

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Things are buzzing around the Concordia Chicago campus these days. Our largest freshman class ever is about to invade us in just a few weeks, and lots of preparations are happening to make sure they have a place to live, enough courses to choose from on the schedule, and appropriate welcome events are in place for their arrival. And things are buzzing in the College of Education as well as we welcome a new dean on our campus and begin to get adjusted to a new style of leadership. These are exciting times! With change, however, comes a bit of discomfort for some, eagerness for others, even a bit of loss for some as the old goes away and the new arrives.

It's been a great year of celebration for DCE ministry as we recognized the 50 years that God has blessed this profession in His church. We celebrated well at the National DCE Conference in April in Dallas, enjoyed a special issue focused on DCE ministry in the last Lutheran Education Journal, and even got a day of recognition in our LCMS church body. In case you missed that, it reads in part as follows:

Resolved, That we give thanks to God for the ministry of DCEs, remembering the words of the apostle Paul, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it," (2 Timothy 3:14, ESV);

And be it also resolved, That June 26, 2009, be officially proclaimed as National LCMS Director of Christian Education Day in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, with the prayer of God's richest blessings on the DCE ministries of our Synod, past, present, and future. (Complete document available on **www.lcms.org)**

It has certainly been a time to reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and look eagerly to the future. For those of us in the DCE profession, it is time for change as well. Coming this fall will be the launch of a new professional organization

called the National Association of Directors of Christian Education (NADCE). For many years, DCEs have indicated an ongoing desire for the formation of an independent association to address their professional needs in advocacy, professional connections and resources. NADCE is the result of listening to those expressed needs and working to formulate an organization that would be solely focused on these issues. This new association will be launched under the direction of a transition team comprised of leaders in DCE ministry from across the Church. NADCE will seek to equip its members with knowledge, skills, attitudes and inspiration so that they may become increasingly effective in their role as ministers in the mission of the Church as educational leaders.

We recognize that we are all in the ministry of faith formation, regardless of our ministry title, location or job description so the purpose statement was created with that in mind. It reads:

"We are the professional organization for LCMS Directors of Christian Education and other church workers who are responsible for the faith formation of children, youth and adults, and are serving in local parishes, districts, universities, and other nontraditional ministry settings."

Our biblical mission comes from Ephesians 4:12-16:

"To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

The three primary service areas that will be provided by NADCE are advocacy, professional connections, and resources. Here's a brief outline of each:

Advocacy
- An active presence at the LCMS International Center
- Addressing critical issues of the DCE profession

- Forming a resolutions review committee
- Enhancing the health and wellness of the DCE
- Expanding and implementing ethical guidelines

Professional Connections
- Expanding communications through online communities
- Establishing e-mentoring and e-coaching opportunities
- Providing easy access to the national listing of DCEs
- Strengthening the bridge between the Concordia University System and the field DCE

Resources
- Launching a new interactive website
- Expanding online capacities for ministry enhancement
- Lifting up women and men in DCE ministry
- Exploring research projects
- Offering regular regional and national conferences
- Inaugural National Conference in 2011 hosted by DCEs in FL/GA District

These are exciting days in DCE ministry. By the time you read this, the first official meeting of the NADCE Board of Directors will have already taken place, with final plans being made for our inaugural launch. It is exciting to see this group of leaders who are so committed to making this the best professional organization possible, all for the sake of ministry. Many hours of prayer and conversation have gone into this effort, always seeking God's guidance for this organization. While we don't necessarily want to get rid of all those things that are "old and comfortable," it is the right time to move forward in looking at the new and innovative possibilities in DCE ministry. To God be the glory!

Visit our website at **www.nadce.org.** The website is still under development at the time of this writing, but feel free to check it out and see what is currently on it. ***LEJ***

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Administrative Talk … When Things Fall Apart

by Glen Kuck

Principal Smith and Principal Jones work in similar schools. Their backgrounds, years of experience, staffs, and areas of responsibility are similar. One day each is called upon to deal with a crisis. In each case, allegations are made about their schools, and rumors are spreading quickly. As the principals, both are accountable and must take action.

Principal Smith calmly, confidently, and intelligently works through the situation and ultimately restores the school's fine reputation. She goes on to effectively lead the school through future obstacles.

Principal Jones wilts under the pressure. She becomes disconcerted, indecisive, and weak. Other people within the school are forced to make the best of the situation. The school's reputation suffers. Principal Jones leaves the school at the end of the year.

What made the difference? Why was one principal able to deal with the situation and the other not? What allowed one to be resilient and the other not?

In the book *Resilient School Leaders* (2005) the authors refer to the concept of personal efficacy. It refers to people's beliefs about their personal capacity to accomplish challenging goals and there is strong evidence that points to the strength of self-efficacy as affecting the quality of performance.

"Psychological research suggests that you think of your self-efficacy beliefs as a filter through which you evaluate your past experiences and make judgments about what you choose to try to accomplish in the future. As a filter for your experience, self-efficacy beliefs define the strength of your sense of personal mastery, your confidence in your ability to make an impact."(Patterson, 2005, p. 76).

The authors go on to point out that what people believe they can accomplish determines what they

choose to do during crises and how long they can persevere. Self-assurance is not an inherited personality trait. It develops through successful experiences (p. 77).

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President during the Great Depression, he initiated sweeping changes. The public saw a man supremely confident and convinced that his plan would get America back on the road to recovery. How could he forge ahead in the midst of economic collapse and a firestorm of criticism? His previous successful experiences gave him the self-assurance he needed to flourish. As one historian noted, "The thought of failure never occurred to him."

People who are resilient *believe* they have the skills to overcome a challenge. People who fail in the face of adversity don't necessarily fail because of lack of skills to deal with the situation, but with lack of confidence in their skills.

I remember watching a televised college basketball game back in the era when UCLA was a perennial powerhouse. After the fast-paced, intensely-fought game ended, UCLA's renowned coach, John Wooden, was asked how his team could muster the energy needed to come from behind in the last minute of the game. He replied that his players believed that they were in better physical condition than their opposition. He then added, "Whether they are, in fact, better conditioned or not isn't the issue. What's important is that they believe that they are."

So how do we acquire positive self-efficacy? How do we attain the ability to persevere when things seem to be falling apart? How do we overcome self-doubts?

It is important for people to set specific, attainable goals. Doing so allows them to add to a list of personal accomplishments from which self-assurance can be drawn in challenging times. It is also important to realize that we can change only those things over which we have control. Efforts to change those things beyond our control result in feelings of failure.

People who perform well under adverse circumstances realize there will be short-term setbacks, so a focus which is directed on the long-term mission is crucial. They remind themselves of previous challenging situations which they overcame through perseverance. Albert Bandura (1995) put it this way:

"If people experience only easy successes they come to

expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort. Some difficulties and setbacks in human pursuits serve a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort. After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By sticking it out through tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity" (p. 3).

Further, research suggests that people who attribute success to their own skills and attribute failure to lack of sufficient effort seem to cope better and are better able to persevere during difficult times than those who attribute success to situational factors and failure to their own lack of sufficient skill (Bandura, pp. 122-3).

Conquering a crisis also requires a person to control anxiety and negative, self-defeating feelings. One strategy is to disengage oneself from the immediate turmoil by imagining that you are positioned near the ceiling of the room, looking down at yourself and those around you. You get a better look at the big picture. You view yourself and the situation more objectively and can therefore be more rational in your decision making.

Attending to one's physical health is vital when things seem to be falling apart. Exercise relieves stress and often allows a person to think more clearly and creatively while they exercise. Being in good physical shape better prepares a person for those stress-filled days and sleepless nights that come.

There's a beautiful passage in the Book of Isaiah that helps us better understand why we can prevail during the difficult times that life brings. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:30-31 KJV).

Isaiah alludes to flying, running, walking, and fainting. On those rare occasions when everything seems to be going well, principals may feel as though they've achieved flight. On many other days they feel like they are running, literally, from task to task. Often they are simply walking, too tired to run. And sometimes in the midst of overwhelming frustrations, all they can do is to keep

from fainting. It's then that the promise of God is most comforting. God is, after all, the wind beneath our wings. ***LEJ***

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Secondary Sequence … A Nudge from a Friend

by Kevin Dunning

Do you Twitter? Do any students follow you? Have you updated your profile on Facebook? Are students among your Friends? Do students have your personal cell number? Have you blogged recently? Should a student be disciplined for calling a teacher a nasty name on their MySpace page? Questions that could not be asked five years ago are now critical to the discussion of what it means to be a professional teacher in the first decade of the 21st century and how far schools should go in policing the e-communication of students.

Last fall a teacher in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district was suspended after the negative comments she made about students appeared on her Facebook page. A story in the *Washington Post* revealed that teachers in the D.C. area had Facebook content that included crude sexual references, depicted teachers with alcohol, and used demeaning language. Blogger Andy Carvin tells the story of Pablo Malavenda, associate dean of students at Purdue University. Malavenda became the target of a "We Hate Pablo" group on Facebook after disciplining a group of students caught selling cocaine. The Facebook threats included directions to his house and suggested ways to hurt or kill him. *New York Magazine* ran a lengthy article about students at a tony private school that used Facebook groups to degrade students and teachers and the controversy which ensued as some then advocated for the free speech rights of students while others championed the need to protect teachers.

It would be hopelessly naïve to suggest these social networking and tools have no impact on Lutheran High Schools. In recent years my school has had to respond to a number of situations created by new technologies. In one case a coach's text messages to students demonstrated an uncomfortable degree of familiarity with some students. In another, a parent complained after

receiving a bill that charged him for over 1900 texts, many of which were sent during school hours when cell phone use is banned. An after school fight was "promoted" by texting. Sexting—the practice of sending lewd pictures or messages—forced us to scramble for a new policy in mid-year. Students have been threatened and harassed on MySpace and Facebook.

So what are the appropriate limitations for teachers? Google "social networking and teachers" and a quick review of the articles suggests there is no consensus in the edtech community about what constitutes appropriate boundaries. For the Lutheran school teacher, St. Paul's admonition to the Philippians can form the basis of some judgments: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things." (NIV)

Cell Phones: An increasing number of young people elect to only use a cell phone and have no "land line." Providing students with a way to contact you outside of school hours can certainly be appropriate, but restricting the nature of the calls is a good idea. Allowing students to call with a homework question or to get information about an upcoming practice can cause no harm and do some good. Getting that call at 10:30 pm can be irritating. Tell students your phone goes off at a reasonable time and that you don't answer calls from blocked numbers. Encourage students with personal issues to access your school's counseling staff, or in the absence of school counselors, discuss the issue privately at school. Use some judgment: a student in severe emotional crisis cannot be ignored because the call comes in at 9:15 pm.

Text Messaging: Many, if not most teens would rather text than phone, e-mail or talk in person. Texters have developed a language that suits their purpose. That language represents either a burst of creativity worthy of laud and honor or the worst thing to happen to writing skills since the death of Shakespeare. More to the point, texting has become the preferred venue for interaction among many students. When teachers text, students may assume that the informality they use with each other is also appropriate when communicating with a teacher. The suggestion here is to avoid texting students or limit them to mundane matters like canceling a practice. Better yet, make use of systems like SchoolReach or Constant Contact to communicate with groups.

Those help draw better boundaries than using a personal cell to text.

Social Networking: Whether through a Call or contract, the day you accepted a teaching position you became a role model. When you work for a Lutheran, Christian school that means people (colleagues, parents and students) have a right to expect that your behavior will be consistent with the values commonly associated with the Christian faith. Lutheran, Christian teachers are appropriately held to a higher standard. A photo on a Facebook profile depicting a teacher swilling beer may not reflect anything illegal or even immoral, but it certainly raises questions about judgment. Similarly, photos of teachers in bikinis or Speedos may even be flattering if one's goal is to find a date, but reflects poorly on one's judgment.

The question about profile content seems easy to address with a modicum of common sense. But should a student be your "Friend?" Here the disadvantages certainly outweigh the advantages. It is unlikely that *all* your students will be on your Friends list. What implication does that portend for students who are not? Many parents of teens believe prohibiting their children from social networking is an important step in protecting their child's safety. What will their reaction be when it becomes known some students are described as your "Friend?" The essence of this dilemma is a simple question: are students part of your social group? If you are not taking shopping trips together; if they aren't invited for Friday afternoon refreshments; if you don't hang out together after the big game, then they are not part of your social network. Students are at the core of your professional life. It is a distinction worth making, at least until they are alumni.

With wikis, blogs and Nings, teachers have a wealth of tools at their disposal that can leverage students' desire to use contemporary communication tools with great academic content. A professional teacher defines the boundaries in making use of those tools for the benefit of students and the school community. A professional teacher uses those tools to build a personal learning network (PLN)—but more on that another time. *LEJ*

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Today's Lutheran Educator … Lutheran Education: It's More Than Religion

by Ed Grube

This is true regardless of which format Lutheran education takes in your ministry. Parents expect more than The Six Chief Parts (There still are six, right?). It seems more than ever that parents know few Bible stories and have passed that depleted treasury along to their children. So parents expect more, but what they expect may not be the Bible stories.

Some parents, in fact, may not know exactly what they expect, but whatever it would be, it had better be excellent. Others have clear expectations in mind, often about moral living, and expect moral excellence in the two little eyes, ears, hands, and feet that process through our classrooms (with or without the accompanying music). Still other parents have proper expectations, and they too expect excellence in the spiritual nurture that we provide. To be honest, another group really does not expect excellence. Whatever we do and however we do it doesn't matter. After all, it's just religious education.

Lutheran education is more than religion. It is excellence, practiced and personified. Though it may sound less than religiously righteous, we cannot downplay excellence or relegate it to secondary status. To pack spiritual punch into the concept, let us ask, "Can we offer anything less than excellence when we teach in the name of Jesus?" The correct answer suggests that educators in Lutheran ministries must be excellent—professionally prepared, dedicated to lifelong learning, passionate about ministry, turned-on to teaching, theologically competent, Scripture-fluent and friendly, and highly paid. (Well, six out of seven aren't bad.)

What are the implications of excellence in Lutheran schools and all congregational education programs?

First, we must decide who should teach.

You should, that's understood. Unless you don't like teaching. You may be theologically

trained and astute, excellently prepared in Greek, Hebrew, the Lutheran Confessions, and so forth, but unless you like to teach, you will not hit the mark of excellence. Liking to teach does not automatically make an educator excellent, but not liking to teach is a huge obstacle to excellence. It shows. Children and parents will see it.

You may be in charge of volunteer teachers and other helpers. Here is where things can get sticky. Will you settle for the ill prepared or those just not suited to teaching and assisting. Will you settle for the surly or slovenly? Will you abdicate competency for good intentions? This is not to suggest elitism, but remembering in whose name we serve has implications for all who minister in His name. Refined recruitment of those who minister with you is crucial to excellence.

The topic of excellence is not confined to teaching religion if you teach in a Lutheran school. Science, social studies, language arts—the entire curriculum needs excellence too. The same argument persists: Whatever content you teach, you are teaching about God's creation, once perfect, then (and now) molested by sinful humans, and now maintained by our patient and merciful God. When you teach in a Lutheran school, you are not so much integrating faith and Scripture into subjects as you are integrating subjects into faith and Scripture. You must be excellently prepared for the task and eager to do it.

Second, we must decide how to teach.

Excellent teachers not only are well trained and those other things mentioned above but also relational. Excellent teachers love to teach and teach with love. They pray for their students and know them well enough to pray for specific needs. They are interested in what is happening away from the classroom. They love as Jesus loved His disciples. And, yes, they discipline as Jesus disciplined or corrected His close followers. Excellent teachers understand that students cannot always be expected to understand. (Consider Jesus' disciples—rather slow students at times. But never unloved by their Teacher.)

Third, we must consider the environment in which we teach.

The better the environment, the fewer the natural impediments to excellence. Interactive white boards, document cameras, clean classrooms, access to media resources—all

contribute to excellence. But sometimes, financial resources—or congregational commitments to financing educational ministries—are limited. This may take a nick out of excellence, but a little care and creativity may make up for it.

Consider Jesus, who couldn't google or access Old Testament Scripture in eight different versions with a single keystroke. He spoke to large groups without benefit of presentation software or strategically placed JumboTrons. He did, however, locate a natural outdoor amphitheater where sound carried well enough for Him to be heard by more than 5,000 people. (Food service was excellent too, though He had resources beyond what we can expect.)

The lesson here is not to downplay the implements of excellent education but to stress what excellent educators bring to the process through their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Parents want excellent education. And for the apathetic—or perhaps just the pathetic—we need to provide it anyway. Excellent Lutheran education is the responsibility and product of excellent teachers. No ministry can afford to pay them what they're worth; no ministry can afford not to employ them.

And God leaves us with this: "But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31 ESV). *LEJ*

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Multiplying Ministries … It's About Time

by Rich Bimler

On a recent trip to New York, I checked into the hotel and asked the person at the desk an extremely important question (at least to me) "Is there a Starbucks within walking distance?" She quickly quipped," Sure there is. Everything is within walking distance …if you have the time."

And right she was. That was not exactly the answer I was looking for but I had to admit that she was on target. I was once again reminded that the Lord gives each of us all the time we need to do what we think is most important. It is not correct to say that we "just don't have the time" to listen or study or visit someone or prepare for class or pray or …you fill in the blanks. It is more accurate to say that we "don't *take* the time" to do whatever is left undone. Was my twenty minute walk to Starbucks from the hotel worth the time? For me it was, but perhaps for many of you, especially if you are like some of my closest friends, it may sound like it was a total *waste* of time.

Life is all about time: 24 hours a day, 1,440 minutes, 86,400 seconds. Each of us, student and teacher, parent and grandparent, young and old, has the same amount of time each day to use, to share, to enjoy, to waste, to savor, to celebrate. And yet each of us, at some time or another, always seem to "run out" of time to do what we need to do and want to do or should do. I recall a favorite classic of mine, *Prayers,* written by Michel Quoist, in 1963. Here is a paraphrase of part of a prayer from him:

You understand, Lord, we simply do not have time.

The child is playing; he hasn't time right now.

The student has homework; he hasn't time.

The young athlete is in a game; he hasn't time.

The young married couple has a new home; they haven't time.

The grandparents have their grandchildren; they haven't time.

People are ill; they have their treatments; they haven't time. They are dying; they have no…

Too late; they have no more time.

There is both humor and truth in the statement, "God invented time so that everything wouldn't happen all at once." The Lord gives us time as a gift, and simply asks us to use it wisely, for Him. The word "time" is used 678 times in the Scriptures (if you do not believe this, take the time to count them.) Perhaps time is only as important as how we use this gift from the Lord to celebrate life, to share our gifts with others and to share God's love and forgiveness with those around us, regardless of what time it is.

It really is amazing what the Lord does with the time He gives to us, *through* us. When you were just a child in school, would you ever watch the clock on the wall and think that the second hand and minute hand were just not going fast enough? Me too. I remember sitting there and being fixated on that silly time piece, instead of listening to the teacher or getting my lessons finished. Come to think of it, I would have had more time to play when I got home if I hadn't wasted so much time watching the clock.

And so it is with many of us today. We still run out of time, waste time, misuse time. We often feel guilty about it or, worse yet, think that we always have to be multi-tasking in order to use our time most wisely. (How many of you are reading this now while also eating, watching TV, sitting in a class or staff meeting, traveling—*but not driving*—or pretending to listen to someone who is speaking to you?)

On days when I get upset with myself for wasting time or when I see others doing the same, I need people around me to help me to re-focus on the fact that time is a gift from the Lord. I need to know that I am forgiven in Christ for all the times that I misuse His gift of time. I need to encourage others, not always to appear to be busy, but rather to sense and see that every day is a day to give away to others, through our use of time. Remember the button that states, "Jesus is coming soon…look busy." Bad theology, but it can help us to affirm that the Lord is with us now and always, even when we and others think we are wasting time.

Listen to our friend Michel once more:

> Lord, I have time,
> I have plenty of time,
> All the time that you give me,
> The years of my life,
> The days of my years,
> The hours of my days,
> They are all mine.
> Mine to fill, quietly, calmly,
> But to fill completely, up to the brim,
> To offer them to You.

I am not asking You, Lord, for time to do this and then that, but Your Grace to do conscientiously, in the time that You give me, what You want me to do.

St. Paul caps it all off in Galatians 4:4 when he says, "…When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children." I'll sure second that.

Yes, it's all about time…in the Lord. *LEJ*

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