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This issue leads off with a chapter excerpted from a recently published book by the same title. Moulds (2007) book, an edited volume of essays by seven authoritative writers, is an expansion on an article originally published in LEJ as “The Call and the Will of God” in Vol 140, issue #1. Chapter One, reprinted with permission here, discusses the biblical origins of the term *didache*, the act of teaching Christians, the forerunner of what we now consider to be the Office of the Lutheran Teacher. He and his co-authors present their views of scriptural and doctrinal origins as an invitation for discussion among Lutheran.

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Here I Sit...Back in Zillman's Class

by O. John Zillman

When my wife and I go on vacation together every summer, we usually get to know some of the people along the way, whether through social chit-chat around the pool, restaurants, airport terminals, etc. It's a way to pass some of the lag in travel time but also just because people are interesting and I, for one, like to find out why.

Conversations like this invariably get around to what one does for a living. My wife – being a teacher – can safely say what she does, at least at the conversational surface in such exchanges. As soon as the word “psychology” comes out of MY mouth, however, one can almost see people physically recoil – and I know what they're doing: they're mentally replaying the entire conversation that we've just had to see if, somehow, they'd revealed that they're crazy, neurotic, depressed or that the voices that we all just heard weren't really their own. I know this because they tell me. I have to explain that I teach *educational* psychology, that I teach teachers and am interested in schools and other places where children learn. They usually calm down after that, but they usually change the subject, too. It's weird.

But educators aren't afraid of psychology and use it on a daily basis. In fact, I'm sure that the reader can still rattle off things like Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development (uh...there were four) define object permanence (you know, when the toddler knows the toy still exists even though she can't see it anymore), describe “the great divide” of logical mathematical thought developing between and dividing the second and third stages as the “idea world” overcomes the limitations of...the...essentially...uh...“physical world”...(It's really okay with me if you want to skip ahead because you remember this and *you* weren't one of the students who sold their Ed Psych textbook back to the bookstore the day after the final exam. You didn't, did you?)

Okay, go ahead a sneak a look at the classroom clock – we have one last item to review.

One of the classic things that one had to memorize

for at least one of my Ed Psych exams was Erik Erikson's "Eight Ages of Man." You know, the part about Trust vs. Mistrust all the way up to Integrity vs. Despair? We usually got to that about the fourth week of the course, even as everyone was still abuzz about Piaget.

Erik Erikson is one of my favorite psychologists. I didn't discover that until about a year ago when, in one of my classes, I was doing the pedagogically unthinkable: actually walking a group of graduate students through a chapter from his "Childhood and Society" (1950) – my freebie copy picked up on one of those "clear out the shelves" things that our library does once in a while and which serendipitously bears the name of Wayne Lucht, stamped in red on the flyleaf. Although he retired in 1990 or so, his gentle mentoring goes on, not too much different than what many readers will recall of him from their Concordia Teachers College days.

At any rate, we worked through Chapter 7, page by page, paragraph by paragraph with explanations of the Freudian references along the way,

...there are things about teaching that cannot be taught – they need to be felt, lived, and believed.

especially important here as Erikson studied with Anna Freud. I was fearful that I was treading around on the edges of the boredom that suppresses all

understanding in my students when I looked up at them and they were *smiling*. They liked it! Hands were up! They asked questions! They didn't just hold out until I answered my *own* questions! They really, really liked it because it had been demystified for them and we had discovered together that a close reading of Erikson's work revealed and resonated dynamics that still occur with children and families today, almost sixty years after it was first written. I've tried since to achieve the same effect with other classes and it's worked there too, I think, because something written in fairly dense prose was put into a conversational, plain English way of understanding. That's a huge hurdle for students of any age – to learn the language, step by step, moving on to more complexity until yesterday's occluded front becomes today's unlimited visibility.

Erikson intrigues me, though, especially in one section of that chapter in which he describes the basis of trust between parent and child. Bear with me for a minute while I quote:

...Let it be said here that the amount of trust derived from earliest infantile experience does not seem to depend on absolute quantities

of food or demonstrations of love, but rather on the quality of the maternal relationship. Mothers create a sense of trust in their children by that kind of administration which in its quality combines sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within the trusted framework of their culture's life style. This forms the basis in the child for a sense of identity which will later combine a sense of being "all right," of being oneself, and of becoming what other people trust one will become... there are, therefore, few frustrations in either this or the following stages which the growing child cannot endure if the frustration leads to the ever-renewed experience of greater sameness and stronger continuity of development, toward a final integration of the individual life cycle with some meaningful wider belongingness. Parents must not only have certain ways of guiding by prohibition and permission; they must also be able to represent to the child a deep, an almost somatic conviction *that there is a meaning to what they are doing* (Erikson, p. 249, emphasis added).

While the tools of psychology are secular, subject to empirical proof and therefore fallible, I have read few better descriptions in the literature in this field of what it means to be a parent – and, I trust that Erikson would include fathers in this as well as mothers. In a single paragraph, Erikson puts together the meaning of trust between that parent and one's child, two people who are (most often) of the same blood and genetic material. When two parents "become one flesh," this is the result – a brand new third-party version of Creation, a joyfully awesome responsibility and relentlessly unfolding wonderment.

The ability to have trust in each other – at this, its most central, core relationship – is not learned easily nor should it be taken for granted and Erikson goes into a description of some of the tribulation occurring when it does not – but I'll spare you the section on that for now. It occurs to me that, implicit in Erikson's thinking, this trust is not something one can teach in a "parenting" class. It has to come from within, be constantly nurtured and held carefully like the first match in the kindling of the campfire. I think we got ourselves in a lot of trouble the day that "parent" was first used as a verb instead of as the descriptor of a relationship.

Similarly, there are things about teaching that cannot be taught – they need to be felt, lived, and believed. There are parts of what we do that cannot be legislated, mandated or accredited either. That's not to say that it's not important to have teachers who are very well educated (see Jane Buerger's inaugural column in this issue), properly credentialed and

who fully understand the ethical boundaries of the profession in schools that meet the highest standards of excellence. The best that even the most well intentioned mandate can do, though, is to declare that no child will be left behind which is no guarantee of their eventual destination. But to trust in each other, that there is meaning to what we are doing, implies that we are in this together, both teacher and student. Lutheran Teachers begin by caring for and about children in their physical and emotional needs, by understanding their intellectual development and doing the best things possible to help it grow and, most of all, conveying every in hour of every school day – and not a few evenings and weekends besides – that this is meaningful work because God has put us into this joyfully awesome relationship as Russ Moulds puts it, to be a Teacher of the Church (Moulds’ new book, bearing that title, is excerpted and reviewed in this issue).

Back to Erikson for a minute. While he does a very nice job of describing how trust works between a mother and child, he doesn’t go into attempting to define what the perfect mother-response (or father-response) will be in all circumstances. People who are into “parenting” as a set of learned skills are looking for that as if there could be a web site or handbook to turn to in every situation where a difficult decision has to be made. It just doesn’t exist – never did. But the benchmark of trust and the importance of the relationship, conveyed by the parent at a level that matches the importance of the relationship is a ready standard of reference.

“No, that’s hot! Don’t touch it!”

“Yes, we can read another story tonight, but pick just one.”

“Yes, you may stay over at So-and-So’s house tonight, but give me a minute to call over there and chat with Mrs. So-and-So.”

“Yes, you may drive our car, but the deductible is \$500.”

The potential closure to each of the above, literally or figuratively, is that parents can look children squarely in their eyes – when they’re all done rolling them – and each knows what the other just meant and that there is a Very Good Reason for it to be so.

A Lutheran educator’s response to every classroom problem won’t be found in any similar kind of resource either. But the standard of trust, applied to the teacher/student relationship, offers a similarly useful benchmark.

“You may *not* talk in the hallway on the way to P.E. but you *may* talk

in the hallway right outside the locker room *after* you're dressed and lined up for class."

"Fighting or inappropriate language *will* earn you a trip to the principal's office but everything else will be handled between me and you – and a parent, if we need some help."

"Your locker is your locker but I may have reason to believe that I need to look in it."

"Sometimes the Internet is a tool for learning; sometimes it's a means of entertainment – but school is a place for learning."

It's hard to look twenty-six pairs of eyes in the eye at the same time, but we know how that's done, don't we? Everyone knows what the other just meant and that the Very Good Reasons apply here too, like it or not, but those reasons are based on mutual trust that the other – student or teacher – is interested and invested in the welfare of the other.

Just as a wise parent clearly lays out an opportunity for a child to maintain the trusting relationship, a teacher does the same. The results can fall on either side of that line: if the child or student follows through, trust moves up a notch; if they don't, they can never say – although they'll try – that the inevitable consequences were because they weren't given the opportunity to make good on the original deal.

And, of course, we all know that this entire thing works the other way around as well.

So am I using a psychological theory – even a well-founded one that the reader may or may not recall – to describe the importance of trust between parent and child at home, between teacher and student in a Christian school? Well, yes, but here's the clincher to the whole thing: There seems to be some precedent for this going all the way back to Genesis:

"And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but...'"

There is a meaning to what we are doing. We can trust God and each other on that one. *LEJ*

Reference:

Erikson, E. (1963). *Childhood and society*. (2nd Ed.) New York: W.W. Norton.

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A Teacher of the Church

by Russell Moulds

This chapter considers the question, “Who is a teacher of the church?”¹

Whatever your image of “a teacher of the church” may be at this moment, expand that perception. In the chapters that follow, we will likely consider content related to your image, but to enlarge that view, consider first the history of the church and several examples of those who have served the teaching ministry, sometimes surprisingly so.

A Teacher Roster

In Acts 18, Priscilla and Aquila while at Ephesus encountered Apollos preaching about Jesus and detected he “knew only the baptism of John,” so this wife-and-husband teaching team “took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.” In third century AD Egypt, Antony, one of the church’s first ascetic hermits or “desert fathers,” attracted countless visitors and followers who frustrated his solitude by seeking to learn his simple Christian life. To the north in Syria, Symeon the Stylite concluded the church had become too worldly and needed an extreme lesson in discipleship, so he lived atop a pillar sixty feet closer to heaven.

In the tenth century, Peter Abelard—when he wasn’t busy with his torrid, secret, and ultimately tragic love affair with his patron’s daughter, Heloise—taught the church to re-read the earlier teachers of the church and reconsider its traditions, thus setting the stage for Luther and other reformers. When that time arrived, Philip Melancthon, author of the Augsburg Confession (and not a clergyman), extended his duties as a professor and activities as a reformer by opening a remedial school in his

1. Editor’s Note: The following chapter is excerpted with permission from *A Teacher of the Church: Theology, Formation, and Practice for the Ministry of Teaching*, Copyright 2007, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon. The Journal expresses its thanks to both author and publisher.

home for younger students who would not otherwise pass the university entrance exams.

In the twentieth century, Walter Becker (my first principal, whom you will not find in church history books) was called to move his teaching ministry to a new congregation where he and his wife and family resided on the stage in the school gymnasium for their first year until other housing could be arranged.

Not all these teachers are exemplars of ministry nor are any of their excesses a license for us. Yet their variety prompts us to ask: Who is a teacher of the church?

Who Is a Teacher of the Church?

In the context of these and other examples of the church's teachers, this book is aimed chiefly though not exclusively at those who are or soon will be teaching ministers in their congregations, schools, and colleges. The authors are all Lutherans with decades of service in the pastoral and teaching ministries. As a thinking reader, you will not agree with all the views presented here even as the authors do not all agree with each other. Nevertheless, this book will deepen your regard for the church's task of *didache*, the act of teaching Christians. The book explores what the writers believe are several key biblical texts and themes for teaching, selected doctrines of the church that inform teaching as a ministry, and features of teaching in the Lutheran tradition and its current practice. We authors address these matters with deep commitment to our shared Lutheran tradition, yet with profound respect for what the Holy Spirit has done across the centuries in other orthodox traditions of the Great Church.

If you don't happen to be of the Lutheran persuasion, we believe that examining this deep tradition with its strong emphasis on teaching the faith will enrich your understanding of your own tradition and your appreciation for our shared convictions within historical Christianity, that history acknowledged in this chapter's opening paragraphs. Welcome to our conversation, a conversation the church has shared—though not without dispute—for centuries.

A question not always explicitly asked in this conversation is, "Who is a teacher of the church?" That question may go unasked because its answer might be taken for granted. Some maintain that the theologians are the church's teachers. They must be included, yet most Christians do not hear or read the theologians and are influenced by them only indirectly as their ideas are filtered through local instruction, popular and simplified

books, and sermons. Some say the pastors who preach those sermons are the church's teachers. Surely all pastoral acts serve to teach, but pastors are often the first to acknowledge that sermons (even in expository preaching) are not the best vehicle for instruction, that pastors are often not good instructors, and that their time is devoted to care for souls and church administration rather than teaching. The church has created such offices as director of Christian education or, in some congregations, minister of Christian nurture. Those in such offices sometimes teach, yet their responsibilities may revolve more around managing programs and facilitating activities which, though related to the church's *didache*, serve mostly as delivery systems for prepared materials and events.

Perhaps the teachers of the church today are the religious media figures, popular authors, and conference presenters. Without empirical studies, it's hard to say to what extent the church at large takes its cues from their content, though clearly some are influential. The quality of content varies with the source, and, while some of these high profile figures have much of value to offer, few are comprehensive in their scope. Most tend to focus on some specific concern, issue-oriented topic, or agenda for personal or congregational development, and, as always in the market place, the consumer's rule is *caveat emptor*. As a genuine teaching ministry, their greatest deficiency is the listener's lack of access to the dialog and mutual, interactive conversation that we see in the ministries of Jesus and Paul.

...since church teachers do not always agree, the real teacher of the church is the Holy Spirit.

Another response to "Who is a teacher of the church?" limits the answer to Jesus and Paul and perhaps other biblical sources. By this account, Christ is the rabbi, his apostles are those sent to convey his teaching, we have their instruction in the New Testament which recognizes and includes the authority of the Old Testament (cf. Rom 15:4), and this is the source and norm for the church's teaching. Those who present their words are, then, not so much teachers as communicators. Certainly the historical church has assigned importance to this view with phrases such as *sola scriptura* and *solus Christus*. But ample biblical content also exists to validate some role, office, or function of teacher (see for example Eph 4:11-12 and 2 Tim 2:2), as we will confirm in later chapters.

Given that biblical content, some role for the teacher has existed in

the church from its earliest years. Thus, another answer to who our teachers are could be called the patristic view. The “patristics,” or “church fathers,” refer to those church thinkers and writers in the first several Christian centuries who hammered out the doctrinal positions that define our historical orthodoxy. The shape of our teaching today was put in place by teachers such as Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine as they thought deeply, originally, creatively, and sometimes controversially in order to separate truth from error in what the Christian faith says and means. Their individual efforts were not always successful, and they found plenty of fault with each other along the way, but cumulatively their work yielded a body of instruction that the church has since relied on and continues to affirm.¹

But not indiscriminantly. The Roman Catholic church and the Protestant churches divided 500 years ago in part over how much authority to assign to the church fathers and their traditions. This is a dispute that every teacher of the church today—Lutheran, Catholic, or otherwise—should learn, appreciate, and be ready to discuss with students because it involves the authority of the Gospel itself. The reader will have to pursue that complex story in other studies, but here it points to an additional view: since church teachers do not always agree, the real teacher of the church is the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (John 14:16), can give us insight to the Scriptures, help us glean truths from the church fathers, the church’s traditions, and other church figures past and present, and guide us to what God would have us know. But this view, in turn, raises age-old problems about excessive subjectivism and individualism for the Christian learner. The Christian, whether learner or teacher, is also a member of the body of Christ and the whole faith community in which God is at work. We not only say, “I believe in God the Father almighty,” but also “*Our* Father who art in heaven.”²

Teaching the Community of Christ

Teaching the church, then, is a community role, and that role includes those teaching in the Christian community’s congregations, schools, and colleges. Yet in my own work in Lutheran high schools, colleges, and church worker conferences, I find that many who are such teachers do not consider themselves a “teacher of the church.” Rather, by their perception, they are certainly faithful Christians and teach the fourth grade in a parish school but are not teachers of their congregation; or they teach a subject and coach a sport in a church-affiliated high school but not the things of faith; or they profess their discipline in a

college with a denominational connection but don't teach or explicitly locate their teaching within that theological tradition; or they run educational programs for their congregation, but they are program administrators and not expositors of Scripture as a means of grace; or they are competent shepherds and preachers but, though they are supposed to be apt teachers (2 Tim 3:2), haven't the time or training to develop curriculum that fosters disciples.

"Teacher of the church"—the expression sounds a bit grandiose. Who would be so bold as to claim it? Instead, we should join Paul in his self-identity as chief of sinners. True enough. Whoever would teach the Christian faith and life must do so with the self-effacing humility of sinner-saint rather than any pride of office.

What's more, perhaps our congregational and educational practitioners' belief is correct. Perhaps they are not teachers of the church if they don't have, in addition to a practical grasp of the Gospel, a good command of a) Scripture, b) the church's history, c) its hermeneutic tools, d) its doctrines, e) their own and different traditions, f) current spiritual issues and influences in their community, and g) some effective ways of educating spiritual growth in that community. Now, that may sound like a tall order, but think about some lesser degree of expertise next time you're sitting in a dentist's chair or airliner.

And what if we don't have teachers who are competent in these characteristics? Just as nature hates a vacuum, the same is true of the spiritual reality. The priests of Baal (1 Kings 18), Simon Magus (Acts 8), and the "super apostles" (2 Cor. 11) are always ready to step in and fill a teaching void. Teaching of some sort will always occur in or be directed at the church. The question is: Who will the teachers be and what will they teach?

The church, then, will have to identify its teachers. And the church has prepared candidates among those already in its congregations, schools, and colleges. Many may not consider themselves teachers of the church. But many of them could be, and already are or are prepared to become such teachers. That's what this book is about. We offer perspective, background, comment, reflection, and some positions we stake out along the way. We hope to encourage those who serve in some practice of teaching *in the church* to serve also as teachers *of the church*. As the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church, by that church God also calls out those he will use to instruct the church so that we may "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord

and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). We will examine this calling—both the role and the process—thoroughly in later chapters.

At this point in this chapter, the reader might expect some dramatic alarm about some crisis for the church or the teaching ministry, and why we’d better do something soon about this dire condition. However, alarm is not in order: “Built on the Rock, the church will stand, even while steeples are falling.” Yet neither is complacency: “Hark, the voice of Jesus calling.” And when calling the apostles, he assures them, “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18).

No Small Potatoes

Think of it this way: for two thousand years, the church has withstood the persecution of the Roman Empire, numerous heresies, several attempts at intellectual takeovers such as modernism, progressivism, and fascism, the moral erosion of consumerism, the threat of world

We...have the Gospel to teach, we...have much to teach about the Gospel

communism, and its own share of internal scandals and corruption. The church is not going away, and those teaching in the church are not part of a small-potatoes operation, even though your congregation or school or college may seem like it. The point is, we not only have the Gospel to teach, we also have much to teach about the Gospel. The faith we teach is two thousand years old, global and transcultural, and greater than any government, science, commerce, or intellectual movement that has or will come along. This book is not, then, a wake-up call, a serving of notice, or a shrill screed of warning. It’s a gentle reminder and invitation to hear the church’s need and call for teachers of God’s Word and respond to that call especially in one’s own locale.

Teaching the Church in the World: Five Current Conditions

Still, while the Gospel remains the same (Heb 13:8), every age in the church has its challenges, dangers, and opportunities, and so its conditions for ministry change as well. Five cultural themes will likely influence the conditions for the teaching ministry in the decades to come. Those conditions will impact who the church recognizes and calls as its teachers and how our teaching is carried out. The themes are as complex as culture itself and are the subject of much attention (and might be numbered differently or more than five). We briefly note these to acknowledge both the church and the world as our context for teaching

and to keep in mind in later chapters, bearing also in mind that predictions are not prophecy.

1. De-concentration of public education's near-monopoly is altering how people perceive school, teaching, teachers, learning, and education. By and large, "teaching" for most people is still synonymous with public school teaching as it has been for about a hundred years, but that baseline is now shifting. Parochial and Christian schools continue to grow in number. Jewish and Muslim schools, though not numerous, are a bigger part of the mix. Home schooling continues to increase. Public schools experiment with hybrids such as charter schools and commercially managed school districts. For now, teaching ministers in parochial schools (and teaching ministry students) inaccurately continue to compare their activities with public school teachers rather than their fellow ministers of the Gospel. However, what has been the traditional neighborhood public school will no longer be the standard by which we begin our thinking about teaching and education. That predisposition will change as the educational landscape changes, and with it comes the opportunity to rethink what we mean and expect about the teacher of the church.³

2. A culture always presumes some world view. In our society, that monopoly no longer belongs to the church as it once did. Competition is increasing for who gets to tell the grand narrative of life. Contestants include institutionalized science, the popular media, and political movements as well as the church. Versions of the human story include various forms of post-modernism, evolution, materialistic naturalism, genetic human enhancement, political-religious fundamentalism, and world environmental and economic collapse or perhaps culminating balance. The teacher of the church pays attention to the current idolatries that would substitute some lesser vision of the human story for what God is doing in the world through Christ. The teacher of the church has a comprehensive narrative that claims to contain all the other stories in Jesus: "For God has put all things in subjection under him" (1 Cor 15:27).

3. Radical Islam is provoking a cautious and even negative perception of conservative religion in general. While some will interpret the activities and clashes of fundamentalist movements in terms of authentic spiritual warfare, others will lump together all religion and especially conservative religion as a source of conflict rather than hope. The teacher of the church will have the task of interpreting these developments in Scripture's terms of sin, judgment, and grace and representing historical, orthodox Christianity as hopeful and life-affirming rather than hostile

and destructive.

4. The Southern Cross—a night sky’s constellation we Northerners never see—is rising as the worldwide center of gravity for Christianity now rapidly moves to the Southern Hemisphere. The Christendom of Europe is gone. American Christianity is stable for the time being but not growing. Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia will be home to what Philip Jenkins calls “the next Christianity.”⁴ He anticipates and is troubled that “the twenty-first century will be regarded by future historians as a century in which religion replaces ideology as the prime animating and destructive force in human affairs.” The concern is that the new emerging churches will neglect the continued reformation of the church (the Latin phrase is *ecclesia semper reformanda*, the church is always reforming) over the past 500 years and will needlessly and tragically rerun much of the worst of the older church’s history. We do not want to repeat the denominational warfare of earlier centuries. While teaching ministers chiefly attend to their own local efforts, at least some teachers of the church will need to consider their ministry at a larger and even global scale for those new churches who could learn from our collective experience.

5. Closer to home, our own society and economy is undergoing increased polarization of the wealthy and the lower income stratum. Church workers who serve at the lower income level that comes with the office will find themselves distanced from the comparatively comfortable circumstances of their parents and grandparents. Many already seem to be struggling with financial responsibility, retirement planning, debt, attitudes and expectations about standard of living in a consumer economy, and what the teacher’s own financial conduct teaches the church. Luther reminds us, “Good works do not make a Christian, but a Christian makes good works.” The teacher’s responsible (though not legalistic) stewardship of personal finances, especially in a consumer economy, is a good and responsible work. Surely, others learn as much from what a teacher of the church does—in this case regarding mammon—as what that teacher says. In our culture, this may become a hard lesson for teaching ministers to learn and then teach.⁵

An Enlarged Image

The following chapters do not explore these sorts of societal themes, but such matters are never far from this book’s topics. We encourage the reader to keep these and similar themes in mind for an enlarged understanding of today’s teaching ministry. The chapters will put in place a

collection of basic biblical concepts and practices for the teacher of the church discussed not by one but seven authors who have been blessed to be part of that ministry.

The usual problem with a collection of essays from several writers is the lack of a uniform style and voice. In this case, we think the variety is an asset that reflects “the varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, the varieties of service, but the same Lord, and the varieties of working, but the same God who works them all in everyone ...for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4–7). We hope you will appreciate the different ways that different contributors can express different views on the same authentic ministry of teaching. There are some common and essential elements in the church’s task of *didache*, the act of teaching Christians, but there is no one monolithic model for being a teacher of the church. Therefore, the next chapter—our exegetical study—presents a survey of several teaching texts from Scripture yet with consistent encouragement to teach the Scriptures and Christ who is their center. The Bible is the right place to commence a study of the teaching ministry. *LEJ*

Endnotes:

1. We continue to hear about some of the theological fringe elements that the church fathers addressed and refuted (Gnosticism is an example) as today’s popular culture re-discovers some of their writings in library archives and an occasional old manuscript is found and published.
2. The original Greek in the Nicene Creed begins, “We believe in God the Father almighty.”
3. Even a little reading in the history and policy of education, public and private, in the United States reveals its Byzantine complexities. Higher education is part of this history and current change. We are seeing smaller colleges attrition in the competition, research universities build alliances with corporations, the Internet and other venues take some instructional roles though not as expected, and costs continue to rise faster than the economy’s inflation rate.
4. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*. See also his summary of this thesis, “The Next Christianity,” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2002.
5. For discussion on personal debt among church workers, see *Issues in Christian Education*, “Church Worker Indebtedness: a Search for Solutions,” Vol. 40, No. 3, Winter 2006.

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Book Review: A Teacher of the Church

by Ed Grube

A Teacher of the Church: Theology, Formation, and Practice for the Ministry of Teaching. Russ Moulds, editor: 2007. Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon 159 pages.

A *Teacher of the Church* by Russ Moulds is a compilation of essays by Moulds and respected professionals Charles Blanco, Richard Carter, Jane Fryar, Kenneth Heinitz, W. Theophil Janzow, and James Pragman. It's a book for everyone involved or who wants to be involved in Lutheran education, from those who educate future teachers for Lutheran school classrooms to preschool teachers, who conduct a very front-line ministry of education in congregations and communities.

Threaded throughout the essays is the theme that in Lutheran schools “our teaching should look both normal and peculiar” (*peculiar* being a good thing here). That theme certainly identifies the niche, both spiritual and educational, for Lutheran schools. National leaders in Lutheran education consistently insist that Lutheran schools must provide excellent education heavily influenced by Scripture and faith. All contributors to this book stress this in a variety of ways.

Reading *A Teacher of the Church* will take time. It demands reflection as well as digestion. The real danger is that teachers in Lutheran educational ministries, especially those who lack certification as Lutheran Teachers, will not take time to discover the significance of their ministry, often because they do not realize they actually have a ministry. Schools would do well to organize a reading/discussion group around this book and would likely derive benefit from an inclusive discussion between teachers who may share common tasks but who are not identically credentialed.

Ministry—more precisely, the nature of educational ministry—is a major topic. Moulds stresses the role of theologically certified Lutheran teachers but not at the expense of teachers who have not earned the Lutheran Teacher Diploma or completed Colloquy.

Janzow thoroughly addresses the ministry of every Christian, which might raise a few eyebrows, hopefully of those who teach in Lutheran schools or preach in the congregations that operate them. Janzow writes, "... all Christians have a ministry, properly understood." Janzow's chapter complements Moulds' description and attempts to define who can be rightly regarded as a teacher of the church. The conclusion seems to be that teachers of the church include all who indeed teach in Lutheran schools, with the implication that those teaching in Lutheran schools need to prepare themselves to proclaim the Gospel, speak Scriptural truth, know Lutheran teachings (excellent and brief summary in Chapter 9 *What's Lutheran about Lutheran Teaching?*), commit to integrating faith and Scripture, and fully accept their role as ministers.

A Teacher of the Church visits other facets and features of life for teachers in Lutheran education. If only one chapter of this book could be reprinted and distributed to workers already in the field, it would be *The Call and the Will of God.** But a word of caution here: This chapter might bring shudders to anyone who uses the phrase "God's will," especially in regard to their calling. The chapter is demystifying. It not-so-gently confronts the reader with seven phrases about *God's will* common on the lips of professional church workers and all other Christians. Then it places them in the perspective of Scripture. Not to reveal "the ending" of this story, it is only fair to warn of the conclusion that "God gives us his Word in Christ and the Scriptures, and apart from some direct, specific revelation, God does not prescribe our life choices." What does this mean for those deliberating a change of location in their ministry? That's not an answer I am willing to give away. Read this chapter. (Yes, you can even read it first, though it might be thought rather un-Lutheran to read Chapter 10 before Chapter 1.)

If Chapter 10 leaves the genuinely sincere and obviously dedicated teacher whimpering and maybe a little wounded (you'll get over it), the fast-acting balm of Fryar's chapter (11) will soothe and rejuvenate. (You might even suspect a little tension between these two.) Fryar, who has written the other book that should be required reading for Lutheran educators (*Go and Make Disciples*, River Forest, Lutheran Education Association, 2004, 2nd Edition) confidently convinces and assures teachers of the church with practical and biblical guidance for following Jesus' command to "Follow Me."

Initial cheerleading for only three of the chapters in no way dimin-

* See LEJ Vol 140, No. 1 for this chapter.

ishes the nurture, wisdom, and sometimes provocation of the other nine chapters. Chapters seven and eight deal specifically with perspectives on the ministry of teachers. Heintz deals with a New Testament perspective and Pragman works through Lutheran perspectives.

Heintz concludes from the New Testament when “Jesus taught and sent the disciples, His emphasis was not on status, office, or position, but on proclaiming the kingdom of God, healing the sick, and casting out demons. The emphasis is on believing, life, servanthood, and the follow-through of faith in Him.” Pragman develops the ministry of teachers relative to “the place of the teacher in the public ministry of the church.” He answers the question “Do teachers have the right—either human or divine—to consider themselves part of the public ministry of the church in a sense similar to the way in which pastors think of themselves ...?” Then he proceeds to examine public ministry functions in light of the priesthood of all believers. Pragman’s treatment of these subjects is not radical; it is well-done, honestly and clearly written, and potentially helpful to those who struggle with issues of public ministry and the priesthood of all believers.

Moulds concludes the book with a chapter titled “The Employerization of the Teaching Ministry.” It’s a chapter for present as well as future practice. Moulds clearly states his distaste for considering a teacher of the church merely an employee. Supported by all previous chapters in the book, he offers five reasons that teachers are not hirelings. And he does it with Scripture, not sentiment. This chapter should be required reading for any congregation that conducts or wants to conduct Lutheran Christian education on its premises. School boards or other governing bodies would do well to understand the unique role of their teachers too.

Twice the book disappointed me, though it wasn’t the fault of the authors. First, it was the scope of definition of *teacher*, especially in regard to teachers in Lutheran early childhood centers, elementary schools, and high schools. Admittedly, it was not Moulds’ intention to dismiss the issue of Lutheran schools as high-potential mission fields; it just was not within the scope of the book. Yet, Lutheran schools increasingly serve not only non-Lutherans but also many who do not know their Savior. LCMS school statistics from 2006–2007 indicate that 17 percent of Lutheran school enrollment is unchurched, a real number of more than 44,000 students. Therefore, teachers—and their congregations—must subscribe to their role not only as teachers of the church but also missionaries to

those who aren't yet in the Church. Two books will help Lutheran educators grow well: *A Teacher of the Church* and *Go and Make Disciples* by Jane Fryar, cited earlier.

Second, I regret not having had time to read the book several times before the review. No doubt I missed a few things (probably more than a few). This book deserves annual reading as, of course, all teachers know the value of review.

Finally, a personal aside. *A Teacher of the Church* will not inflate the egos of professional church workers. While supportive of the notion of ministry, Moulds does not allow ministry titles to elevate anyone. Those looking to improve their organizational status in one way or another will not find fuel here. They will be disappointed. I must admit that I was one of those people. I hoped some segments of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod might wake up to the riches it possesses in teachers and DCEs—the leadership, skills, and dedication of these workers—and maybe give them a franchise in synodical governance. I was looking to arm my professional militancy (Onward, Christian Soldiers!). Alas, we're still “powerless pedagogues,” but, in the end, I am not disappointed: I learned something far more important and far less fragile than the accouterments of title and credential. I became even more confident that true ministry is in the minds, hearts, and souls of teachers of the church. And if it is not, those teachers would better serve the obligations (and freedoms) of their vocation elsewhere. *LEJ*

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Middle Level Career Education: Without a Counselor

by Bernard Tonjes

Career education has traditionally been a responsibility of the high school guidance program. In years gone by, in an ideal situation, as students worked their way through high school, they would meet one-on-one with their high school counselor to discuss personal strengths and areas in need of improvement. These would be considered in the light of academic attainments. There might have been a paper and pencil test or two administered and then discussed. (Remember how many of us were told we would be either teachers or farmers?) If all went well, you completed the process with a deeper sense of personal knowledge and a sense of where you might fit in the world after you completed your formal education. If not, you came away frustrated and amazed that you could spend so much time and get so little out of it.

In the past thirty years or so, school guidance and counseling has been changing. Unlike days-gone-by when counselors were occupied with the delivery of special services to special students, public education systems in most states have adopted what is called a comprehensive developmental model for the delivery of guidance services to students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). This comprehensive developmental model differs from previous ways of delivering these services in that it anticipates the normal needs of students according to established developmental timetables and seeks to provide information, skill training and other services to all students before the needs present themselves as a series of crises. In using this model, guidance counselors in the 21st century are making greater use of whole-class activity for the delivery of services, as opposed to a one-to-one relationship (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

Another change, which has accompanied the move to the comprehensive developmental model, is the growing use of school counselors in elementary and middle school settings. Many of the developmental needs experienced by students occur in the context of the transitions that they experience as part of life in modern school systems. Elementary and middle school counselors in public school systems now spend time more time

in classrooms working with groups of students in skill building activities, discussion groups, and role playing various situations. Topics in this new trend include social, emotional, vocational and moral development (Coleman, 2001). This new approach to the delivery of guidance services differs from earlier models in that the older, traditional approach was “reactive, crisis-driven, unplanned... [whereas] the comprehensive developmental model is planned, preventative and proactive.” (Schlossberg, Morris and Lieberman, 2001, p.57).

It is a fact that very few Lutheran elementary schools have access to formal school counseling programs and even fewer have the means to employ full or part-time counseling professionals. While this is a concern in some circles, research conducted during 2005 in Missouri District LCMS schools indicated that Lutheran teachers and administrators develop programs and curricula that, for the most part, speak to the same needs addressed by the use of the comprehensive developmental counseling model in public schools (Tonjes, 2005). In fact, a case can be made that Lutheran schools have always been ahead of their time in confronting issues of moral development, social interaction and family problems. A careful comparison of topics found in the religion curriculum of most Lutheran schools with the topics included in a standard guidance curriculum shows a high degree of correspondence (Tonjes, 2005). Think about it: Haven't Lutheran schools always taught children to love one another, to turn the other cheek, to pray for those that sin against you, to use the gifts God gave you for the benefit of others? It may be couched in different terminology, but the comprehensive developmental guidance curriculum approaches many of the same topics, but from a largely humanistic perspective.

However, there is one area in which Lutheran schools may be lacking. The same research that showed that Lutheran schools are doing an excellent job of meeting student needs in the Personal/Social and Academic/Education domains indicated that many Lutheran schools were not meeting student needs when it came to the Career/Vocational Domain. “Lutheran schools do an excellent job of promoting church vocations to their students, but these frequently are the only vocations that receive specific attention in the classroom.” (Tonjes, 2005, p. 167) This study also found that in every Lutheran school *with* a counselor, the counselor developed or introduced a significant vocational exploration component in the school's program. Lutheran schools are not alone in this problem. Especially at the middle school level (grades 5-8) some

researchers have concluded that career planning is woefully inadequate for a large portion of middle school students.

Career/Vocational exploration should be included in a Lutheran school's overall program for a variety of reasons. The relationship between teacher and students is such that it lends itself to the exploration process. Teachers know students' strengths and weaknesses and talk to students about the students' attitudes and behaviors. An open dialog about these attitudes and behaviors can be valuable as students engage in the self-examination required to assess their personal abilities and values (Trusty, Niles & Carney, 2005). Many times a simple question can cause a student to recognize conflicts between expressed values and behavior, "Why do you tell me you want to be a lawyer, when you also tell me how much you hate reading?"

Middle school students are also on the receiving end of increasing pressure to make preliminary decisions that could have tremendous impact on their future career options (Osborn & Reardon, 2006) but without understanding the implications of the decisions they make. A student who decides to take an easier math class because his friend will be in the same class, may find that when he gets to high school, his achievement in math has been limited by his choice of the lower-level math "track." Middle level students are generally aware that to get to college, they should take the "harder" math classes, but very few realize that limitations in math can be a severe handicap for those that wish to pursue "non-college" careers in vocations such as welding, electronics, or HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning). It is in this manner that other academic choices can have a strong bearing on educational and personal development of the individual for decades to come (Trusty, Niles & Carney, 2005). It is easy to see how the undeveloped, unexplored values of a middle school student can place that student at risk for limited vocational options.

Implementing a career exploration unit in a school also brings academic benefits to the students and the school. In addition to the obvious increases in student information and exposure to more options (Turner & Lappan, 2002) that such units develop, students can begin to make a tangible connection between the concepts they are learning in school and the "real" world of work (Stott & Jackson, 2005)

Because students can now see an increased practical value in what they study in school, research has shown that some students will show increases in grades, improved behavior and participation in class, and

greater expressed satisfaction with school (Legum & Hoare, 2004). Students also can learn research and planning, and presentation skills in the context of a career exploration unit that are immediately transferable to other more traditional areas of the curriculum (Stott Jackson, 2005).

An additional benefit arises from having an intentional, significant exposure to career education. Students themselves become more intentional and reflective in their own future educational and career planning (Trusty, Niles & Carney, 2005).

Planning a career exploration unit for students can take many forms. It is common in lower grades for teachers to use a “community helpers” approach, inviting parents and other familiar individuals from common occupations to come to the class and speak to the students about their job and what they do. This is a natural vehicle for parent involvement as most classrooms will have a wide variety of occupations represented

God’s will is accomplished through the actions of people in all vocations.

among the parents. As students move into the middle grades, the ASCA (American School Counselors Association)

and the National Council for Career Development recommend that, in addition to exploration of career options, students work on competencies in individual planning and long-term career planning (Turner & Lappan, 2002; Wigfield, Lutz & Wagner, 2005).

In the middle grades (grades 5–8) career exploration can effectively be integrated into other specific areas of the curriculum. Students in an English or social studies class can be taught research, writing, organizational and presentation skills as they work individually or in groups to find information about careers of interest to them. It is also easy to approach career exploration from a cross-curricular approach, using the career exploration task as a basis for related activities in math, science, English, religion or other classes. An effective approach can be to assign research related to particular occupation in the context of a larger unit within a class. For example, if a life science class is studying ecology, students may find benefit in looking into jobs like wildlife management, civil engineering, hydrology, meteorology, or any number of related careers.

Especially when dealing with middle level students, one important focus can be to help students make reasonable matches between the beliefs they have about their personal competencies and the values they

hold that are driving their career choices (Wigfield, Lutz & Wagner, 2005). This discussion can be especially meaningful when presented in the context of a religion class which deals with our stewardship of God's great gifts to us.

This is when teacher insight into the student's personality and behavior is especially meaningful and useful in helping the student reflect not only on a given career, but *why* they are interested in that career, and they can serve God and others in that career. Teachers interested in exploring Luther's doctrine of vocation are commended to read *God at Work* by Gene Edward Vieth (2002) for an excellent, practical discussion of the topic which will give the teacher an excellent theological grounding. As students progress through self-evaluation tools available in the public domain, Lutheran teachers will notice a well-defined tilt towards secular humanism. Vieth's text will help teachers help students see that God's call to vocation is not limited to careers in professional church work, and that God's will is accomplished through the actions of people in all vocations.

Service learning activities also work well in a career planning context. In addition to the personal satisfaction that students receive as they engage in challenging physical labor when helping others, they can be exposed to tasks they may not have considered for themselves. Considering the context in which the task is embedded, that of service to others, it establishes an excellent bridge to take students once again to Scripture and the doctrine of vocation. Along with the spiritual growth, students' career development goals gain a practical, real-world context. Research indicates that students who engage in meaningful service-learning projects demonstrate measurable increases in personal and social development, civic responsibility and academic learning (Billig, 2002; Stott & Jackson, 2005)

Parent involvement should not be left behind in the lower grades (Davis & Lambie, 2005) and is especially appropriate for students at the middle school level. It is an excellent option to consider when planning a unit on career exploration for middle level students. Research indicates that parent support is needed for best chance of success for a career exploration program and getting parents directly involved as participants is an excellent way to engender that support. Such a program also allows teachers the opportunity to work closely with parents on a project of mutual interest. Middle level students have reached a level of maturity at which they can begin to understand the passion that some parents might

have for the work they do. It is a wonderful opportunity for these parents to discuss their careers and to share with students the sometimes deep meaning and satisfaction that they find in their jobs. (Turner & Lappan, 2002).

A look at resources available online will give a good overview of the variety of approaches that one can take in developing a career education unit for students. In fact the list is so long and so varied it may be somewhat overwhelming. In the face of information overload, Osborne & Reardon (2006) recommend that career education lessons for middle school students contain just a few critical components. First is to include time for students to develop knowledge about themselves. Students can benefit from standardized tests and on-line quizzes which ask them to identify their perceived competencies, their values, and their interests. It is not uncommon to find, especially among younger students, individuals who claim to like “everything” and others who dislike “everything.” Students holding these attitudes challenge even the most sophisticated standardized measures, reinforcing the importance of the role of the classroom teacher in helping the student understand themselves. Osborn and Reardon (2006) include a recommendation that students be given time to work on decision making skills as a high priority and suggest plenty of time for reflection. Many times, whole-class discussion serves as an excellent vehicle to allow students to reflect out-loud and to benefit from the lessons included in the comments of others.

A concern of importance specifically for middle school students is the need of students at this age to see connectedness between school and work (Osborne & Reardon, 2006; Shepherd Johnson, 2000). Middle school students are at the beginning of the process where they are starting to look outside of themselves, their small circle of friends and family at the larger world, and many times they can be confused by apparent inconsistencies. Making sure that students can see that 7th grade math and English will relate to what they will *really* do in a job someday is what brings relevance to work whose purpose they may not understand.

In looking at the regular duties of a classroom teacher, it could be that while there may be time in the day, as a classroom teacher you just cannot see how you will find the time to develop a career exploration unit such as this. If this is the case, you may be able to find individuals in your congregation or among your school families who have the expertise and experience to put together a program that will benefit students. The Missouri District study of elementary school guidance practices

found that it was commonplace for schools to make use of volunteers for guidance-related tasks such as these (Tonjes, 2005). Individuals from outside the regular school staff can come in and be of assistance, having meaningful input and working with students if roles are clearly defined in advance (Brown, Dahlbeck & Sparkman-Barnes, 2006).

Obviously, another very important component of a middle school career exploration unit would be to have available information about a wide variety of career options. The use of the Internet and World Wide Web has made this part of the process very simple. Below you will find some specific websites and recommendations for searching the web to help with this task. As usual, teachers should check sites in advance to make sure of their authenticity and appropriateness for the age of the students involved. Students should also be constantly reminded of general internet safety procedures such as not giving out one's name or address or participating in so-called "chat rooms." It will be common to find a great deal of advertising associated with some sites, some of which may not be suitable for presentation in your school. Also, federal law restricts certain internet activities, including some interest and values tests, to children age 14 years or older which may limit your ability to use certain sites with middle level students.

To get you started, you might try going to your favorite search engine (Google, Yahoo, Ask.com, etc) and searching for "career exploration middle grades." Each search engine will give you different and interesting results, which may help you entice your students to investigate their futures in the world of work. Another option is to check with guidance personnel from your local public school district to find out what they are using. Frequently, these tools are open sources on the internet and available for all to use such as the link below from Mann Middle School in Austin, Texas. When contacted about mentioning the site in this article, school administrators were happy to share the results of their labor with others. Likewise, if you find a particularly useful website, values test or career simulation, be bold about sharing the information with your colleagues as more students will then benefit from your experience.

The opportunities for meaningful discussion, personal growth and increased academic understanding offered by career and vocation exploration make the subject especially appropriate for all students. When embedded in the Christ-centered context of a Lutheran school, the results can be an especially meaningful exercise in helping students discover the plan God that holds for them.

Some useful Internet Sites

- <http://www.careervoyages.gov/students-main.cfm> “Career Voyages” Operated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the US Department of Labor. It has excellent age-appropriate tools on the internet for exploration of career options.
- <http://www.bls.gov/k12> “Exploring Career Information” also from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- <http://www.livecareer.com/> “Live Career.com” Personal values and interests. Presents a useful career interest test, but students must be at least 14 years of age. There are also lots of advertising distractions which make taking the test more time consuming than it needs to be.
- <http://www.mapping-your-future.org/MHSS/> “Mapping Your Future” Good general information for students in middle grades.;
- <http://www.amaisd.org/mann/careertl.htm> This is a career exploration assembled by the staff at Mann Middle School in Austin, Texas. An excellent variety of safe options for middle school students. Listed here by permission. **LEJ**

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“I Love Reading!” – Fifth and Sixth Graders React to Literature Circles

by Steven Witt

“I love reading for the first time. I use to just fake that I read the book. I love when we have literature circles,” said Joshua, 12 years old.

This comment came on the second day of literature circles in my 5th and 6th grade classroom. Joshua is a struggling 6th grade reader who does not read at grade level. He seems unmotivated in most classes and has a generally poor attitude toward learning, except when we have literature circles. Literature circles are an arena for students to explore literature together. Literature circles in my classroom have sparked motivation, fostered communication skills, encouraged a deeper understanding of literature, and have provided a chance for students to use higher level thinking skills in an authentic conversational manner. Literature circles have my students excited about reading – including Joshua.

According to Daniels (2002) literature circles are small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book. While reading each group’s assigned portion of the text (either in or outside of class), each member takes notes to help her or him to contribute to the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with ideas to share. Each group follows a reading and meeting schedule, holding periodic discussions on the way through the book. When a group finishes a book, the circle members may share highlights of their reading with the rest of their class. Then new groups may be created and new books are selected and students move into a new discussion (Daniels, 2002, p. 2).

Over the past fifteen years, the use of literature circles (also called book clubs, or literature groups) has exploded (Calkins, 2001) and research on this phenomenon has paralleled its rise (Daniels, 2002).

Literature circles arose partly in response to traditional, teacher-led discussions in which students often assumed passive roles. This traditional whole group instruction has followed an IRE (Initiate, Response, Evaluation) sequence in which the teacher initiates the question, and students respond to these only when the teacher calls on them. The teacher

then evaluates the answer. As a result, students are not actively involved in their learning process.

Literature circles are an effective way for learning to happen through interaction, engagement, and active involvement in a social setting (Davis, Resta, Davis & Camocho, 2001). Students speak when there is an opportunity and they have something to say in a discussion style which is similar to conversation. Research has shown that students take more risks during these small group discussions (Eeds & Wells, 1989). Eeds & Wells conclude that when teacher and students engage in student-centered conversations about literature different understandings of a text may be constructed and shared, yielding richer readings of texts. Literature circles also promote students' motivation to read and have been shown to improve students' reading levels and performance on tests (Davis, Resta, Davis & Camocho, 2001).

Quality literature circles are filled with a variety of readers' perspectives and opinions about the books being read. In literature circles readers are interested in the meanings they construct and those meanings that are offered by other readers, and it is this diversity of ideas that is essential for quality discussion. The group members will not always agree on a certain opinion or interpretation but they will look back to the text to bring support for their understanding (Serafini, 2000).

For quality literature circles to take place it has been suggested that teachers need to demonstrate how to discuss literature, increase student awareness and understandings of the elements and structures of literature, help them to learn to generate and negotiate interpretations in a supportive learning environment, and learn how to talk to fellow students in a positive and effective manner (Maloch, 2004; Wienczek & O'Flahavan, 1994).

I decided to implement literature circles to help improve the reading skills of my students and, in preparation for this approach, I spent time during the summer months reading several different books and research studies about literature circles such as, *Moving Forward with Literature Circles* (2002), *Getting Started with Literature Circles* (2003), and *Grand Conversations* (1990). I realize that as teachers, we cannot assume that after simply handing a book to children they will be able to discuss literature in depth, make connections, have insights into the author's style, and be able to interpret and understand the story. Before children are set off in literature circles they need to be exposed to a wide variety of literature. They need to know how to interact in discussion groups and they need to have ideas about what they should talk about.

In my classroom we have reading workshop daily for about sixty minutes. Students are reading a lot of different of genres daily. I believe this immersion in reading helped my students develop quality literature discussions. I began the school year by immediately introducing literature circles to my students during reading workshop. I shared with the students how much fun it is to walk out of an exciting movie and talk about what you saw with your friends. Through student collaboration we developed a list of guidelines that we thought would help our circles work effectively (see Appendix 1). I then spent several class periods modeling and discussing the purpose and function of literature circles.

I modeled how to discuss literature using daily read-alouds. I read aloud a short story. I then asked, “Well what do you think?” Other than the initial prompt I didn’t ask many questions about the story. I also allowed the students to speak with out raising their hands. This helped to build the conversation format. To help initiate and model discussion after a read-aloud I had the students turn to someone sitting next to them and comment on the book or a prompt I had given them like, “What do you think will happen next?” This pair-and-share activity allowed more students to have a voice and talk about the book. This also allowed the shy student a chance to have a conversation with a partner. After the pair-and-share we came back as a whole group, and the students shared with the whole group interesting comments that they heard.

The most powerful way my students grew in their understanding of what goes into a good discussion was to observe one in action. I used a common cooperative learning technique, a “fishbowl,” to model good discussion strategies for the rest of the class. The day prior to the “fishbowl” activity I chose four students with strong discussion skills to participate in the demonstration. I had them reread a chapter of a book that I had been reading aloud to the whole class. I gave them a prompt, “Look for something to talk about that stood out for you.” For the “fishbowl” demonstration, the group gathered chairs in a circle at the front of the room and began to talk. Although understandably self-conscious at first, the students quickly forgot the audience and engaged in an interesting discussion of the book’s ending.

I didn’t introduce role sheets as is often suggested, particularly by Daniels, (1994). I felt that I would only rely on these if the conversations were not productive. However, my students’ loved the natural conversation time that literature circles provided so I did not use role sheets.

To set the students on their way in literature circles I did a short

book talk on the various fiction books that students could choose from. I intentionally chose books at different reading levels. Students ranked their top three choices and later that night I placed the students into four heterogeneous groups. There were approximately four to five students in each group. I placed the children in their groups primarily by their book choice, but I also took into account student reading level, behavior, and social issues. With their top choices most of the students seemed to migrate towards books that were at their independent reading level. Literature circle groups met twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 15–20 minutes during our reading workshop time slot. The class of 14 students was divided into four groups. At the beginning of the study I had two literature circles going on at the same time, but soon discovered that two discussions occurring at the same time created a distraction to both groups. I quickly adjusted and had only one discussion at a time that allowed both the group and me a chance to focus on the discussion at hand. The students not participating in the circle were reading independently.

After each literature circle meeting we held a short debriefing session. I guided this session by simply asking a question, “What went well and what do we need to work on?” (See Appendix 3 for a sample list developed by the students during a debriefing session.) This debriefing session allowed the students to learn how to see what made the circles productive and what caused problems.

Through the process of implementing literature circles it was obvious through the active discussions that my students were having that they did learn to function independently within the group. This was obvious from the beginning as I saw students voluntarily jump into the discussion and their enthusiasm grew as they became comfortable with the approach. Every morning at least one student would begin their day by asking me if we were going to have literature circles that day.

As we continued the use of the literature circle mode, some major themes seemed to emerge in terms of what I was able to observe during student sessions. A later analysis of student responses and behaviors indicated that several major themes were beginning to emerge, these revolving around the kinds and content of student talk, that there was an evident, positive attitude among them and that I could record instances of the use of specific reading comprehension strategies, specifically, prediction, inference and the use of personal connections to the content. Literature circles also helped the students develop interpersonal

communication skills as students learned to listen to others, express their own opinions and to sustain a discussion by building on the ideas of others. They considered more than one side of an issue, looked back into the text to reaffirm or change their opinion, and found ways to agree or disagree with others: they were having quality literature discussions.

Increase in Motivation

The increase in student motivation was one of the first major benefits that I noted throughout my study of literature circles. Joshua, previously mentioned, struggles to read and performs below his grade level. Having been his reading and writing teacher for the past two years, I have noted a remarkable and positive shift in his attitude in that time.

In the past Joshua lacked a desire to complete most reading assignments, especially those that involved reading a number of pages. He would often simply avoid doing the assigned reading or simply guess on oral or written questions. Joshua was in a group that was made up of five sixth grade students.

They were reading and discussing *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. This is an exciting book that can be challenging because the author uses many different

They considered more than one side of an issue...they were having quality literature discussions.

literary devices. However, from the onset of literature circles, Joshua took a leadership role in discussions. For example, the following excerpt was taken from the discussion at the beginning of a circle discussion.

Joshua began the discussion with questions about the book:

Joshua: What surprised you so far in the story?

Lee: The whetherman

Joshua: Why was it a surprise?

Lee: I thought at first when they said whether I was so into the story I thought he meant weather forecast and I looked back and read “w-h-e-t-h-e-r.”

Joshua: What did you expect?

John: I expected for it to be a whole lot more confusing but it wasn't really that confusing.

Joshua guided the discussion through questions. He then probed deeper and asked Lee to support his answer. Joshua often asked questions

and used a follow up question. I believe that because of this leadership role Joshua became more confident in his understanding as well as in his sense of safety in this conversational setting allowing him to ask questions without fear of being graded or judged. This confidence then led him to be motivated to actively read outside of the literature circles.

The analysis of the interview transcript of a personal one-on-one interview with Joshua seems to indicate that his motivation toward reading has increased in the course of just six weeks of using literature circles.

Do you like literature circles?

“Yes because I have time to share with my friends. I like to tell them stuff that they didn’t get, or they tell me stuff that I didn’t get. We can help each other out.”

How have literature circles helped you grow as a reader?

“They help me like we’ll discuss something and if that’s something that I didn’t get they show me where it is, and I can reread it.”

Is there anything bad about literature circles?

“Not at all. Besides if it’s bad it’s because someone didn’t read.”

Having been familiar with Joshua as a student for some time, it is amazing for me to see the increased enjoyment and positive attitude Joshua has towards reading using this approach. I believe that through the non-threatening environment of literature circles Joshua is more comfortable and draws on his peers to help him understand the text.

Expands reading comprehension strategies:

Fountas and Pinnel (2001) state that good readers make connections to text, personal knowledge, and world knowledge as they read. They also say that readers re-read for understanding, ask for clarifications, summarize, analyze, and criticize. In this typical example of a literature circle discussion on the book *Phantom Tollbooth*, students were observed using these reading strategies as they socially constructed an understanding of the text:

Joshua: I think I kind of skipped it but how did the dog get to the boy?

John: He just started running and all of the sudden he appeared because he was not at the Leathargians

Paul (correcting the pronunciation): Lethargians

John: Yeah for not doing something

Lee: But, like the dog – I think – is right now, I would think he is the principal of all that place. He is like the big leader (who) knows how to get everywhere just like that.

Joshua: And then also the dog...the dog...when the dog can talk to him like...like we were talking about...he likes to go on the cars. He goes, “Can I go with you?”

Lee: He got happy right away

Joshua: Yeah and then also he goes...when they start fighting just a little bit...then he goes...the alarm clock always goes off when they are fighting. That was weird.

Karl: I think its funny – their schedule – and all day they have naps and something that doesn’t do anything at all and they’re either relaxing or sleeping.

Note how Joshua again begins this portion of the discussion. He is not sure if he completely understands what he has read and so asks for clarification on how the boy got the dog. This example shows us that it is okay for children to realize that they might not always understand what they read. John answers Joshua with a quick concise answer. This helps clarify Joshua’s understanding of the text.

The students then spend time summarizing what they have read. According to Fountas and Pinnel (2001) summarizing helps students reconstruct meaning from what they had read and create sense out of what was read. Note in the above transcript excerpt that the students are summarizing the story in a logical and sequential order. They are continually building on what the person before them has said. This continuity in the conversation is helping the children understand the basics of appropriate human conversations. One person speaks while the others listen and wait for their turn to respond.

Throughout the reading of this novel I used various mini-lessons to teach the students’ literary concepts such as homophones. In this next, brief portion of the discussion John is drawing on his understanding of this concept:

John: It was funny how they used the homophones with, like, the whether-man when, umm, Milo says “If you’re the weatherman can you tell me what the weather will be?” and the whether-man says “not the weatherman I’m the whether-man. I tell you “whether this or that will happen” not “whether it will rain or shine.”

During my research on literature circles I also noticed how their interpretation and that of their peers guided the students. This seemed to help them consider and explore a variety of perspective interpretations as they read. The example below shows how the students were trying to determine the age of the main character, Milo.

Lee: It is hard to tell if he is in college, high school, or in middle school.

Joshua: Because he has a car.

Lee: Because he has a car he thinks very differently and he seems like he would be an older kid.

Joshua: Yea...and for all we know he could be 13 and not have a care because nobody cares about much at 13.

Lee: And it could be just a book that since he's already going through a tollbooth it could be realistic fiction – Oh no – not even fiction.

Paul: The tollbooth looks as tall as him: it seems like he is a kid. It looks like a kiddy car, one of those kid ones.

Lee: But as you can see the artist, like, overdoes things...also, like, he's got his own room.

Paul: He's an only child.

Lee: It seems like he's like a depressed 21 year old.

Notice how Lee, Joshua, and Paul have different opinions on the age of Milo. Lee and Paul both use the text and the illustrations to try and determine Milo's age. Because of the car in the picture, Lee is unclear as to how old Milo is. Paul is confident that Milo is a young boy. The readers do not come to consensus on the age of Milo. The intended outcome is for each member of the discussion to come away with a greater understanding of themselves and the literature being read (Karolides, 1992) not necessarily that they agree on their opinions.

This is an excellent example of back and forth discussion and negotiation. This is often what goes on in a reader's head as he is negotiating the text as he reads for understanding (Fountas and Pinnel, 2001).

In reading we must have a strong understanding of the vocabulary as we make meaning of the words. In the discussion below the group is working together as they build on their knowledge of words and how the author uses words in the *Phantom Tollbooth*.

Joshua: And they also used a bunch of different other weird words –

like Eric said – it’s like a dictionary.

Lee: Dictionopolis

John: It was funny when the watchdog came he said, “What do you think you’re doing?” And Milo just says, “Sitting down.” And the watchdog goes, “Exactly. Exactly, I’m here to make sure that you don’t do that” and, so, Milo was asking how he got there and the watchdog was, “You shouldn’t be here; you should be thinking” and Milo just doesn’t want to think.

Joshua: And also I just found something that goes with “‘What are you doing here?’ growled the watchdog. ‘Just killing time,’ replied Milo. ‘You see killing time roared the dog so ferociously.’”

Lee: The story also like Eric said (is) a dictionary. It is kind of confusing to get to dictionopolis because he doesn’t know the way and the whether-man wouldn’t help him. And the whether-man confused me by saying if you find my way bring it back to me.

The students noticed various literary terms, such as homophones, and literary devices, such as clichés and plays on words. Of course, the students learned these concepts through direct instruction by the teacher. The use of literature

circles demonstrated that the students were able to understand and apply the concepts in their self-directed literature conversations. This reinforced

Students’ insights and reflections...drove the learning in literature circles.

my understanding that I can step away from the literature discussions and allow my students to engage in quality literature circles independently.

It should be noted that during my daily reading workshop classes I continually model and teach the very reading strategies that my students are drawing on and using in literature circles. My reading workshop class consists of daily silent reading and a small group mini-lesson on an instructional level book. I believe a key component that helps the student apply these skills is the motivational opportunity of peer discussion of a book in a safe environment.

Of course, my classroom is not perfect and neither were our literature circles. There are times when I, as the teacher sitting on the outside of the circle, must step in and clarify, redirect, or move the discussion along. These interventions are isolated and do not happen often.

Summary:

Literature circles gave me the opportunity during reading class to step out from the focus of the children while allowing the literature, author, and reader a chance to take center stage. I believe that the modeling and direct instruction that I used helped the students conduct quality literature circles. These literature conversations sparked motivation in all of my students. It, especially, seemed to motivate the typically under-achieving student like Joshua. The circles also fostered communication skills as the students learned to understand conversational rules and appropriate ways to respond while not always agreeing with an interpretation. These discussions encouraged a deeper understanding of literature as students were not worried about the teacher's approval or lack of approval. I was amazed at the excitement in my students' voices as they discussed the books they were reading. The students were more engaged than if I simply directed them towards one "correct" teacher-led understanding.

Circles provided a chance for my students to use higher level thinking skills in an authentic conversation. Students' insights and reflections, rather than ready-to-use questions from the teacher, drove the learning in literature circles. The students also learned to generate their own ideas and contribute to thoughtful conversation about what they read. This kind of practice helped to develop thoughtful, competent, and critical readers (Brabham & Villaume, 2000).

Conclusion:

After a full year of using literature circles in my classroom, I simply wonder now why I didn't use literature circles earlier. Will your students benefit from using literature circles? Step into my classroom and see the excitement in literature circles. Students enjoy reading and they love to talk about what they have read. I invite you to step back and let your students read and discuss, watch them grow in their conversations about the books they are reading and, most importantly, see them excited about reading. You might have a student say "I love reading for the first time." *LEJ*

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Appendix 1:

A Class-Created List of Literature Circles Guidelines

- Stay focused on the discussion
- You must read before the discussion
- Don’t interrupt but be ready to speak
- Listen
- Think about what you are reading
- Disagree agreeably and tell why
- Ask questions
- Share what makes sense
- Ask opinions – like did the character do the right thing?

Appendix 2:

Reading Response Form

1. Title and Author:
2. For Discussion Date:
3. Reading Assignment:
4. A part that I would like to share with my group: (Write the first and last word and the page number.)
5. One question that I have about the reading:
6. Wonder Words: Write three words from your reading that you wonder about and want to talk about with your group.

Appendix 3:

What went well? What do we need to work on?

- People were unwilling to share
- We didn't know what to do when finished
- Noise level
- Active listening
- Not enough to talk about
- No one is responding
- Off task

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Go and Teach... The Teacher as Life-Long Scholar

by Jane Buerger

One of the on-going challenges of serving in a Teacher Education Program involves identifying qualities of excellent educators and then developing strategies for developing these in both pre-service and in-service teachers. One quality that seems to generate some debate is whether personal scholarship is important for classroom teachers. On one hand, it's hard to imagine a good teacher who does not have a strong background in whatever he or she is supposed to be teaching. On the other hand, I've heard arguments against minimum academic requirements for teachers. I have to admit that I find these arguments surprising. If David Letterman were to develop a *serious* "Top 10 List of What Makes a Good Teacher," I'd hope that "Academic Preparation" and a true "Love of Learning" would be appear somewhere near the top.

I'm sure that each of us has had experiences with highly intelligent, well-educated individuals who just weren't able to make their subject matter intelligible to their students. These teachers may have a true love of their subject, but they may also spend much class time talking to their chalkboards, oblivious to whatever is going on in the rest of the classroom. Some students can thrive under such teachers; many others find learning in such an environment nearly impossible.

Incidentally, suspicion of well-educated people isn't new. I'm reminded of Festus, governor of Judea, shouting at St. Paul, "Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad." (Acts 26:24).

Learning can also be extremely difficult when a teacher isn't well prepared in the subject he/she is attempting to teach. Over the years, I've had many opportunities to observe student teachers. I really enjoy this part of my job since new teachers often have an energy level and an ability to relate to students that makes visiting their classes a real treat. There have been times, unfortunately, when I've visited a student teacher who was clearly unprepared to teach the subject matter. No amount of energy could hide that fact: observing such a

class is actually painful.

It is important for teachers to have knowledge of the basic facts, concepts, and skills that they are trying to teach, but that just isn't enough. Since knowledge is constantly changing and expanding, it is just as important that teachers continue to expand their knowledge base. That is why I advocate the concept of "Teacher as Life-Long Scholar." In fact, I believe quite strongly in the following statements.

A teacher should be able to model what it means to be a student.

Let's start with the good Lutheran question, "What does this mean?"

A teacher's undergraduate education usually provides knowledge of basic facts and concepts. Although this knowledge is valuable, teachers need to move away from simply giving out information and asking rote questions which require simple recall. Teachers need in-depth understanding of the subjects that they teach.

Here's a second good Lutheran question, "How is this done?"

A teacher should be able to ask questions and be willing to hunt for answers.

I once studied with a mathematician who believed that posing problems was at least as important as actually solving problems. He also believed that the best questions were those that did not have simple or easy-to-find answers. The truth is that the process of problem solving often leads the solver to discover knowledge that is new, at least to him or her. Teachers who challenge themselves by asking questions or posing problems will gain a deeper understanding of the subjects that they are studying. Given the wealth of information that is available in the media and on the internet, it is vital that teachers understand the basic methods of inquiry for the subjects that they teach.

A teacher should know how to help students hunt for answers.

When teachers learn to pose questions for themselves, they can help their students to do the same. Once students start asking questions, they may expect the teacher to have an answer ready at all times. Of course, we teachers know that, even if we know the answer, sometimes it is better not to answer a question immediately. There are times when it's actually more important to guide the children to find out the information themselves. For example, some questions in science might be best resolved by conducting a simple experiment while questions about historical events might involve reading a book or perhaps talking to someone who was an eyewitness. Simple mathematics can help children find information about weather patterns or their classmates' favorite pets. A

teacher must be prepared to provide guidance as children attempt to make sense of their schoolwork and their world (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Teachers should have a “grown-up” understanding of the structure of the subjects that they teach.

One of the challenges I faced while teaching my mathematics education courses was trying to convince some of the early childhood teacher candidates that they really needed to *understand* mathematics and that “loving kids” just wasn’t enough. Here I’ll use an example that actually happened during a lesson taught by a pre-service teacher candidate. The teacher candidate was presenting a lesson designed to introduce second graders to fractions. This particular candidate was personable and creative so I have no doubt that

the lesson was engaging for the children. In fact, one of the seven-year-olds announced that fractions were “just like dividing!” The teacher candidate responded,

...having interests outside of the...curriculum is important to keeping our lives in balance.

“Oh, no! They’re nothing like dividing.” This may be an extreme case, but the point is that the teacher candidate needed more than factual knowledge of how to show one-half of a circle; she needed to be able to relate the concept to other areas of mathematics.

In order to plan lessons that make sense and are interactive and meaningful, teachers must understand the basic organization of the subject. They must be willing and able to go beneath the surface of a subject and see relationships between concepts within an academic discipline and between the disciplines themselves (Goodlad, 1994; Stronge, 2002).

Teachers should continue to learn – for the sake of learning.

Even though most of us were required to complete general education requirements as part of our undergraduate studies, it’s obvious that knowledge is constantly changing. I believe that it is extremely important for teachers to continue to learn – to be true life-long scholars. One aspect of this is the usual expectation that teachers earn advanced degrees and/or participate in professional development activities. These activities often reinforce what we learned as undergraduates.

Exploring new interests is also important. We need to keep a sense of curiosity about how things work, an interest in how people connect with their surroundings, and a sense of wonder as we encounter God’s creation.

Our God has given us so many things to explore and enjoy. Even though it's almost impossible to think of adding one more thing to our already crowded lives, having interests outside of the subjects in the curriculum is important to keeping our lives in balance.

Teachers should continue to learn – for the sake of their students.

If teachers hope to gain some insight into how their students interact with the world, it is imperative that the teachers take the time to learn about the things that the students are doing. This might mean keeping abreast of (and maybe actually experiencing) some of the latest music, movies, and technology. It might mean curling up with Harry Potter instead of a favorite magazine or newspaper. In a school with a diverse student population, it might also mean becoming familiar with the cultures that the students come from.

Teachers should be able to admit that sometimes they don't know all the answers.

I remember situations when students asked questions that I honestly couldn't answer. I also remember the barely-muffled comments such as, "How are we supposed to learn this stuff, if she doesn't know it?" The reality is that: 1. No one person can be expected to know everything; 2. some questions have more than one answer; and 3. some questions have no answer at all. In these situations we should be willing to join our students in looking for solutions. The classroom can become a true community of learners where the teacher becomes a student and a student can sometimes become the teacher.

Teachers should be willing to walk humbly.

Part of being a life-long scholar is admitting that there are gaps in one's own knowledge and understanding. That is the essence of being human. We may make mistakes in how we deal with our students and our colleagues. Sometimes we have to admit, "I'm sorry – I just don't know" or "I'm sorry – I made a mistake." When this happens, we can rejoice that we are forgiven and redeemed by our precious Savior. We can pray for guidance when the next situation occurs, and, when we're feeling particularly inept, we can take comfort in the following words of the prophet Micah.

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). **LEJ**

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Administrative Talk...The Dreaded Faculty Meeting

by Glen Kuck

The old saying, “After all is said and done, more is said than done,” often applies to faculty meetings. Though vital to a school, they can easily digress into mindless wastes of time.

Peter Vajda (2007) has written about what makes meetings in the business world effective. His findings have applications in the world of education as well. Among the things he cites that make meetings unproductive are the following:

- They usually contain an abysmally low amount of information conveyed per minute.
- They often contain at least one person who inevitably gets his turn to waste everyone’s time.
- They easily drift away from the subject.
- They require thorough preparation that people have not taken the time to do beforehand.

He also notes that the more time one spends in meetings, the greater the negative effects.

So, what can a principal do to help faculty meetings be productive? Some thoughts:

Meetings need to start and end on time.

Meetings must be run efficiently. A teacher’s time is important. In the back of the minds of most teachers during a faculty meeting is the thought “I could be grading papers right now.”

Teachers should have ample evidence that decisions will be made by the group as a result of open, honest discussion. Mere lip service to this concept isn’t sufficient.

Teachers need to know from experience that their opinions count.

Participants must follow through on what was decided upon at meetings. Principals are responsible to make sure this happens.

Schools should schedule no more faculty meetings than are necessary.

Meetings should have a written agenda, but time

must be provided for participants to bring up other issues of importance to them.

When helpful, other staff members should be invited; doing so helps the flow of information and engenders a “we” mentality among the people who keep the school working.

Meetings shouldn’t begin with a complaint or problem. Doing so sets a negative tone for the rest of the meeting.

The principal should not be seated at the head of the meeting table or behind a desk, separated from the other participants. Doing so symbolizes an adversarial relationship. If possible, the participants should be seated in a circle. It facilitates discussion and creates a more democratic atmosphere.

If an issue involves only a few people and doesn’t have any direct bearing on the group as a whole, it’s best if the issue is handled by the people involved at a time other than during a faculty meeting.

Vajda also brings up an interesting point about silence – the purpose of meetings is not to talk, it’s to create ideas, arrive at solutions, and make plans. Silence is helpful in making these things happen. A well-placed minute or two of silence gives the participants a chance to assimilate information, reflect, and create. It helps them to determine the deeper aspects of an issue and to create solutions that weren’t immediately obvious.

Faculty meetings provide an important time for teachers to laugh, commiserate, and grow together. It’s important that meetings fulfill their potential so each teacher feels strengthened by being a part of a team working for common goals.

An analogy can be made between faculties and bands. When problems arise, a faculty can react like a marching band or a like jazz band. If members of the marching band begin walking into and over each other, they each might just keep walking as they had been, convinced that they are right and the others are wrong. The results can be disastrous. A jazz band, on the other hand, learns to develop a sense of how best to perform together. They learn to improvise along the way for the good of the final product.

Good faculties are more like jazz bands. The principal establishes the atmosphere and the objectives, and then helps the members of the group work together to attain their goals.

Well planned, well executed meetings are an important part in that process. *LEJ*

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by Jonathan C. Laabs

It is amazing to observe as the baseball season rolls into its last couple months each year how much emphasis players traditionally place on their training. For some, it becomes an opportunity to shine. Rookies can show their stuff after years of preparation and demonstration of performance. Experienced players build upon their strengths and strive to carry their team toward post-season. Those who are injured sit out for a while and use physical therapy to get back to a professional level of competence. For others, it's back to the minor league and more training.

Though money may be a tempting reason for optimal performance in any professional sport, most players are driven by the desire to excel in what they have been trained to do. They take pride in their chosen vocation and seek to meet the standards that are expected by those who pay their salaries and, more importantly, by those who get enjoyment from their performance. Regardless of talent and natural abilities, however, no professional baseball player will make it very far without the proper amount of initial training, ongoing development, and desire to grow.

Educators in Lutheran ministries need to be comparably equipped for ministry. This is our chosen vocation. This is our calling from God. Financial incentives are not the driving force for what we do. We are, however, motivated by the fact that God has placed us into positions of ministry to His people in schools, congregations, communities, and organizations that are spread throughout the world. In response to His special choice for our lives, we strive to do well. Nothing less than excellent is acceptable when we are serving our Master teacher. Being equipped to serve is our responsibility as professional educators and as Christians.

What does it mean to be *A Teacher of the Church*? Each Lutheran educator is encouraged to explore this path by reading Russ Moulds' new book of that title, where he explores the formation of individuals for unique ministry roles that go far beyond skill and technique. All who

teach in Lutheran congregations and schools are in positions of ministry that require a basic understanding and certain assumptions about what that means. Being equipped for that ministry reaches further than “basic training.” For educators in Lutheran ministries, being equipped is a life-long process that requires planning, commitment, and effort. Like other professions, we seek to meet professional standards and performance goals associated with our roles. Unique to our calling, however, are elements that enhance the Christ-centered focus of our broader responsibilities.

How can I as a Lutheran educator be best equipped for my ministry?

Being grounded in the Word of God: Personal and faculty devotions, reading of the Bible and active participation in a Lutheran congregation are means by which we can “fill our cup” and arm ourselves with God’s plan for service and ministry

Ongoing education and discussion about the Lutheran context of education: Coming from a variety of backgrounds in education, family origin and religious practice, educators who find themselves together in Lutheran ministry settings must establish a common understanding and set of beliefs about their collective purpose. This is most often based upon the mission of the institution. In some cases, basic education about Lutheran doctrine, history of the Church, and practical application to our ministry is necessary. In all cases, ongoing dialog and “refreshment” is beneficial.

Collaboration: No one person is best equipped to do everything. Successful schools and congregational education programs are marked by a variety of individuals offering what they can do best toward a common goal. Knowing each other’s strengths and capitalizing on many resources in a coordinated manner will ensure quality and provide for individual growth. Formal collaboration with fellow Christian educators will help to develop the unique characteristics of a Lutheran educator.

Professional development: Graduate courses and professional reading are important, but not sufficient. Daily attention to topics and issues in the world, in the field of education and in the Church are critical to be informed and relevant in our ministry roles. Conferences, workshops, and online continuing education are all means by which we further develop our skills, refine our perspectives, and open ourselves to new ideas. Emphasis needs to be placed upon fellowship and growth opportunities with individuals with whom we have our ministry in common. Local, regional, district and national Lutheran events are planned for the spiritual, social and educational nourishment of Lutheran educators. Plan especially to attend the largest of these (over 4000 participants): the LEA

Convocation, April 24-26, 2008 in Minneapolis, Minn.

These are just a few ideas. Becoming fully equipped as an educator in Lutheran ministries is a lifelong process. Unlike the professional baseball player, we're not limited to a particular game, season, or contract. Lutheran education ministry requires our daily personal and professional attention. Being fully prepared to serve is the best way to respond to God's great calling. May He help each of us be well-equipped with joy.

LEJ

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Multiplying Ministries...Keepers of the Meaning – Those Older Folks Around Us

by Rich Bimler

I love this phrase. Keepers of the Meaning sums up what generations are all about. It's all about telling the story of Jesus and His love. It's about keeping folks of all ages aware of and focused in on what the Lord is doing in and through each of us. It's about being intentional in sharing our faith through word and deed. It's about making the main thing in our life the Main Thing: Jesus Christ. It's about turning our life stories into faith stories.

Think for a moment all of the special people who God has put into your life ...parents, educators, neighbors, pastors, counselors, grandparents ...and on and on. These gifts from God are Keepers of the Meaning as Dr. George Valliant describes them in his classic book, *Aging Well* (Little Brown and Company, New York; 2002).

Keepers of the Meaning are those folks around us who, in the spiritual sense, remind us again and again of who we are and Whose we are. They have continued to tell the story of Christ's life, death, and Resurrection for us. They not only know, but they also share, the meaning of what life is in Christ Jesus.

Take a look at St. Luke 2:25-38, the story of Simeon and Anna. This is where we hear Simeon strongly proclaim his faith with the words, "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel." What a great statement of faith. What a way of, not only being a *keeper* of the faith, but also a teller of the *meaning* of faith.

And then there's Anna. Eighty-four years young and she never left the temple because she was so busy worshipping there with "fasting and prayer night and day." Wow, talk about a Keeper of the Meaning. She continued to "praise God and speak about the Child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

Thank God for Simeon and Anna, and praise God for the Simeons and Annas who appear in our daily lives.

They are the saints among us, living or dead, who have and continue to point us to the Cross and the Empty Tomb. Take a moment to recall some of your Keepers of the Meaning in your life. Thank God for them, tell others about them, and tell them in person, if they are still on this earth.

Dr. Valliant uses the Keepers of the Meaning term to describe the powerful and positive attributes of older adults. He stresses that a major gift that older adults bring to society is “increased experience with justice.” The young need the old more and more to be the judges, the sages, the experienced voices of wisdom and knowledge. This does not mean that older folks know all the answers, but it does mean that their experiences have taught them the role and benefit of patience and the understanding of life.

We multiply our ministries (nice title for a column, eh?) when we intentionally put older adults in contact with children and youth in our classrooms, Bible classes, sharing groups, and other settings. Older adults are waiting to be asked to share, to feel worthwhile, and to become connected with other caring people. And the good news is that the number of older adults in our churches and communities is increasing by leaps and bounds (or, if not by leaps, at least by steps). Invite the grandparents to your class and next retreat, have youth interview the 80 year olds in your church, offer adult /child day care opportunities together, go visit the shut-ins with some children, volunteer at the assisted living place down the street, and certainly call your own Mom and grandparents regularly.

Oh, and by the way, in a spiritual sense, you and I are Keepers of the Meaning also, regardless of our age. We are gifted by God’s Spirit to tell others what He has done in the same ways that other Keepers of the Meaning have told and shown us what He has done. The Holy Huddle of God’s people around us provides us with the opportunity to share our faith as keepers while at the same time being built up in our faith through the Word and Sacrament and through the proclamation of Jesus to and through others. So many people out there need you, and me, as their Keeper of the Meaning. Celebrating this fact is not our job it’s our joy.

Celebrate today the Keepers of the Meaning in your life through the years, and right now. And celebrate the fact that you and I are Keepers of the Meaning to others as well. And help put older adults, the veteran Keepers of the Meaning, in ministry range of those with whom you live and serve.

What a Gift. What a Life. What a God, in Christ Jesus.

Thanks for being a Keeper of the Meaning, regardless of your age.

LEJ

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