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It's the Private Moments

This issue of Lutheran Education devotes itself primarily to the Lutheran teacher. On the pages that follow the reader is presented a segmented narrative of Susan Johnson's first-call experiences and her eventual understanding of God's purposes for her in being given the assignment. Rodney Rathmann explores the level of satisfaction among a sample of LCMS teachers that represents both the inexperienced as well as the veteran. While Daniel Flynn reminds us that the classroom is not for therapy, he also provides assistance in understanding the importance of relationships with students and how teachers as counselors might lead their charges to look beyond themselves and through the gospel transform themselves. Finally, Dennis Verseman illuminates the distinctive nature of the Lutheran teaching ministry.

As this is being written, many of those to whom this particular issue is being directed, i.e., the Lutheran teacher, are preparing for the beginning of another school year. The ensuing thoughts, however, are not directed solely toward the Lutheran teacher, but rather they grope to articulate the commonality that we too often forget exists between our counterparts in many classrooms around the world.

In this journal's previous issue, Dwayne Mau provided a helpful understanding of the public/private continuum. Allow me to apply the public/private distinction in a different context.

Just like a family, education, including all levels of Lutheran education, has both a private and a public face. Many families are able to present a loving, harmonious image to their friends and community. Some, however, behind the public façade, struggle with a private reality of conflict, anger and even violence within the home.

Education's problem is just the opposite. For years the public perception of schools has been programmed to a mindset of negativity. Test scores aren't rising; the achievement gap isn't closing. Educators are blamed. Principals lack vision; we need to improve their "skill sets." Teachers are resistant and don't care about children; we need to get them to "reinvest." As parents increasingly seek options such as Lutheran schools to avoid these perceptions, and if we actively seek to recruit them and in the process receive government funds either directly or through assistance to students, there exists the potential for the public face of Lutheran education to be increasingly subjected to the
same kind of negativity by segments of society who profit by promoting such, I believe, erroneous perspectives in public education. One can envision a future with the media getting a pat on the back for rooting out corruption and incompetence in Lutheran schools. Is it really all that far-fetched to conjure up the possibility of politicians getting poll boosts using children enrolled in Lutheran schools that they've "protected" as props for their campaign or as a manifestation of their virtue? (Remember, no court has ever declared that nonpublic schools are immune from reasonable government regulation.) How long will it take before education consultants, many of whom haven't talked to a child in years, supplement the big bucks they already receive by doing "one night stand" seminars, taking their dog-and-pony shows on the road from Lutheran school to Lutheran school? Will it be just a short time before we get bombarded with the latest "Crisis in Lutheran education"? When that occurs, and I believe it might, it will be the Lutheran classroom teacher, joining her public school counterparts, who will wind up with mud on her face—the public face, that is.

What will make this so exasperating is that America won't have a crisis in schooling—public, private, Catholic, Lutheran, etc.—it will have something much worse, just as it has now: it will have a crisis of child-rearing. This will not be news, but critics will routinely omit—just as they do now—the obvious: that the family is the cradle of learning, the essential socializing institution. And they'll do this while continuing to bemoan low scores and demanding change.

But what of the Lutheran teacher? What is and will continue to be the reality behind the closed doors of hundreds of Lutheran classrooms from pre-school to university? The day-to-day interactions among Lutheran schoolteachers and the students they serve will be, just as they almost always have been, caring, creative and dynamic. The bonds between teacher—not just the Lutheran teacher, mind you¹—and student are profound and powerful and exist below the radar of pontificating media, politicians, and consultants playing the Chicken Little theme. The friendships of teachers and their students are deep and long lasting, because few bonds are more powerful than those formed by learning and seeking truth together.

The pontificators are unable to deal with this private reality because they don't understand it and they can't measure it. The private reality of any school, Lutheran or

¹ There are times when I get the distinct impression that we Lutheran teachers believe we have the corner on the caring, creative, and dynamic market, and public schools and their teachers have the corner on the sin market. As the spouse of a recently retired public school teacher and having spawned another currently serving in public education, I can unequivocally say this is pure drivel. They and their colleagues cared and care a lot—it's not just "Lutheran Schools" that "Care A Lot" as the old Lutheran Education Association bumper sticker perhaps unintentionally, but still disparagingly, implied.
otherwise, is much more meaningful. It is one of relationships among teachers and students, relationships which are profound and spiritually imperative. These powerful forces are irreducible, because quantification fails in the crucible of tenderness that lives at the heart of any good classroom. Asking a pontificator to assimilate this is similar to asking the visually challenged to absorb a painting by Renoir. They might be able to tell you what they heard about it or what they think it should be, but never what it is.

Before the pontificators discount this observation as touchy-feely poppycock, they should read the letters students write to former teachers. Invariably it is not the math formula students memorize or the research paper they pound out at midnight that students remember. When they reflect on the important moments in their schooling, students write things like, “You made me believe in myself,” or “You made school a happy place for me,” or “When I was in your class, I always felt loved and understood,” or “Your role has been that of a father, cheerleader, a brother in Christ,” or more extensive ruminative prose such as the following:

I’m reading Frank Peretti’s newest book, The Wounded Spirit [which] is about bullying and the damage it can cause. In part of his book Peretti writes, ‘God has created us in His image and put each one of us here on earth for specific purposes. That means that every human being has intrinsic value, preciousness, meaning, and dignity.’

[T]his was not the first time I had heard this message. No, the first time I heard this message was on an August Monday and you were introducing yourself, the class, and perhaps your philosophy of teaching. I remember your words about us and to us because no teacher has ever said them to me.

This was memorable; however, what came next, I’ll never forget. You actually lived those words! We both knew you could not have done it perfectly, but you lived your relationship with my classmates and with me in such a profound way that I had no choice but to believe you did think of me as a precious treasure of God. Thank you for that lesson. . . . From [it] stems many other truths on not only teaching, but living. Thank you for really listening and pushing me towards what God would have me become.

This kind of breakthrough and revelation is and will continue to be accomplished by teachers and students daily and hourly. In Lutheran classrooms by Word, word, and deed; in public schools, limited by Constitutionally mandated neutrality, through word and deed—though does not the Word become active in word and deed? Be that as it may, it’s the private moments that beat the public face of education, Lutheran or otherwise, all to pieces.♯
Lutheran Schools –
Distinctiveness of the Teaching Force

Dennis Versemann is retired after 40 years in the teaching ministry and lives in Yucca Valley, CA. He received his Ed.D. from the University of Michigan in 1998. He most recently served as principal of St. Paul Lutheran School, Ann Arbor, MI following 22 years on the faculty at Concordia University, Ann Arbor during which time he held various positions: Registrar, Director of Teacher Placement, Director of Student Teaching, and Vice-President for Student Services.

Throughout its history, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has sought to maintain a unique and distinctive school system through the recruitment, education, and employment of teachers in its schools. The task of developing and maintaining a distinctive teaching force was pursued primarily through the development of a church-controlled system of teacher education institutions. Among the various private church-related schools, the Missouri Synod is the one church that has emphasized an educational program for its teachers that not only meets requirements for the teaching of church doctrine and Bible history, but also meets requirements for certification requirements of the various states.

Private Schooling or Public Schooling

In colonial America the church operated most educational institutions. However, during the nineteenth century, free public schooling began to emerge. Such was the growth of this system of free, public education that by 1919 the distinguished
educational historian Elwood P. Cubberly wrote, “Schools in the United States . . . arose as children of the Church, but from instruments of religion they have been gradually changed into instruments of the State” (p. 13).

Although public schooling continued to grow in popularity and compulsory school attendance laws were adopted in the United States, these laws continued to permit parents to send their children to schools operated by churches. As a result many churches developed systems of schools that centered on the provision of a distinctive religious education. Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Christian Reformed, and Lutheran church bodies continued to develop their own educational systems. In recent years, the growth of fundamentalist Christian schools has expanded in many parts of the country.

The growth of these religious (and other private schools) in the past few decades has kindled debates about the relative merits of public vs. private schools in meeting the legislative intent of compulsory school laws. Many education analysts and legal scholars cite the “common school” heritage of public schools to argue that public schools are the premiere and most effective agent for transmitting a common set of values to America’s youth. These analysts argue that market forces drive these private and religious schools to cater to the narrow and particularistic interests of the parents they serve.

Other analysts believe that private—and especially religious—schools are essential to the preservation of pluralism and religious freedom in the United States, and that private schools have an important role to play in a democratic society. Levin (1990) strikes a balanced viewpoint on this issue when he notes: “The challenge (in a nation with public and private schools) is that of preserving the shared educational experience that is necessary for . . . preserving the existing economic, political, and social order while allowing for some range of choice within that” (p. 252).

**Origins of the Church and its Schools**

Since the arrival of the Saxon Lutherans in Perry County, Missouri, in 1839, the Lutheran Church that is known today as The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) has emphasized the importance of maintaining a distinctive system of education that integrates the faith into all aspects of the educational process. An important provision incorporated into the first constitution of the synod required local congregations to provide a Christian education for their children. It was held that the best way to meet this objective was through the establishment of full-time Christian Day Schools. The synod originally made it a condition of membership that each congregation had to establish such a school (Krauss, 1922).
Wolbrecht (1947) described the condition of education in the synod during its earliest period when he wrote, “The best traditions in the church held that the purpose of all education was to equip individuals for competent Christian living here and hereafter. Accordingly, it was expected that there should be provided grade schools for all” (p. 85). Thus, even in the early days of the synod and even before the synod was officially organized, full time Lutheran elementary schools, ones that emphasized not only preparation for eternity but also preparation for the life here on this earth, became the foundation for the Christian education program of LCMS congregations.

The first Saxon immigrants, realizing the importance of having teachers and pastors available if their churches and schools were to be maintained, also established a “seminary” for the training of those needed to maintain the churches and schools. Stellhorn (1947) reports that this first “seminary,” established in 1839, resembled an elementary school because the students all were under the age of 15. However, after some struggles with maintaining the institution and hiring an instructor, in 1843 the “seminary” was given the express purpose of training pastors and teachers.

The system of LCMS teacher education is unique among the various educational systems in the United States. It is the only system of higher education that was developed for the specific purpose of preparing teachers for the schools of the church.

Earlier Lutheran groups had come to America from various European countries and had settled during colonial times. Beck (1939) notes that many of these groups formed their own religious schools, having come from countries in Europe where schools were a part of the church. The teachers for these schools had been educated in the more secular universities in Europe. These various Lutheran groups did not provide for the education of teachers to replace these European educated ones and, as a result, over a period of years these schools failed.

One of the main lessons that the early Missouri Synod fathers learned from these other Lutheran groups was to make sure that teachers were educated to understand the philosophy of Christian education that was the main mission of Lutheran schools. The continued emphasis on the mission of Lutheran schools influenced the
development of the curriculum required of those preparing for the teaching ministry of the synod. Although mission statements provide focus for the operation of these schools, teachers are the part of the makeup of the school that gives the focus and reality for those statements.

In this respect, the system of LCMS teacher education is unique among the various educational systems in the United States. It is the only system of higher education that was developed for the specific purpose of preparing teachers for the schools of the church.

**Teachers and School Mission**

A review of some literature on teachers in private schools can help illuminate the challenges that Lutheran schools face as they continue to educate and prepare a specially trained teaching force. Many argue that the Catholic school system lost some of its uniqueness and orientation toward the Catholic religion when the composition of its teaching force changed. As the pool of teachers drawn from the Catholic clergy or members of Catholic religious orders declined, the system was forced to hire teachers from the same labor pool as the public schools. Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1939) suggest that questions began to be raised about the ability of the Catholic school system to preserve the Catholic character of its educational programs. The lay instructors hired in Catholic schools for the most part came from a program of education and training identical to that of the teachers in public schools.

Rose (1988) found that those who organized the evangelical Christian schools in her study chose the teaching force based on the personal character and commitment of the teachers. These teachers usually were members of the sponsoring church, taught the Bible, and reinforced the religious beliefs and values that parents considered important. Academic credentials and pedagogical expertise were less of a determining factor in the hiring of these teachers.

Wagner (1990) conducted research on a more diversified group of evangelical, Christian schools and found that much of the culture in the schools she studied had been borrowed from the surrounding society. She reported the ideology of these schools was “a gray amalgam of conservative Christian ideals, American popular culture, and professional education techniques braided together at the schools” (p. 5). The teachers in these schools had been trained in secular universities—many had taught in the public schools—and as a result had brought with them a set of cultural traits that, although they were altered within the Christian school setting, still reflected the culture of the surrounding public community. As a result of these patterns of teacher preparation and experience and the need for the schools to appeal
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to a broad constituency. Wagner concluded that these schools looked very much like the public schools.

The schools referenced above are an integral part of the environment of the supporting church body, but more importantly, they are also impacted by the surrounding society and culture. Thus, the researchers who studied these schools suggest that the surrounding society and culture have more of an impact than may readily be evident to the casual observer. These authors conclude that hiring teachers who are primarily from the same labor pool as those hired in the public schools is a major concern for private, religious schools. The result of hiring teachers with a secular educational background leads to these teachers importing into the system values and viewpoints from outside the system.

Teacher Preparation in the Missouri Synod

As the LCMS began to develop, it immediately began to organize its own teacher training institutions. Schmieding (1935) notes that even before the synod was formally organized, private individuals had opened two institutions designed to prepare teachers for the Lutheran schools then in existence. The curriculum in these two institutions was based on the subjects taught in the common schools, with considerable emphasis on religion, English, and instrumental music. English was emphasized so teachers could help students make the transition from German to English. Thus, the emphasis was on instruction in the “common school subjects” and also religion. These two institutions were later taken over by the synod and became a part of the first teacher’s seminary.

This first “teacher’s seminary” as it was called, was established in Addison, Illinois, in 1864. Wolbrecht (1947) reports that even after establishing a separate teacher’s seminary, the synod was continually confronted with the lack of trained personnel for its schools. This led to the establishment of a second teacher’s college at Seward, Nebraska, in 1894.

The emphasis in these early teacher-training institutions was on religious instruction in addition to preparation in the various subject areas. Schmieding (1934) notes that as these institutions continued to develop, adjustments were made to meet demands made upon the Lutheran educational system arising from an American environment. They remained strong language and pedagogical institutions and continued to emphasize the importance of instructions in religion.

Throughout its history, the Missouri Synod continued emphasis on the preparation of top quality teachers for its schools. A resolution passed at the 1917 synodical convention read in part: “Every congregation should provide for a good
school, a suitable building, all necessary teaching equipment, and capable instructors in sufficient numbers" (Proceedings, 1917, p. 32). It further resolved, "That the needs of elementary education be regarded as an important determining factor in planning the curricula of our colleges, normals, and seminaries" (Proceedings, 1917, p. 97).

As the teacher education programs at River Forest and Seward expanded, the emphasis continued on providing quality programs that not only emphasized the normal school curriculum but also emphasized the religious aspect of teacher education. The synod encouraged these schools to fulfill requirements for accreditation as they began to expand their programs to four-year bachelor degree granting institutions.

At its convention in 1935, the synod approved the following recommendations of a "curriculum committee for normal schools": "(1) that a third year be added to the normal course at River Forest; (2) that a third year be added to the normal course at Seward; (3) that the faculty at River Forest be encouraged to institute correspondence and extension courses for teachers" (Proceedings, 1935, p. 100). When introducing this resolution, the committee stated these would be steps toward a full college course of four years.

As a follow-up to these recommendations, at the 1938 convention, both colleges were granted status as four-year degree granting institutions (Proceedings, 1938). The two teachers colleges continued to strive for excellence in their programs by achieving accreditation with the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, River Forest in 1950 and Seward in 1953. Both of these institutions also gained recognition by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), again underscoring their commitment to broader standards of educational excellence in professional education circles.

As one studies the history of teacher education in the Missouri Synod, there is continuing emphasis on training teachers that were properly certified by accrediting agencies. The system of teacher education continues to keep up-to-date in its requirements for meeting the policies established by states along with national accrediting agencies. All of the colleges of the Concordia University System have programs of teacher education that are accredited by the state in which the individual institutions are located. In addition, most also have NCATE accreditation.

While meeting state requirements, the colleges continue to emphasize the preparation of teachers who understand the Christian philosophy of Lutheran schools. This emphasis led to the development of a special form of synodical certification which indicated that a teacher education graduate had met not only all of the standards as found in public sector certification but also the unique aspects of
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Lutheran teacher education.

Historically there have been some changes in the specific requirements to meet the criteria, but the general concept has not changed. Schmieding (1935) lists the curriculum that prospective teachers had to complete in the early days of the first teacher’s college of the synod. About 20% of the course work required of prospective teachers for the Lutheran schools emphasized some phase of religion and theology.

The Missouri Synod’s emphasis on teachers receiving training in the religious aspect of education is reflected in several resolutions passed at synodical conventions. “That teachers be encouraged to continue to study privately and attend conferences, so that they will become ever more efficient in their work, especially also in the work of teaching religion and giving their pupils a Christian training” (Proceedings, 1926, p. 81). “That the needs of Christian education be regarded as an important determining factor in planning the curricula of our colleges, normals, and seminaries” (Proceedings, 1932, p. 130). This resolution emphasized the need for the Christian aspect of Lutheran schools not only in the teachers colleges but in the seminaries as well. Since pastors were charged with some supervision of the schools and in some instances still taught in the schools, it was important for them to understand the philosophy of Lutheran schools.

Continuing Education for Teachers

To assist those who were already teaching, but had not received all of the course work in religion and theology, the synodical convention in 1956 passed a resolution that encouraged the beginning of a process that would provide a way for the teachers colleges to offer the necessary course work required for synodical certification through summer classes, night schools, or by correspondence.

The 1989 convention Proceedings indicate that the Board for Parish Services reported a continued need for the synodical colleges to provide course work in Old and New Testament, Christian doctrine, evangelism, and the teaching of the Christian faith. This is the course work that would lead to synodical certification.

Thus, the synod continued to emphasize the importance of having teachers in Lutheran schools that have received their professional training in one of the colleges of the synod. Teachers who graduate from these schools should be knowledgeable in the philosophy of Lutheran education and understand the doctrinal position of the church. In addition to the undergraduate education that is required for synodical certification, the synod has developed various in-service opportunities for teachers who have completed their undergraduate education to continue their growth in understanding their role as Christian teachers. In the early years of the history of the
synod, a system of “teachers’ conferences” was organized in various, regional locations. In the early years, many of these conferences included both pastors and teachers meeting together to discuss topics related to education and schools. The first constitution of the synod included the requirement that these conferences be held (Synodical Handbook, 1927).

Stellhorn (1963) stresses the conferences were organized for the improvement of the school through the professional advancement of the teachers. Topics ranged from religious instruction to discipline and methodology in all areas of the curriculum. These conferences were an informal teacher’s seminary and a definite means of in service training.

Another form of professional development for in-service teachers in Lutheran schools was provided through the publication of a professional journal. The Evangelisch-Lutherisches Schulblatt (Evangelical Lutheran School Journal), a professional magazine for teachers, became an official publication of the synod in 1865. This journal was published for use by the teachers in the system, providing an opportunity for them to receive more information about education and schools. The name was changed to Lutheran School Journal in 1922; today it is known as Lutheran Education.

In 1869 the synod established its own publishing company, Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis, Missouri. At various times, this publishing house prepared textbooks for use in the schools; however, its main function was to prepare religious materials for use in the churches and schools. One of the strengths of this publishing company is its preparation of a unified religion curriculum for use in Lutheran schools.

**Trends in the Composition of the Synodical Teaching Force**

As one studies the history of the teaching force within the LCMS, one discovers some interesting trends that have occurred over the years. In its early history, the Missouri Synod required congregations to form schools as a condition of admittance to the synod. However, many times the demand for well-qualified teachers outstripped supply and/or congregations could not afford to employ a teacher in addition to a pastor. As a result, pastors many times were required to teach in a congregation’s school in addition to assuming pastoral duties. The concern was always to have teachers in the schools that were capable instructors, especially in the area of religious instruction.

Data gathered from synod’s Statistical Yearbooks, 1884 to 1920 indicate that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many schools were taught by pastors. In 1915 there were 2,350 teachers in the synod. More than 1200 of those were pastors.
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During the early part of the twentieth century the emphasis was placed on recruiting males other than pastors for the teaching profession. As the education profession came to stress the importance of pedagogical training in the preparation of teachers, and as state certification requirements for entry into the teaching profession increased, it became more and more difficult for synodical leadership to justify the use of pastors as teachers.

Historically, the role of males in teaching received special emphasis in the Missouri Synod. From the earliest days of the synod, Lutheran doctrine held that a person who occupied the position of teacher in one of the congregation's schools was a member of the "ministry" of the church. Since the position of Minister of the Gospel in the church was reserved only for males, and since teachers were defined as ministers, individuals appointed to permanent teaching positions in Lutheran schools were, by virtue of church doctrine, males only.

The definition of teaching as a part of the Lutheran ministry, and the restriction of the ministry to males, was one of the central challenges faced by the system of Lutheran schools as it sought to recruit, prepare, and employ teachers during much of its history. The teaching force came to be dominated by men, educated in the teachers colleges of the synod.

During the 1940's and 1950's the role of women as teachers in the schools of the synod became a major issue of the synod. As the need for teachers for the schools of the synod became more acute, the synodical teachers colleges began to enroll more women. Prior to 1960 hiring and placement practices in the Lutheran school system favored allowing males to obtain full, synodical certification before entering the teaching force while encouraging female teachers to be placed into teaching positions before they completed their program, with the stipulation that these positions were on a temporary basis.

However, with increasing numbers of teacher education graduates available to the Lutheran schools in the 1950's, and as a result of increased certification requirements for teachers, the situation of women in the labor market of Lutheran schooling was changing. In 1959, the synod stipulated that by 1966 all women who were placed into teaching positions in Lutheran schools were to have completed the baccalaureate degree. Thus, the synodical leadership no longer looked favorably upon the practice of using women enrolled in the synodical teachers colleges to fill emergency vacancies. Another part of this same resolution resolved that "women now in service without a baccalaureate degree be urged to continue their in-service education until they have fulfilled degree requirements and the standards of the
church” (Proceeding, 1959, p. 199).

The emphasis of the synod continued to be one of preparing teachers, whether male or female, who not only met certification requirements of the states but also met requirements for the Lutheran Teacher Diploma.

Maintaining a Distinctive Teaching Force

As the synodical college system expanded to ten institutions, the emphasis continued on preparing teachers to meet the qualifications for synodical certification. However, the colleges were not always able to keep up with the demand, forcing Lutheran elementary and secondary schools to hire some teachers from the public sector. As the number of non-synodically trained teachers increased, the synod’s colleges and universities offered opportunities for teachers trained outside of its colleges to complete the required course work in religion and theology through extension classes, evening classes, correspondence courses, and summer school. The latest development in this area is the offering of colloquy courses through Concordia University Education Network (CUEnet), making it possible for teachers to complete colloquy courses through on-line enrollment.

As the increasing demand for synodically-trained teachers becomes more acute, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will need to continue to find other ways of providing the training necessary for teachers to maintain the unique Christian and Lutheran perspective that characterizes the system’s schools.

These developments demonstrate the synod’s commitment to maintaining a teaching force that is distinctive, one that is able to continue to teach those Christian values that the founders of this synod felt were so important that they committed themselves to begin and maintain distinctive schools that taught these values to children. Oestmann (1994) emphasizes this point when he asserts, “The role of the Lutheran school will change through the ages, but the purpose of the Lutheran school will never change. There will always be a need for institutions such as the
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colleges of the synod to prepare and train our youth for the ministry of the church. The Lutheran school will be able to offer excellence in education with the advantage of sharing the Law and Gospel with each child and family” (p. 91).

As the increasing demand for synodically-trained teachers becomes more acute, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will need to continue to find other ways of providing the training necessary for teachers to maintain the unique Christian and Lutheran perspective that characterizes the system’s schools. If teachers from outside the system are employed to fill vacancies, Missouri Synod colleges and universities will have to continue their emphasis on providing alternatives for teachers to meet synodical certification standards.

The role of the teacher continues to be a vital part of maintaining the distinctive mission of the schools of the LCMS. Teachers who understand the proper application of law and gospel, who understand what it means to integrate the faith, will continue to maintain the unique aspect of Lutheran schools. The colleges and universities of the synod need to strive to meet the demands for teachers for these schools. Teachers modeling the teaching ministry can have a major influence on young people, encouraging them to consider this ministry as their life’s calling. The demand for quality Christian schools continues to expand and teachers continue to be the key ingredient in providing that quality Christian education that parents are seeking.

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Musings on a Lutheran Teacher’s First Year of Ministry

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Colors

From early on, crayons and pictures are the staple of nearly every child. Perhaps you can recall the times when you went to church, Cheerios, crayons, and coloring books in tote. It is even common for many Lutheran churches to pass out Children’s Bulletins with a picture to color printed on the front.

So often, children are given pictures to “fill in.” The lines are created for them, and it is their job to “stay within the lines” and “make a pretty picture.” Teachers and parents strive to have students stop scribbling and color within the lines. Art teachers rejoice when the scribbles are molded into their proper shapes.

Coloring, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. Pictures are beautiful to look at and often represent a person’s feelings or things that are closest to their hearts. What is frightening is when we allow others to dictate how the world should look, in other words, how we should paint or color our pictures.

I was faced with this dilemma as I began my ministry. While the people I was called to serve had all of the best intentions, they painted a picture for
me. They handed me an interesting picture, something like a Jackson Pollock painting, and told me that this was the way it was and that I would soon find these predictions to be true. I cringed, initially, at this painting. I felt like a stubborn child who cries, “But give me my own set of crayons. I want to make my own picture.” I didn’t like the pre-formed shapes handed to me. I wanted to scribble away.

Is that not the challenge of every Christian and especially of the Christian educator? How do we make our own pictures? The world shows us their pictures. We read debates about stem cell research, listen to Dr. Laura Schlessinger tell us what’s “right and wrong,” and we see the world through the eyes of the media or through the eyes of others. It sometimes seems easier to have someone hand us a finished painting rather than figuring out the details for ourselves. How many times have you heard a colleague say, “Oh, that student is trouble. Watch out for her.” Or another comment in the parish, “Pastor is so unresponsive and lazy. You cannot expect any help from him.” It often happens in subtle ways, but others paint the pictures for you.

The danger in this is that you never have the chance to be a true artist. It can be scary, even damaging to your ministry, when someone limits your view of the world to their painting that involves only eight colors. Expanding the palette involves a little work that only comes through the Holy Spirit. The beauty of this is that the Holy Spirit reminds us of the work of Jesus Christ, the ultimate artist. You see, Jesus starts with a clean canvas every day. And throughout the day, we paint ourselves into sin and despair. We begin to believe that the first year of teaching is going to be hell fire and brimstone or we begin to see Johnny as the child with no potential, no desire to learn. We might even begin to doubt why in the world a placement director placed us in a particular situation or why we ever signed a call document. Then Jesus Christ reminds us that the way he paints the pictures of the world is different. He provides us with a new set of brushes or crayons and he gives us the chance to color things with the guidance of his unique lens.

I have to admit, as a first year teacher, I am trying not to let all of the pictures be painted for me. It is a challenge to get to know each student and staff member outside of the opinions of others. It is also the continuing challenge of a Christian to paint pictures with the work of the heavenly artist. It is a daunting task that sometimes leaves me crying out for my “Paint With Water” books. I often want everything done the easy way. I want to have a picture that looks beautiful within three minutes. I want to have strong relationships with my staff, feel welcomed in the church, and have a support network that rivals my days at Concordia, River Forest.

Whether you are a first year teacher or a fifty-first year teacher, may God grant
you the awareness of the pictures that you have hung in the hallways of your life that guide your thoughts, opinions, and actions. May he also grant you patience during those tough days when you have no desire to form new pictures. Have you formed an inaccurate painting of your principal or the president of your university? As a professor, do you keep imparting pictures that were painted years ago and stick to old teaching methods, afraid of letting your students paint the pictures for you? As a teacher, have you taken the time to invite the colleague over to your house, one whom you have perhaps placed on your "hit list?"

While thousands of children will be entering school buildings this fall with new watercolors and new crayons, it might be wise as Lutheran teachers to do the same. It might be helpful to purchase a box of crayons and use it as a reminder to paint your own pictures. But if you’re ever far from your box of crayons, may you find comfort in the message of the cross. For it is Jesus who ultimately hands us the canvas of grace and guides us to paint away, again and again, washing the canvas clean in the blood of the Lamb.

Transformers

I have been spending many hours driving around the city and looking in children’s rooms. This process, known as going on home visits helps build rapport with students before a busy school year begins.

During these visits I noticed that there are some toys that never seem to change; they come back in new versions or variations, but the same general concept remains the same. Barbies are popular for their beauty and because they allow children to make-believe every possible scenario from first dates to camping with friends. Legos remain a staple in every household because they allow children to dream and create almost anything imaginable, or just what is on the front of the Lego bin. And Transformers, even though they come back under different guises, still collect dust and remain fingerprinted and abused by millions of children.

I never owned a Transformer as a child and wondered about the mystique behind them. I can understand why Lincoln Logs and Tinkertoys never go out of style as they encourage children to build and create whatever their imagination desires and is still something valued by adults today. But Transformers? I was at a loss!

It was not until a recent drive to the airport that I realized the attraction of Transformers. I watched one of my students turn his Transformer into about five different creatures. From plane to mega-soldier to ordinary man, there truly is “more than meets the eye” when watching a nine year-old twist and contort the plastic body pieces.
Johnson

I enjoy those individuals who have the same power over me. I relish the fact that when I arrive home in Cedar Rapids for every Christmas, I seem instantly transformed. My hands are magically attracted to the dishtowel, and I find myself drying dishes and conversing with my family. I also transform from a responsible adult into the witty youngest child, the baby of the family. When I travel to Oakmont, Pennsylvania, or St. Louis, or Chicago, I am transformed into my many various creatures: a sobbing child, a playful friend, a compassionate listener, and a mediocre cook. When I arrive in the classroom, my arms are transformed into masters of cursive writing and my face transforms from steely to soft, from strict to gentle. I have begun to realize the beauty of having many different people in your life who transform you: who realize there is “more than meets the eye” and who are okay with seeing your scary, angry face holding weapons of distress or who will laugh at the transformation of a serious person into one who tells funny stories and changes a bleak situation into one of laughter.

Christ has blessed me with many transformers—family, friends, teachers, and fellow members of the body of Christ. I realize the beauty and fascination with transforming what once appeared to be one personality into another. Christ has given each of us unique talents to transform one another. He gives us the gifts of listening, caring, and sharing his Word. He allows us to be messengers of the true transformation, which happens when one kneels at the cross and rises from the power and message of the tomb. As 2 Corinthians 3:18 states, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Christ continues to work through each one of us, his messengers, not only to feel comfortable with seeing one another’s transformations from sinner to saint but also to recognize that we are given the power to transform others lives with the transforming power of the Gospel. Just as Saul the persecutor turned to Paul the preacher, so, too, Christ gives us the chance to witness the many different personalities of each other. And he blesses us with the opportunity to deal with such oddities and confusions by giving us the ultimate transformative tool: the message of the Gospel.

Unanswered Questions

Today was a very interesting religion class. I listened to a barrage of questions about the story of Noah and the ark.

What happened to all of the people God killed in the flood? Did they go to heaven or hell? What did the people eat for food in the ark, especially since they couldn’t kill the animals and couldn’t grow anything in the ark? Did the people in the
ark get cabin fever? How did all of the sea creatures fit in the ark? Or did God let them live in the floodwaters? What was the smell like in the ark? What did they do in the ark? How did the pairs of animals get in the ark?

I often find myself in the situation of the children: asking lots of questions. In some ways, my life as a new teacher parallels the story of Noah and the questions the children have: What will happen to my students when they die? Am I making any impact on their lives—and not only an academic impact but also a spiritual one? What do these children eat for food in the morning that makes them so interesting to deal with? Will teachers and students ever see the light of day—are we allowed to leave the “arks” of our classrooms and schools? Is it possible to cram any more desks in this room? And why has the floor turned into a sea of school supplies? Why do 3rd and 4th graders smell—puberty already? What are we supposed to do in this class? Am I in charge? How did I get two of the same kind of kids in my room—monkeys?

There are days when I often parallel my situation to that of being in the ark. The people in the ark were trapped for 150 days. The school year is longer than that! The people in the ark had animals to deal with and their own family members. I’ve got animals to deal with and my own sets of Shem, Ham, and Japheth: three sets of parents! I want to get out of this flood of waters and set my feet on dry ground soon, too! And some days, many days, I want to jump ship.

Praise the Lord for examples such as Noah. Noah was no one great. God worked faith in him, and he had a situation on his hands that must have been tantamount to space cadet Tommy and ADHD Jon. Through ordinary people like Noah, God showed his mercy. While he was upset with his creation, he spared a remnant. And it’s that remnant of “animals,” so to speak, that gives me a purpose everyday: to teach.
While many days I cry out, “Why me, Lord? Of all the people to spare and set apart as one of your chosen people, why me?” I notice that the Lord doesn’t ask for our qualifications or a job application. Noah probably wasn’t a master carpenter or even a great lion tamer. In fact, he was a sinner, too. And God saw it in his plan to work faith in an ordinary man and to provide us with an example of his grace.

While the rains come crashing down and the boat gets rocky, I rest assured that the storm does eventually subside. The ark may not come to rest until June, but for now, it’s time to kick back and enjoy the chaos inside. And unlike Noah, I don’t have to wait for the reminders of the promises of Christ. Fortunately, I have the examples of that great story: the dove, the rainbow, and the water, to keep me going on my own journey.

**Stories**

A few weeks ago, a good friend of mine visited, and we reached a simple, yet profound conclusion at the end of a conversation: everyone has a story to share.

Stories are strongly advocated by our society. When Barbara Bush used to go read to children across the nation, she received a slot on “World News Tonight with Peter Jennings.” It is rare that you hear anyone say, “Don’t read a story.” Quite the contrary! From six year-olds to sixty year-olds, from storybooks to suppertime stories, stories seem to be highly valued.

I have come to realize that oftentimes the key to dealing with people in society is to listen to their story. It used to seem odd to me, but I’ve discovered that people really want to give you the summary of their life. They usually hit the high, emotional points; maybe they fought in a war or maybe their wife suffered from Multiple Sclerosis. Nonetheless, they are eager to share their story.

I believe part of this really has to do with the fact that in order to get to know a person, you must hear their story first. Everyone’s life consists of many books, but they are in a series. Over a period of time, you will get to know a person. You might get to know their story from volumes 30-40 or maybe you’ll only hear about one volume. But, in order to understand the book you’re reading in a series, or in this case, the person you’re meeting, you must have a background to the other books in the series.

I find that once individuals share their story with you, they are content to form a relationship with you. They breathe a sigh of relief because they know that you know “the rest of the story” (as Paul Harvey would say). Maybe they will choose to read it to you all in one sitting, or maybe it’s a suspenseful story and you’ll hear bits and pieces of it each night over the course of a few weeks or months. Whatever the case,
when you know the whole story, the avenue is opened for a relationship.

The same is true of a congregation. Since arriving, I’ve had a barrage of people who want to tell me the story of St. Paul Lutheran Church. “Do you know the history?” they’ll ask me. And like a typical postmodern product of the 20th Century I’ll shrug my shoulders and think to myself, “No, I don’t and who cares because I’m in the present and I want to live out a new story, not rehash an old one.” But lately I’m learning that I can’t escape history. Whether it’s from a textbook or from the mouth of an authority figure, I’m learning the value of stories. I’ll jump to the wrong conclusions if I don’t read all of the books in the series. Goodness, I might actually try to write the books myself and do serious injury to others and great injustice to the original author.

So, today, I listened to a story. This wasn’t about pancakes falling from the sky, although one of my favorite children’s books does have such scrumptious details! No, this book was about sin—sexual molestation, intolerance, mean-spiritedness, deeply entrenched fears. It was a pretty gray story. And as I listened I found myself in the role of a child practically asking this storyteller, “Why, Daddy, would anyone do such things?”

Lutherans belt out with pride a hymn entitled “I Love to Tell the Story.” Today, I found that phrase has multiple applications. Today, I heard a story of sin. I heard of people who cannot get along. I heard about people so afraid of recurring sin that they stick to their old way of thinking, even if it does hurt others. I heard a pastor’s confession of his own inadequacies on Sunday morning. I heard a father reprimanding his son for climbing the table where the guest book was placed. All around me, I heard the story of brokenness, of frustrated ministers of the Gospel, of people who love Jesus Christ but are scared of sin. I heard my story through all of these: the story of a fallen sinner.

I heard today some pretty interesting stories that help me as I begin to write my own version and make my own history at St. Paul Lutheran. But I also am reminded of the wonderful lines of that old hymn: “I love to tell the story/of Jesus and his Glory/that sacred, old, old story/of Jesus and his Love.” You see, there’s a unique story that transcends all of our earthly stories. It is the story that penetrates our earthly stories. It begins in a Lush Garden, continues in a desert, and seemingly ends in a tomb. But, amazingly, this story keeps being retold and re-experienced in everyday life.

Stop Crucifying Yourself

The scene is a hill, set amid an area of the city that is certainly far from affluent.
On top of that hill is a school and inside of that school is a classroom: the scene of our crucifixion.

Walking into the room is a grim sight as the teacher hangs outstretched from the doorframe, with a clock serving as the crown of thorns. Fellow teachers are dividing the teacher’s lesson plans, carting off her handcrafted mailboxes, looting her book fair profits, and slapping her body on the way out the door, hands full of teaching supplies.

The teacher lies outstretched between the doorframe, head hung in shame. The marks in her hand bear a resemblance to the red pen that was so often clutched between her fingers. The wound in her side was from the verbal abuses by administrators and children. The clock served as the inscription above this makeshift cross, serving only as a reminder that the Law of time and the pressure of getting everything done ultimately crucified this teacher.

The chalkboard filled with assignments and examples, the walls filled with words, class projects, posters, and pictures, the gifts left for the students on their desks: all testimonies of the Teacher’s work. Spilled milk shows the hurried state in which the students left, shocked at their Teacher’s crucifixion.

Am I referring to a teacher’s crucifixion or the Teacher’s crucifixion? The two seem markedly similar in many ways. One died so the other wouldn’t have to—the Teacher died so that all teachers might avoid death.

So, why then do we crucify ourselves? Why do we turn the words of criticism and anger into twisted thorns upon our heads? Why do we try to nail ourselves to
the tree by telling ourselves our teaching isn’t good enough or our school isn’t all that supportive or our classroom would be so much easier if it weren’t for Tommy with ADD and Toni with no support from home? Why do we forget that we have the Teacher standing behind our teaching?

Teachers are good at crucifying themselves, taking the weight of the world on their shoulders. From lesson plans to school sponsored events to keeping in contact with parents, it seems our vocation becomes our crucifixion, at the cost of diminishing the true crucifixion. Teachers often pride themselves in their martyrdom, while at the same time wondering if the workload will ever lighten or the parents will ever stop asking questions.

The beauty of being a teacher is that we get to share the message of the crucifixion and it’s aftermath. We don’t have to live out the crucifixion; we live out the resurrection. While parents will try to pin us down and catch us in our words or administrators will breathe down our backs, we no longer fear the consequences of writing a test that is less than perfect or failing to take action in a particular situation. We climb down from our own makeshift crosses in order to look at the one that adorns our own classroom. We do so only with help from God, who takes our broken limbs and heals them with his powerful words of forgiveness.

Did I Reach the Right Number?

“Then he said, ‘May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?’ He answered, ‘For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.’” (Genesis 18:32)

Abraham is quite the bargainer. He is prying into the mind of God. He’d like some concrete answers and so he phrases his questions in successive order eventually leading up to the number of his relatives that he’d like saved—ten finally.

Whether it’s fifty people or ten people, God’s will is bent on being merciful to those who belong to him. In many ways, it mystifies Abraham. For Abraham sees knowledge of the numbers as comfort and security, but God will offer him none of that. Instead, he will offer himself as gracious and merciful and a true listener to his servant’s plea. But he refuses to play the number game. He refuses to fill out a chart boldly proclaiming the number of people he’ll save. And so, Abraham is left with no Law answers, only the true Gospel. God’s mercy and saving power will transcend all numbers.

There is a peculiar thing that happens in our educational system. We often strike bargains with God. As teachers, we want everything boiled down to simple equations: CAT scores, the number of returning students from last year, how many
students are pulling 3.5 GPAs, the number of As on the math test, or the number of pictures we receive from our students. We like to measure everything in numbers. For when we do that, we can automatically pat ourselves on the back and say, "I’m sure doing my job as a teacher."

Numbers often provide a false sense of security. While they are exact and come by way of careful calculation, they often measure only the visible or what we want them to measure. Just as Abraham phrased his questions to God in number format, we often do the same in our teaching. Am I a good teacher? Look at the test scores or the parent letters or the smiles on the kids’ faces. And so, we measure our worth by all of these things and phrase questions so that the answers fit what we need in the way of affirmation.

So, then, if we’re so good at phrasing questions to fit our needs, how about this one: What have you done today that merits you any favor in the eyes of the Lord? That’s right, how have you made a difference in the kingdom? The simple truth is, you haven’t. If you want to play the numbers game, you’ll never be able to do enough for the Lord. You’ll never win enough souls to his side. You’ll screw up teaching the kids about amphibians. You’ll probably miscalculate a child’s grade, thereby providing yourself with a false sense of security. In short, you don’t do anything favorable in the eyes of the Lord.

Christ does it all. You haven’t made one speck of difference. But Christ working through you has made all the difference. This thing called ministry is never about test scores or “making a difference in one child’s life.” It’s about serving Christ. It’s about accepting his direction, his molding, and his will for your life. It’s realizing that the work you do isn’t measured by the Lord for some extra special spot in heaven. If you’re asking yourself if you’ve achieved enough as a teacher or if you’ve taught the kids everything you need to know, you’ll always fall short. You’ll never do “enough” or “teach everything.” Test scores will never be all perfect and report cards will still make parents’ blood boil. The greatest achievement you can boast about in your ministry will never be one of your own: it will be that which belongs to Christ.

“How many will you save, Lord?” Abraham asked. “How many lives have I touched?” the weary teacher asks. And to both the Lord replies in an ever so subtle way, “Does it matter? Must we measure my mercy and strength in all situations in numbers? Must you limit the power I have in any situation?” And to that, we prayerfully and simply do as Abraham did: return home. We return to the field of planting and feeding seeds, to the place where we know we are being assisted and rest in the knowledge that our worth as an educator isn’t measured in numbers, nor is our relationship with God. I am thankful that Jesus Christ abolished the system of
“measuring up” and instituted the Gospel.

Random Thoughts
What if we did away with grades for a day? What if we stripped the educational system of all the things with which it measures? What would a student do without a percentage on top of their paper? How would they know if they did well? Would it matter if they did well?

What are we teaching kids when we run everything in the way of the Law? You’re given just a few chances before your card is pulled and you lose time off recess. In fact, you only have four times during the day during which you can screw up. Does Religion have to fit in a compact 30-minute space? Does anything have to be 30 minutes long or 5 minutes long?
I’m falling asleep....

Getting the Wrinkles Out
Since the start of my teaching ministry, I have used the iron more times in one quarter of a school year than in all of my combined years of life. I’ve used an iron in ministry both literally and figuratively.

Ironing is one of those tasks that I really despise. It seems when I begin ironing it’s as if I continue to create more work for myself. Just as soon as one wrinkle gets out, the phone rings, I move the iron too quickly, and another wrinkle forms. Or I’ll begin ironing only to find a permanent stain in the garment. No matter how hard I try to iron, my attempts seem to be in vain.

Even if it does supposedly appear as if I’ve done a great job ironing, as soon as I come to school, that all changes. The once beautiful button-down Eddie Bauer shirt becomes wrinkled as soon as I bend over to pick up yet another stray homework assignment. When I begin to sweat profusely because I forgot to make copies for the math assignment, I know deep down that I’ll be ironing again! For the shirt will smell so much from my perspiration that I’ll have to begin the process of washing, drying, and ironing all over again.

For me, there seems to be only one sure-fire way to have perfect clothes. I have a friend named Todd. Todd works at a dry cleaning store, and he’ll often take my clothes and clean them for free. Not only will he clean them, but also they’ll come back wrinkle free. Todd is the only one who can seem to master the task that I cannot.

I have done a lot of ironing since I began my teaching ministry. I try to see everyone else as a beautiful, unwrinkled, unsoiled child of God. I try to view my fellow staff members as wearing crisp button down white shirts—no wrinkles, no
creases, and certainly no stains. And, mind you, they are wearing the brightest white possible.

But something happens in the course of the day. A staff member says something that irks me, and so a wrinkle appears on her shirt. A co-worker refuses to acknowledge my greeting in the morning—a big, fat orange blob appears on his shirt. Left feeling helpless, alone, and incapable of doing my job, I quickly soil everyone else’s shirts.

I recognize my own sinfulness, too, and soon my shirt is wrinkled. I try desperately to get out my iron. I feel uncomfortable in a soiled, wrinkled shirt. My sin and everyone else’s is exposed. It drives me nuts. I want to pull out the ironing board and get to work. But you know my ironing history.

Whether it’s a problem with literally ironing clothes or ironing out the faults of others or the wrongs we do to each other, we all are failures at ironing. This daunting task is never over. Just as clothes need to be ironed over and over again, relationships need to be ironed over and over again. Just as our clothes wrinkle at the slightest movement, so too do we wrinkle one another with the slightest words or gestures.

My friend Todd is the only one who can get literal wrinkles out of my clothes. But I do have another friend who works in the ironing business. His name is Jesus. He’s a very good ironer. In fact, he launders and cleans all day long. He’s the 24-hour dry cleaning and ironing service. He irons out the wrinkles of sin and washes out the stains from it, too.

And, so, today I’ll don a newly ironed shirt. By the end of the day it will be soiled. But thank God that, for each of us, underneath our wrinkled and stained clothing lies a wrinkled and stained body that is washed clean and pressed by the second, by the minute, by the day, by the week. I’m not afraid to let my wrinkles show, for God sends his master ironer to smooth everything out. And I’m not afraid to let Jesus do the ironing through me. He gives me that power, too.

The Book It! Dilemma

Being a Lutheran teacher can bring about some interesting dilemmas in one’s life. I suppose that Mrs. Carver was not expecting the response she received yesterday afternoon.

I have a student in my class who lost a Book-It! certificate, a pizza coupon. While this seems like nothing out of the ordinary, the inner workings of my brain did not respond in the most ordinary of ways. Cheryl came to me asking for a new Book-It! certificate and my first response was, “I don’t re-issue certificates that I already gave
out. I *handed* it to you specifically so you would not lose it.” Cheryl went quietly back to her seat. Case closed—time to move onto managing the “Needing Ritalin” children, as well as to tracking down 15 students’ homework assignments.

The pizza certificate was far from my mind (although pizza itself isn’t usually) until I came home that night to hear a message from Mrs. Carver, asking if I could re-issue the pizza certificate. I was fuming, at first. Here was a parent who had clearly seen that her child had been irresponsible and rather than having her child see the consequences of such an action, she was simply smoothing it over and making me take responsibility by re-issuing another certificate. I thought of all of the times I could have lost something important, such as parent money for field trips or students’ homework, and how I couldn’t go back to the parents and ask for more field trip money. It was my fault for losing it.

And, so, the wheels kept turning. I went to the fitness center still stewing. For goodness’ sake, it was just a pizza coupon. “Just a pizza coupon,” I kept thinking and repeating myself, imitating the repetitive style that Lyle so often uses. But, no, it was something deeper. It was getting to the core and thrust of how we deal with others. Was this a time to show God’s Law or Gospel or both?

I thought about it some more and thought of all the times that maybe I haven’t lost something, but have, in essence, “lost something” because I’ve been a bad steward of what’s been entrusted to me. I thought about the times that I haven’t kept track of homework carefully but have never known if it’s my fault or a child’s. All I know is that it can be a scary feeling. I thought of all of my screw-ups.

I also thought of the times, though, where I have been punished (a “consequence” in educational jargon) for my errors. I ran into a Neighborhood Watch sign at the age of 16 and I had to pay dearly. I neglected to deal with a broken relationship with a friend and it is still broken. I talked back to my parents and was severely lectured.

I thought more and more. Mrs. Carver was the intercessor, pleading for mercy for her daughter. Her insistence appealed to me, like so many of the people in the Bible who insisted that God help them. Cheryl had sent someone on her behalf to plead for her forgiveness.

Oh, yeah, I have one of those intercessors, too. While I wish he were a little bit better at pleading for an unlimited supply of Pizza Hut breadsticks for me, he’s an even better intercessor than Mrs. Carver. He’s got battle scars to intercede for us.

And, so, I made the decision about the lost certificate with both feet planted on different sides of the spectrum. I told Mrs. Carver that God deals with us in two ways and that Cheryl needed to understand that this certificate was undeserved. She had
Ever wonder what happens when people stay nailed to the cross? When the nails keep pounding and the spear keeps stabbing? That person dies. Their every spirit and fiber dies. Everything that once made up their being dies. They lie broken, incapacitated, unloved, and uncared for.

Some days I wonder what it would have been like had Jesus used the same approaches we do as he died on the cross. What if he’d yelled out our infinite number of sins, addressing each of us by name as he did so? What would it have sounded like to hear a laundry list of your sins ringing out across the entire land for all to hear? What if Jesus had hurled the stones back at you and hammered you with nails while he was on the cross?

Praise God that he didn’t!! Praise God that he spoke the words that keep me going day in and day out when I hear the nails pounding: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

These words don’t sting like nail wounds. They are soothing water and bandages on open wounds. They calm the troubled spirit. They silence the pounding of the nails. They are the most beautiful words of the cross.

What do you find yourself doing? Do you find yourself pounding nails into the hands of everyone around you? While this is sometimes necessary, it isn’t necessary to leave those nail marks there. For the words of Jesus drowned out the actions of those who divided his clothing, mocked him by serving him a drink on a sponge, and threw a crown on his head. The nail marks were only important for Thomas to see. The rest of us want to forget the nail marks. For that reminds us of our own sin and the terrible punishment that Christ bore for us. Listen to the cry he gave on the cross and let it permeate your daily interactions, from the cries of the repentant child who forgot his homework to the cries of the teacher who screwed up yet again. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

**KFC and Jonah**

When I was in high school, I had the realization that my Penny Saver paper route (which was delivered once a week and netted what seemed like only a few pennies) was simply not going to cover the expenses of a Lutheran university. And so, I picked up the want ads and found an advertisement for KFC.

$5.50 an hour! Wow! I knew some of my friends had been slaving for over a year at their jobs and were still making $5.25 an hour. I smiled in satisfaction at my discovery and went to KFC, references and pen in hand. To my utter amazement, I was hired on the spot and told to come back to work in two days for a 4:00-8:00 p.m. shift on a Sunday night.
Musings of a First-Year Lutheran Teacher

That Sunday night was one of the pivotal points of my life. Slinging potatoes from large pots into smaller pots, doing dishes, and sweating up a storm, I had no idea that working for Colonel Sanders would involve such drudgery. Having little dish experience at home proved to be a thorn in my flesh as I was left with chicken racks, broilers, potato pans, and crusty gravy pots. I left KFC that night with dirty pants, a few dollars in my pocket, and plenty of complaints under my belt.

When I walked in the door I proclaimed, “I’m quitting that place! I never ate at KFC before this job and that has not changed tonight. I dished up potatoes and did dishes during the whole time! It was crazy! I’m not going back.” My father and mother gave me the bottom line: “You’re going back. You’ve committed to this job and you’re not backing down. We’ve agreed that you may end this job at the end of summer vacation. But this is a commitment. And in this house, we don’t back down on commitments.”

So, the next weekend, I arrived back at KFC with freshly laundered shirt and slacks, a well-rested arm, and a deflated ego. For the remainder of the summer, I learned acronyms to remind me what pieces of meat were white and dark, memorized the menu, accepted Oreo brownies as bribes from the boss, and gave away a few dozen pints of food for my plentiful mistakes.

Jonah and KFC. What do they have in common? Better yet, what do KFC, Jonah, and church work all have in common?

Jonah, too, was presented with a task that seemed like KFC. Pots of potatoes, greasy food—Nineveh had never looked appealing to Jonah and it sure didn’t look appealing to him once he was called there. In fact, he had little regard for the town. These Gentiles were enemies of Israel, too evil for Jonah to associate with. Just as I felt I was above chicken racks and emptying trash, Jonah felt the same way. This was one call that was not for him.

And, so, Jonah took the approach that I so desperately wanted to take: he fled. It seemed easiest, right? When the voice of God tells you to do something important, eternally significant, in fact, maybe it seems like a good choice to flee? After all, one might screw up and make things worse. Maybe Jonah’s own security and eternal salvation was at stake. “Sure,” Jonah thought. “Running away is the best option.”

But you can’t play hide-and-seek with God. You see, he makes it pretty clear that whether you’re physically trying to hide from him or spiritually avoiding him, he has every knowledge of where you are. Adam and Eve couldn’t hide in the garden and Jonah couldn’t hide in the cargo of a ship. God comes to his people with the words, “I’ve found you.” With Adam and Eve, he convicted them and then promised them the greatest gift of all time. With Jonah, he used many of the same tactics: he
reminded him that he had a job to do. And he gave him the strength to do it: “From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry” (Jonah 2:1). The Lord responded to Jonah’s call by giving Jonah a second call, reminding him that it was his word, God’s, that Jonah was proclaiming.

It took the voice of parents and scooping more potatoes for me to realize that I wasn’t going to abandon my commitment at KFC. It took a whale, some time of despair, and a just and merciful God to remind Jonah that God needed him to proclaim God’s word to the people of Nineveh. It often takes this same “reality check” from God, today, to remind us church workers to avoid “jumping ship.”

Situations often seem worse at first. I grew used to coleslaw and the 18-piece meal deal. Jonah shied away from Nineveh, but once he got there, God’s message was met with an overwhelming response. St. Paul’s or St. John’s or Redeemer or Concordia or wherever you are called to serve may seem like a Nineveh or a KFC. Undesirable, full of muck and mire, not fitting with your gifts, frustrating, draining—maybe that’s what your present call seems like. But God does not leave you powerless. He gives you the tools to equip you in this ministry: he gives you his Word to proclaim. He asks none of us to fix the situation, heal the wounds of sin, or ignore the sin of ourselves or those around us. Instead, he gives us his Son and the Word, which proclaims the Word made flesh. This word heals the wounds of sin and works to fix situations. By ourselves, any situation seems insurmountable: a Nineveh or a KFC. But coupled with the power of God, with his perspective, with his words, Nineveh fades from sight. On the horizon are lost souls.

While we struggle, falter, and, at many times, want to jump ship, Christ has called us. We can be reassured of his divine hand as we look back to our call documents and remember how the people of our respective congregations prayed to God and consulted him in the call process. While we know that our situations may seem very much like Nineveh, we also know that Nineveh is where we’re called to serve. For the Ninevites needed God’s word in an amazing way. And the same God that provided Jonah with strength and the words to proclaim to a people that seemed unappealing to Jonah, is the same God who provides you with the strength to minister to your Nineveh, to your KFC. Exercise caution before you jump ship or leave the chicken coop until you recognize that God is calling you to the next chicken coop or Nineveh. The whole world is full of Ninevites in need of God’s Word. Rejoice in your little corner of Nineveh and rely on God’s hand to teach you and show you his strength through your time of service. Just as Nineveh required a three-day stay because of its importance, Christ reminds us through this that our own times in our own Ninevehs are left up to the Father’s timing. While the Ninevites responded
quickly, some people will not. May God continue to help us persevere through the toughest of Nineveh’s and bring us safely to a final resting spot, heaven, with the unbearable Ninevites whom we once thought we could never minister to.

Don’t Lose Your Ground

A few weeks ago, I rode the back roads with a good friend of mine and lamented, “This year has been a complete change for me. Everything from consuming a half pound of peanut butter M & Ms a night to what is important to me.” We continued on those back country roads discussing what the first few of months of my teaching ministry had been like. After a few minutes of discussion, we pulled into the gas station and my friend produced a King Size bag of M & Ms for me, “for old time’s sake.”

Where do I begin with my thoughts of being a first year teacher? I’ve taken a lot of journeys outside of myself and inside of the corridors of my mind. I’ve literally boarded airplanes to get away from the person I’ve become here and to return to the person I once was. And that, quite frankly, has scared me. But each time I’ve boarded those planes or slid behind the wheel of my car or sat in a coffee shop hundreds of miles away with a handful of my closest friends, a part of me returns, a part of me that’s been lost.

A week ago, I went to a women’s retreat at church and spent a short time running the inclined road that leads into (and out of) the camp. As my shoes hit pockets of rocks and my ankles turned, as I huffed and puffed for breath, I found myself repeating the words of the Lost and Found song: “It’s all a journey from lost to found and I say, ‘Don’t lose your ground.’” I ran those inclines with all of my strength in almost complete defiance of who I’ve become and the trials I’ve gone through this year.

When I look back on this past year, I notice that the terrain of my life has changed. Not only did I move from a geographically congested, bulldozed land of suburbia and postage stamp back yards but also the ground I was once standing on began to slide. Physically the ground changed and spiritually the ground changed, too.

This year’s grounding was different because it seemed like I was thrown on someone else’s turf and given a separate set of rules. I still wanted to play my clarinet, have time to enjoy life, talk to my co-workers, be free to forget to turn off a computer monitor, take interest in those around me, send notes of support, and be the “arm opener” that I’ve been known as. But this year has seemed different. Where was the joy in music I once had? Why does it seem so hard to love those around
me? Can life stop being a replay of everything gone wrong in my first call? What happened to the girl who wanted to stop and talk to people and couldn’t care less whether or not she botched up a conversation?

The ground seemed to change. All that was once important to me seemed to disappear and this year has been one long year of walking on shaky ground.

So, how have I gotten back on solid ground? How did I determine I lost my ground in the first place? I knew it in several ways: I knew I’d lost it when I didn’t want to stand on the ground anymore. That means, I knew I’d lost my ground when I didn’t want to set foot in a Lutheran school to teach anymore. I knew I’d lost it when I was scared that my inability to know how to cope with “everything new” was the “damnable sin.” I knew I’d lost it when I believed I couldn’t be forgiven. I knew the ground was lost when I spent the 30-minute drive home from my classroom wondering what was wrong with what I was doing or with the mission of the school or with the leadership of it.

How did I get back on solid ground? I did so by returning to those areas of my life that don’t have the earth’s plates colliding with each other and in constant conflict with one another each day. I went to areas where spiritual earthquakes aren’t common and where plate shifting and grinding and rubbing doesn’t occur to the point where the very foundation of a person is gone. I returned to the Lord’s Table, to the clarinet, to supporting people, to the treadmill, to the open arms of a parent, to the sign that proclaimed “Welcome to Cedar Rapids.” I returned to all of the “little homes” in my life. But did I return? I’m not really sure. But did God ever leave? Well, no. Then I realize that I returned, but he really rescued me.

At the beginning of my stint here, lots of pictures were painted for me. And those pictures turned into a bleak landscape for me. Over time, I’ve come to realize that I always want to be returning to the paintings of Jesus. There are many days when I’ve looked at myself and said, “What’s happened?” And then I’m able to look at who I am through Christ and the talents he’s given me and I say, “How did that happen?!”

Throughout this year, I’ve learned that maybe I was painting the wrong picture of my call situation and that maybe the people who called me had painted the wrong picture of me. And so, I rest very much with the conviction that I had at the beginning of my call here: Let Jesus do the painting. When he does the painting, the brushstrokes are even, things appear more clearly, and the colors and scenery are vivid. When Jesus paints, you actually step back and think about what you’re viewing. You suddenly realize that your painting is futile.

What advice do I impart to those who embark in the ministry next year? Well, the
same advice that keeps me going each day: Keep letting God paint the pictures and don’t lose your ground. While some of you will physically leave familiar soil to be at a new place, others of you will keep on ministering at the same place. And to all of you, I say this, “Don’t lose your ground.” Did you once find yourself touching the hearts of the saints through your musical ability? Then why is that instrument slid on the shelf behind the forgotten boxes? Did you once find joy in talking to people? Then why is it a chore to muster a hello? Did you once inhale dirty suburban air and proclaim how wonderful God’s creation is? Then why is it that you’re five minutes from a nature preserve and longing to see God’s beauty?

Losing one’s ground happens subtly and over time. It is a cycle of lost and found. May you not only find that all of your years of ministry work in this ebb and flow but that it is joyous to always be found.

**A Rafter Shaker**

It is a Saturday morning and I have just finished mentally composing another letter to the property manager of this large apartment complex, adding to the twelve-month chronology of living with mice. From the pan-sized hole under the dishwasher that needed patching to the holes behind the stove and in the cabinetry to the mice crawling on my counter and chewing through the bagel bag and feasting, I have had enough. In addition, I have had enough of calling and complaining and insisting time after time that setting a glue trap does not solve the problem of mice coming into my apartment. I have drawn up documents that could be used in court against my manger, taken pictures, boxed up my kitchen cabinets, and been more assertive than I thought my spunky self could be.

So what does dealing with mice have to do with my final reflections on my year here? Well, the situation I find is a striking parallel to so many of the things I’ve dealt with during my first year of service. While mice aren’t running across my desk at school or finding my M & M stash in the bottom drawer, it seems that there are situations in the church and at school that are just as annoying as mice. And for a while at both home and school, I was ignorant to those things that were nagging at me. Here at home I thought that the mice droppings were really shavings from the garbage disposal and at school I thought that all of the Law talk and struggles I faced in teaching were just me. And so, I ignored them for quite some time.

Over time, though, I began to ask myself, “Can I really live this way?” In the case of my apartment situation, I could not. I grew weary of wondering if the mice would go out for a midnight snack in my kitchen, and at school I grew weary of bottling up everything and living under the Law. Months wore on and I was physically sick.
every month. I underwent tests and saw specialists and no one could help. In hindsight, the mystery to the frequent colds and sinus infections wasn’t anything that could be helped. These physical ailments were a result of an emotionally crumbling person.

Over the past year, I have grown immensely in my abilities to teach and to cope with those “mice-like” situations at home and at church. It wasn’t until recently, though, that I truly felt like God was reassuring me as to why I was called here. Ever since I arrived I have asked myself, “Why did God call me here?” I dutifully read the first devotion in a book by Tom Rogers and came up with the simple answer, “God called you here because he needs you to be here.” Well, that didn’t quite suffice for me because I kept countering with more and more questions such as, “Why am I needed here.”

Glimpses of the Lord’s necessity of having his feeble servant Susan here at this time and in this place have been given to me. It was at a recent lunch with co-workers during a discussion about the situations at our congregation that I realized how much “rafter shaking” I had done. I had come into the call and from the start recognized things that were not right. It was not until later in the year that I actually let those be known. When I did, it was a very hard exchange for those being confronted, and I also realized that I hadn’t gone about my “rafter shaking” in the best manner. But it needed to be done. Sitting at lunch that day with a sobbing co-worker who lamented over years of putting up with some of the same nagging annoyances, I realized that my “rafter shaking” had helped her to realize she wasn’t

Yes, I was called by God to be here because he needed me here. He needed me here, as uncomfortable as it was, to speak for a firmer foundation for His church. He needed me here to shepherd his flock of Paula, Sandra, Tommy, and so many others. And he needed me here to remind me that in this time, in this place I am his child called to use his gifts and spread his Gospel because he’d have it no other way.
alone and that the feelings she had about things that bothered her needed to made
known.

What is “rafter shaking” you might ask? Well, it’s the ability that God gives
people to look at a situation and recognize when God’s gifts are being misused and
abused by his servants. It is the ability to recognize sin in the church and the ability
to calmly and rationally deal with it because of this simple fact: Christ would have it
no other way. When his gifts are misused and abused by his children, when a church
is stuck in the proclamation of the Law and not the Gospel, when church workers are
left feeling inadequate and guilt-ridden day in and day out, when the church and
school no longer hold hands but run in the opposite direction of one another, this
happens: the message of Christ crucified and Christ risen gets lost in the muck and
mire of sinfulness.

Earlier in the year I reflected about a painting and the pictures I had painted for
me here at St. Paul. I still realize that the canvas is something that exists and the
picture has changed throughout the year. Depending on the angle I look at it or the
distance from which I’m standing, the picture looks different. This year I’ve also
learned to not look at the entire painting but to get a closer view and to look at the
colors and the unique brushstrokes that make up the entire mural, the entire picture. I
have been given the ability by God to see those brushstrokes and why the picture
doesn’t always look so pretty.

The picture is different now because I’ve added my own brushstrokes. Some of
them have been black and thick and laden with sin and others have been yellow and
blue and seem to portray the forgiveness and joy of being a Christian. But, here in
this time and in this very place, I have painted and painted. And I have learned the
struggle of being a servant that sins and who is called to recognize and deal with the
sinfulness and humanity of a congregation and its members.

Each of you out there is in your own unique calling. Inevitably, we all have some
“rafter shaking” to do. Until June 30th, I’ll be calling and writing my manager at the
apartment complex, setting traps, and storing my cereal in my refrigerator. I’ll keep
“shaking the rafters” of my very apartment complex because doing anything less is
unthinkable. But when you start applying that to humans and to situations of
pastoral workloads and school philosophies, it doesn’t always seem a possibility. But
to allow sin to reign in the school and to compromise gifts and talents at the expense
of the salvation of souls is also unthinkable. Rafter shaking is uncomfortable and
takes a great amount of help from God. However, the house that is shaken and
survives the shaking, remaining firm on its foundation, is a house that is remarkably
strong and well appreciated.
Johnson

There are many other reasons I’ve been called here. I believe that the next few months will be critical at St. Paul because many people have shaken the rafters and the people will undergo a refining and purifying process. I also agree that the next tenant who lives at 4 Arbor Circle in Apt. #425 will have fewer mice and a much nicer living environment. Tommy will have a greater sense of his ability in math. Alan will be a more responsible individual. Sandra’s seed of faith will be a bit taller as a result of her time at St. Paul. Shari will be refreshed and strengthened by her colleagues who stood by her during the rafter shaking and who helped her through it. Paula will grow from constructive criticism and learn to adjust her behaviors to better use her intellectual gifts. Yes, I was called by God to be here because he needed me here. He needed me here, as uncomfortable as it was, to speak for a firmer foundation for His church. He needed me here to shepherd his flock of Paula, Sandra, Tommy, and so many others. And he needed me here to remind me that in this time, in this place I am his child called to use his gifts and spread his Gospel because he’d have it no other way. ¶

Living with Conviction

“Mere tolerance is the virtue of men who no longer believe in anything.”

G.K. Chesterton

“There are three conversions. The conversion of the heart, of the mind, and finally of the purse.”

Martin Luther
Job Satisfaction among Those Teaching in Lutheran Schools

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Lutheran schools can appropriately be regarded as one of our church’s great treasures. They provide sponsoring congregations with the opportunity to touch families with the Good News of Jesus. Through the ministry of Lutheran schools, young children can receive a quality Christ-centered education. Because of the influence of Lutheran schools, unchurched children enter the family of God through the waters of Holy Baptism. Together with their families, many become members of the school’s sponsoring congregation. Perhaps more than ever before, our schools need effective teachers who demonstrate passion, care, and a variety of diverse skills for an ever-challenging, ever-expanding job.

Many Lutheran teachers struggle with the demands of their calling—compounded at times by personal challenges and frustrations—and opt to leave teaching in the Lutheran school. Statistics from past years consistently show more professional church workers—including teachers—leaving the professional ranks of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) than joining them (Kueck, 1997, p. 8). Why do these ministers of the Gospel choose to leave? How can those concerned about supporting,
encouraging, and retaining quality teachers help them to find satisfaction and fulfillment in their work?

**How Satisfied Are Those Teaching in Lutheran Schools?**

In 1997 a study was undertaken to explore the level of satisfaction among a sample of teachers of the LCMS, specifically those teaching in the schools of the Florida/Georgia District. It compared educators’ levels of satisfaction according to demographic, personal, and professional factors. In addition, the study identified those variables most closely related to high levels of teacher satisfaction.

This study provides useful information to members of congregations and communities desiring to encourage their professional educators so that through the efforts of these teachers, schools will increase in effectiveness as moral communities rather than mere educational delivery systems. Additionally, it offers information helpful to those desiring to support and encourage teachers in their ministries so that they remain in teaching and so that young people continue to choose Lutheran teaching for their life’s vocation.

**Findings and Interpretation**

Data was gathered at the Nurturing the Faith workshops held at six different sites within the district in 1997. Nearly 370 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 350 usable returns were received (95%). The questionnaire was designed to gather information about teacher job satisfaction and to allow respondents to react to items on a Likert scale to indicate the degree of presence of variables thought to contribute to job satisfaction among teachers.
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The demographic section asked respondents to check spaces to indicate the grouping or item best describing them (e.g., Rural [], City [], Suburban []). After reading statements identifying each of the factors thought to contribute to teacher satisfaction, respondents were asked to indicate the degree they perceived each factor to be present in their life by checking one of the following: strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree, or strongly agree.

The questionnaire was developed to include 16 items that could be used to explore the constructs of role perception, teaching environment, and support in relationship to teacher satisfaction. The instrument included the following variables, each identified by an individual item on the questionnaire: commitment to teaching in a Christian school, regard for teaching as a calling from God, value of student teaching experience, spousal support, family support, support and friendships among staff, teacher efficacy, administrative support, pastoral support, appreciation by students' parents, freedom to design learning experiences, strategies for coping with stress, school climate, non-teaching responsibilities to sponsoring congregation(s), salary level, and friendships beyond members of the faculty and staff. Following the gathering of the data, factor analysis was used to verify the presence of the initial constructs.

Three research questions were considered in this study. A summary of the results follows:

1. How satisfied are those teaching in Lutheran schools?

   Responses to the item assessing teacher job satisfaction were assigned numerical values ranging from 1=completely unfulfilled to 5=completely fulfilled. Data analysis indicated a negative skewness with a mean of 3.92, median of 4, and a standard deviation of .81. Results show that nearly 87% of those responding to the survey believe themselves to be fulfilled or completely fulfilled, indicating a high level of job satisfaction among those teaching in the Florida/Georgia district of the LCMS.

   These findings differ from those of McClure, Weidman, and Sharp (1988) who found more dissatisfaction among those working in private schools than their counterparts in the public schools. They attribute higher levels of dissatisfaction to the lower salaries and conditions of employment offered by private schools.

   However, the results of this study support the findings of Lee, Dedrick, and Smith (1991) who found a high level of fulfillment among teachers in Catholic parochial schools in spite of their relatively low salaries.

2. To what extent do demographic, personal, and professional factors
affect job satisfaction among those teaching in Lutheran schools?

The level of job satisfaction among those teaching in the Florida/Georgia district was analyzed according to a number of variables. A discussion of each follows.

Age. Mean scores indicate that, generally speaking, those teaching in Lutheran schools in Florida/Georgia who are over age 35 are more satisfied in their jobs than their counterparts who are 35 years-old and under. The differences between teachers under 35 years of age and those 35 years and over were found to be statistically significant in relation to teacher job satisfaction, t(347) = -2.29, p<.05. This finding seems to support the work of Friedman and Lotan (1985) who found that teacher burnout rises with teachers’ age and years of experience until it peaks at age 41 to 45 years and then declines. Metzke (1988) also found age to be a consistent correlate with attrition among special and general educators, with teachers under age 35 at greatest risk of attrition. It is reasonable to speculate that as teachers leave the profession those remaining in teaching may possess a higher level of commitment to the profession and/or have developed coping mechanisms and a system of support which enable them to thrive and enjoy greater satisfaction in their work. These findings support those of Singer (1993), who noted that teachers over 35 may have had more opportunities than their younger counterparts to learn coping strategies and consequently become better able to adapt to the demands of teaching.

Gender. In their work on teacher burnout, Friedman and Lotan (1985) and Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) found males more susceptible to burnout than females. Friedman (1991) also found that high-burnout schools employ fewer female teachers than low-burnout schools. Most studies dealing specifically with teacher job satisfaction, however, find no significant difference between men and women on the issue of job satisfaction.

The ratio of female to male teachers in Florida/Georgia participating in this study (77% to 23%) compares very closely with the ratio of females to males teaching in Lutheran schools throughout the country (80% to 20%). This study found a higher level of satisfaction among men than women. This difference, however, was not found to be statistically significant, t(348)= .85, p>.05.

Training. Numerically, those teaching in Lutheran schools in Florida/Georgia with and without synodical endorsement seem fairly evenly divided. A total of 143 respondents (40.86%) indicated they are synodically endorsed, 136 (38.86%) indicated they were not, and 54 (15.43%) failed to designate their training.

Results show non-synodically endorsed teachers possessing an overall slightly higher level of satisfaction than synodically endorsed educators, though this difference was not statistically significant, t(294) = -1.56, p>.05.
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Education. Over 20% of the 350 respondents had a Master's Degree and beyond, while over 45% had pursued, or were pursuing post baccalaureate studies. Results of a one-way analysis of variance, \( F(2, 337) = 2.02, p > .05 \), show no significant difference among the groups, indicating that those surveyed possessed no statistically significant difference in job satisfaction according to educational attainment.

Number of Years Teaching in Lutheran Schools. Approximately 60% (211) of those completing the survey were either beginning teaching in Lutheran schools or have taught in Lutheran schools for less than five years. Respondents were grouped according to those having taught less than 1 year, those with 1 to 10 years of experience, and those with more than 10 years of experience. Results of a one-way analysis of variance, \( F(2, 334) = 2.48, p > .05 \), show no significant difference among the three groups, indicating that those surveyed possessed no statistical difference in job satisfaction according to their level of experience in Lutheran schools.

Number of Years Teaching in Public Schools. Approximately 68% (239) of those responding to the survey item indicate having never taught in public schools. Approximately 29% taught in public education for 10 years or less and a scant 2.86% taught in public schools for over 10 years. Respondents were categorized according to whether or not they had taught in public schools. Differences between the two groups according to job satisfaction were not found to be statistically significant, \( t(348) = .72, p > .05 \).

Number of Years Teaching at Present School. As mentioned previously, a large number of teachers responding to the survey were new to their present teaching situation. Approximately 60% had spent 5 years or less teaching in their present school. However, approximately 30% of those responding had spent 6 to 15 years teaching in their present school. Mean comparisons indicate that those new to the Lutheran school in which they were currently teaching or who had taught there for five years or less experience less job satisfaction than those with over five years at their present schools. Perhaps those with less job satisfaction have sought teaching positions in other schools rather than electing to remain in a school where they find themselves struggling with vocational fulfillment. These differences were found to be statistically significant, \( t(347) = -2.78, p < .05 \).

Total Number of Years Teaching. Approximately 27% of those responding to this survey item had total teaching experience of five years or less and approximately 11% of those responding had 26 or more years of teaching experience. Mean comparisons seemed to indicate a positive correlation between job satisfaction and years of teaching experience. However, results of a one-way analysis of variance, \( F(2, \)
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347)= .99, p>.05, show no significant difference with regard to job satisfaction among teachers according to total number of years of experience.

Grade Level Currently Teaching. Approximately 32% of those responding to the survey taught at the early childhood level. Another approximately 27% taught primary grades (grades 1-3). Approximately 31% taught middle grades (grades 4-6). Nearly 6% identified themselves as teachers of junior high (grades 7-9). Results of a one-way analysis of variance, F(2, 283) = 1.52, p>.05, show no significant difference among the three groups.

Average Number of Students. Responses were aggregated into the following categories: those teaching an average of 15 students, those teaching an average of 15 to 20, those teaching an average of 21 to 25, and those teaching an average of more than 25 students at a time. Results of a one-way analysis of variance, F(3, 336) = .43, p>.05, show no significant difference in job satisfaction according to the average number of students taught.

Location of School. Approximately 6% of the respondents identified the location of the school in which they teach as rural, approximately 54% identified their school’s location as city, and approximately 40% identified the location of their school as suburban. Highest levels of job satisfaction among those teaching in Lutheran schools of the Florida/Georgia district were reported among those teaching in schools located in the suburbs. Comparisons were made between those teaching in suburbs and those teaching in either rural or city schools. However, job satisfaction differences were not found to be statistically significant between the two groups, t(347) = .57, p>.05.

3. To what extent do individual demographic variables, commitment to teaching in a Christian school, regard for teaching as an opportunity to achieve moral transcendence, values of student teaching experience, spousal support, family support, support and friendships among staff, teacher efficacy, administrative support, pastoral support, appreciation by students’ parents, freedom to design learning experiences, strategies for coping with stress, school climate, non-teaching responsibilities to sponsoring congregation(s), salary level, and friendships outside of faculty and staff affect job satisfaction among those teaching in Lutheran schools?

Research question three focused on identifying those factors bringing meaning, purpose, and fulfillment to the lives of Lutheran teachers. It is reasoned that teachers will approach their responsibilities with ongoing enthusiasm, effectiveness, and desire
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to grow professionally when they possess these factors.

Several factors are quite prominent among respondents. Approximately 97% of those responding said they were committed to teaching in a Lutheran school because it provides the opportunity to live and share their faith in Jesus every day. Approximately 97% said they view teaching in a Lutheran school as a calling from God. A number of previous studies, including those of Chapman and Lowther (1982); Dalton (1989); Culver, Wolfe, and Cross (1990); Verdugo et al. (1997) and others show the important role of commitment in helping educators achieve job satisfaction. Cherniss (1993) underscores the importance of moral transcendence among those serving in caring professions such as teaching.

Approximately 96% of those responding perceived themselves as effective with their students, saw the parents of their children as supportive, and had a great degree of freedom to plan learning experiences for their students. A number of researchers support the importance of teachers feeling successful in their work as a contributor to job satisfaction. Among these are the work of Mitchell, Ortiz, and Mitchell (1987); Hughes (1989); Farber (1991); and Friedman and Farber (1992). In addition, the studies of Bronfenbrenner (1976); Brophy and Evertson (1981); and Ashton and Webb (1986) have isolated the type of students in the classroom as key determinants of teachers’ feelings of satisfaction.

In addition to high levels of job satisfaction, those teaching in the Lutheran schools of Florida/Georgia were found to possess a high level of autonomy. Approximately 96% either agree or strongly agree that they enjoy the freedom to plan their own educational experiences. These findings support the work of Kreis and Brookopp (1986) who studied teachers’ perceived degree of autonomy within their work situation and their sense of job satisfaction, comparing teachers from parochial and public schools. They found a significant correlation between teachers’ perceived autonomy within the classroom and their overall satisfaction. Their findings also show that parochial school teachers perceive themselves as more autonomous than public school teachers.

Kreis and Brookopp (1986) offer the following by way of explanation: parochial schools are founded on a philosophical commitment; parochial school teachers often perceive their teaching with a sense of mission; parochial schools are often smaller with fewer directions coming from a central office, and there are fewer, less militant unions in parochial schools.

Approximately 93% felt they were encouraged and befriended by the other teachers and staff at their school, and approximately 91% perceived their family as supportive of their ministry in Lutheran education. In addition, 89% thought of their
Rathmann

administrator as supportive and of the climate of their school as positive. Chapman (1983) and Chapman and Green (1986) found that school climate positively affects teacher job satisfaction. The work of Bryk and Driscoll (1988); Rosenholtz (1989); and Rutter (1986) underscores the important contribution to teacher satisfaction provided by a strong sense of community.

The role of the supportive school administrator in teacher satisfaction is also crucial. The work of Billingsley and Cross (1991); Rosenholtz (1989); Anderson and Iwanicki (1984); and Starnaman and Miller (1992) draw attention to the importance of effective leadership from the administrator in encouraging and supporting teachers while helping to reduce role conflict and role ambiguity.

Only the item dealing with salary (My salary enables me to provide adequately for my needs and those of my family) had more respondents (approximately 45%) indicating disagreement (34.97%) or strong disagreement (10.98%) than those (approximately 43%) indicating agreement (36.42%) or strong agreement (6.65%).

Pearson product-moment correlations identifies interrelationships among the variables considered in this study. The highest relationship identified was between the variable concerning how teachers feel encouraged and befriended by other teachers and staff members and the variable dealing with how effective they believe themselves to be with those they teach. This relationship suggests that teachers with positive relationships with their peers also feel efficacious regarding their success with their pupils. Also showing a relatively high correlation among respondents is commitment to teaching because of opportunities to live and share faith in Jesus and viewing teaching as a calling from God. Both of these variables focus on the unique aspects of teaching in a Christian setting, including the privilege and responsibility of helping students grow in knowledge, skills, and understanding while integrating the Christian faith into all that occurs in the curriculum.

Using factor analysis, three constructs emerged from the 16 variables considering teacher perceptions thought to relate to job satisfaction. These are Professional

Congregational responsibilities (e.g., organist, youth worker, coach) have contributed overall to a sense of satisfaction among those teaching in Lutheran schools rather than detracting from it.
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Strategies, Environment, and Support from Superiors; Proximal Supportive Relationships at Work; and Shared Values and Family Support. Of all factors considered, multiple regression analysis showed a significant partial correlation between job satisfaction and the variable concerning professional strategies, environment, support from superiors and the variable for number of years at present school.

The construct for Environment, Professional Strategies, and Support from Superiors comprises a number of factors of importance to teachers. The relationship of this construct and teacher job satisfaction supports the findings of Cherniss (1993) who identified the contribution autonomy and the ability to strike a balance between the professional and non-work aspects of life make toward teachers finding and continuing to find job satisfaction. For a teacher, autonomy includes being able to design learning experiences and to test innovative materials and procedures to enhance student learning. Professional and non-professional aspects of life include but are not limited to the enjoyment, enrichment, and encouragement provided through interests and friendships extending beyond the school and the level of comfort with nonteaching responsibilities in the congregation.

According to the results of this study, congregational responsibilities (e.g., organist, youth worker, coach) have contributed overall to a sense of satisfaction among those teaching in Lutheran schools rather than detracting from it. It can be reasoned that congregational involvement helps teachers to contribute to the overall mission and ministry of the congregation in ways that enrich their own lives, providing opportunity to build friendships and find fulfillment outside the classroom yet within the congregation.

A significant aspect of garnering a sense of fulfillment in teaching is the support teachers receive from administrators, pastors, and the parents of their students (Friedman & Farber, 1992). Although teachers in Lutheran schools are called to minister to the children in their classroom, they are usually held accountable to the administrator, the pastor as head of the congregation sponsoring the school, and the parents of those they teach. It stands to reason that Lutheran teachers must have the support of parents, administrator, and pastor in order to feel fulfilled because these three generally assess the effectiveness of a teacher in his or her work. In most situations parents comprise the board of education, where the administrator and pastor hold significant influence and where performance reviews are shared.

The role of the administrator in supporting and encouraging teachers is regarded as critical (Chapman & Green, 1986; Rosenholtz, 1989; Billingsley & Cross, 1991). He or she initiates and orients beginning and new teachers into the life of the
congregation and school community; speaks on behalf of the teacher as concerns arise; assists the teacher in finding solutions to problems and challenges; and guides, praises, and motivates teachers in an ongoing supervisory capacity. Effective administrators also provide the catalyst to other aspects of this construct, including level of congregational responsibilities, autonomy, school climate, and growth in professional strategies and in the ability to balance professional and non-work aspects of life. In supportive environments, teachers are encouraged to explore new ideas (Stanaman & Miller, 1992) and to assert themselves as educational leaders (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991).

Regarding school climate, this study affirms the findings of Lee, Dedrick, & Smith (1991) who found teachers in Catholic schools to be considerably more efficacious than their counterparts in the public system despite the much lower salary they received in the Catholic system. Lee et al. found that those teaching in the Catholic system reported higher ratings on principal leadership, their encouragement of innovation, and administrative responsiveness. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) suggest that Catholic and other private schools are better able than public schools to form “functional communities” for the support and benefit of all those involved.

Like Catholic schools, Lutheran schools are also posited to form functional communities for the mutual benefit of those involved. Their typical smallness generally tends to facilitate the formation of close relationships among teachers, administrators, pastors, students’ families, and members of sponsoring congregations. Ideally, relationships between teachers and the families of their students grow as they worship together at congregational services and as they participate in school and congregational activities throughout the week.

Results of this study also show a significant relationship between the number of years a teacher has served at a Lutheran school and his or her level of job satisfaction. It could be reasoned that teachers remain for a long period of time in a given teaching situation because they find it rewarding and satisfying.

Conclusions and Implications

Those teaching in the Lutheran schools of the Florida/Georgia district enjoy a decidedly high level of job satisfaction. They find their work as teachers in Lutheran schools rewarding because they are committed to teaching in a Lutheran school and because it allows them to share their faith in Jesus. They regard their work as a calling from God. The satisfaction they find in their work is especially significant because many struggle with salary levels inadequate for meeting their needs and those of their family.
Job Satisfaction Among Teachers in Lutheran Schools

The findings of this study suggest that those seeking to support and encourage teachers so that they are able to find satisfaction and fulfillment in their work may focus on providing for teachers a positive school environment. Teachers who feel good about the school are more likely to feel good about themselves and the contribution they are making to the overall goals of the school and the progress of their students. Teachers who feel efficacious tend to be more positive toward their students, praising them more and criticizing them less (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

Further, those desiring to help those teaching in Lutheran schools to find job satisfaction in their present situation may recognize the importance of administrative and pastoral support for teachers and their important role in advancing the mission and ministry of the congregation. In advancing many of the factors associated with teacher job satisfaction, the role of the school administrator is especially crucial. It seems likely that administrators can help teachers find satisfaction and fulfillment in their work by providing teachers with autonomy over their primary areas of responsibility. They can help teachers to find a level of congregational involvement that is personally rewarding and helpful in advancing the goals of the congregation and school and yet not a burden, which in time diminishes the energy and creativity a teacher has available for the students in his or her classroom. Administrators can also help to promote good relationships between teachers and the pastor and between teachers and the parents of children in the school. In addition, the administrator can help teachers find a balance between professional and nonwork activities and can assist teachers in developing effective coping strategies.

Parents interested in having their children taught by educators who are fulfilled in their calling will do well to support, value, and encourage individual teachers as they work with their children. They will also affirm teachers in the nonschool relationships they establish and help them to find the coping strategies that will enable them to
overcome the challenges associated with teaching.

References


The Christian Teacher as Counselor

Dan Flynn holds a Masters of Education in school counseling from Loyola College, Baltimore, MD. He is currently the Director of Counseling at Concordia University, Ann Arbor. His passion after 25 years as a Lutheran educator is still working with adolescents.

“Ed” was an athletic, engaging twelve-year-old who liked me a lot. In our Lutheran school’s departmentalized program, I was his religion teacher and also coached his middle school basketball team. Every morning at 7:30, just after arriving at school and having absolutely no desire to see any students, Ed would come to my classroom. I was busy attempting to get my day in order, running off papers, organizing lesson plans, and doing last minute grading before school started at 8:30. However, Ed wanted to talk.

As athletic and outgoing as he was, Ed’s peers tended to isolate him. He sought a lot of attention in and out of class. He was the kid who was always trying to be funny, but who never quite was. It was obvious that he was a needy kid. I was polite and kind and listened with some patience. The story began to unfold. Day after day, Ed’s mom drove him to school and yelled at him. From the moment he got in the car, his mom was extremely critical, attacking Ed’s self-esteem. By the time he got to school, he was beaten down and crawled into my classroom. I was the positive, caring religion teacher he sought out for encouragement. But at 7:30 a.m., with my day...
sprinting before me, I really didn’t have the desire to give him the time. In my six-year school, Ed came to my classroom, every morning for four years, until he was 16 and received his driver’s license. Then, he was free from being beaten down.

My journey into counseling began because of students like Ed. I have spent 15 years in middle and high school classrooms, and ten years at Concordia University, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Over those years, a variety of students entered my classroom and many sought ongoing conversations. What I have discovered is that “the death of the soul is never quick. It is a slow dying, a succession of little deaths” (Yaconelli, 1998, p. 15). Some issues I could address; others I was not equipped, or able, to confront. Ultimately, the conversations pushed me into a graduate program in educational counseling. If the students were to come with a “succession of little deaths,” I should have the skills to help them process their issues.

This article offers some guidelines for Christian teachers to use in the conversations they are having with students. Also, I will offer a sample counseling formula that can be used by any educator.

Some Basic Guidelines

When I use the phrase “Teacher as Counselor,” I am not suggesting that the teacher is a therapist. There are many complex issues that come into classrooms that should not be handled by teachers. Issues such as clinical depression, eating disorders, potential suicide, or the potential of a student harming others need to be referred out. In the case of suicide or potential violence, immediate action needs to be taken. These issues move beyond the teacher to the administration, with consultation from the teacher, working with the family. The classroom is not a therapy session.

In my first year of teaching, I had a student who had ongoing anxiety attacks. When he started breathing hard, sweating profusely, and became uncooperative, I, as the caring Christian teacher, would talk to him. I would take him out of the classroom and try to settle him. This took hours of time from my class. My other students were left alone. I didn’t tell my principal because, as a rookie teacher, I didn’t recognize the seriousness of the problem. Panic or anxiety attacks are beyond the teacher. I needed to tell my principal, who could have worked with the family to get treatment for the student. Our primary goal as educators is to instruct. The secondary goal is to be a classroom caregiver. Both go hand-in-hand, but instruction must take precedence. Otherwise, the classroom lacks credibility.

As I moved from rookie to veteran teacher, I found the level of my relationships with students had become much deeper. I invited students to my home and got to know their families. This I saw as part of ministry. I connected to the souls of
students, and they were genuinely drawn to me. I saw (and still see) the Christian classroom as uniquely equipped to demonstrate community in a world that lacks community. Peck (1987) notes that “community neither comes naturally nor is it purchased cheaply” (p. 21). I invested considerable energy in creating what the early church did in Acts 2:42, “devoting themselves to the teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Students came to my home. We studied the word and explored the “unpredictability” (Yaconelli, 1998, p. 28) of the gospel. One student articulated my goal in a 1991 Catech Comment article saying, “the power [of the faith integrating teacher is] to irritate their students into a rage about Jesus.” This does not come spontaneously and I worked diligently to reach that ideal. However, one of the dangers I had to continuously confront was the closeness I developed with students.

The classroom is a place of instruction in academic disciplines and, for Christian educators, also a place for the faith to come alive. Boundaries can be an issue. Professionalism can be compromised by the informality of relationships, and caring can be misused in the quest for community. It was Christmas and one student, who struggled with his parents, needed gift money. For whatever reason, his parents wouldn’t give him any money. Consequently, he asked me to lend some to him. I did. He got gifts, and I got an angry phone call from his parents. They were dealing with him at home, and I had complicated the circumstances. The goal of Acts 2:42, and the energy to craft a biblical community are important ideals, but they need to be implemented wisely.

When I was a young teacher, the problems students brought to me were quite different from the issues they bring to me today, years later. In my first five years of ministry, I talked to students about peer relationships, or struggling with class work, or a frustration on the athletic field. I was only a few years older than my students, and I could easily relate to issues they brought to me. I was wrestling with some of those same problems. Teachers need to be aware of their own issues so they don’t misguide students. Now, as an experienced instructor and currently as a counselor at a university, other issues emerge that I would not have understood as a young teacher. Developmental steps of moving into adulthood, identifying and processing issues that make one a man or woman, and confronting guilt and shame from past
behaviors and the resulting stalled growth, are all needs that come into my university counseling office daily. We as Christian educators observe the developmental process that Erik Erikson or Jean Piaget both researched. Each season in ministry brings out different developmental issues from the students we serve. The young teacher has youthfulness, the veteran has maturity. Both generate different types of conversations with our students, making age diversity a strength. Today, I spend considerable time helping my students grow into adulthood. As I’m not a therapist, this is not therapy, but rather the facilitation of a developmental process. I have journeyed through young adulthood and my thirties. For students, who are starting that journey, I am a voice of balance when they feel pushed and pulled by circumstances.

**A Simple Formula: Solution-Focused**

One method to use when speaking to a student is based on solution-focused counseling and intended as brief conversations. This method does not add any more time expectations to a Christian teacher’s already full schedule, but may, in fact, condense some conversations. The teacher shapes and directs the conversations in a supportive way that helps the student process his or her issue. As the teacher becomes more comfortable with the process, conversations will be more directive and not simply ongoing, non-ending dialogue. The format presented here is a condensed view of the solution-focused process. It is easily utilized in its simplest form.

Returning to Ed’s story, it was apparent that he was not doing well with the morning rides with his mother. Although we talked a lot, I really didn’t lead him anywhere, but simply gave him a caring word and some time. I could have done much more. Today, I would lead him through the solution-focused counseling process, which would not take any more time than I was already giving him. Ed felt that life was out of his control, which produced negative feelings. He could have felt more empowered and equipped, even at 12 or 14 years of age, to handle his situation.

At a Solution-Focused Brief Therapy workshop in 1996, Colleen and Michael Daley presented three presuppositions as the central philosophy to remember when using the solution-focused model. Understanding these three presuppositions will give a healthy foundation to using this method. First, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Don’t go looking for problems. Problems will find you. There is an instinct among caring Christian educators to engage in conversation and be fixers. Sometimes we hear about difficult situations from students, who are managing quite fine, but we want to help them. This opens up the possibility of creating a problem. Resist the temptation to fix the situation. If the student is successful and functioning well, leave...
the situation alone.

The second parameter is, "Once you know it works, do more of it." This sounds simple enough, but it necessitates that educators relearn behaviors to be successful. I learned this as a classroom disciplinarian. As a rookie teacher, I used certain techniques that worked and other means of discipline didn’t work. I had to throw away the bad and keep the good. So also with our students. Their successes need to be pointed out to them and encouraged, so that successful behaviors are repeated.

Relating to the foregoing is the third presupposition: "If it doesn’t work, don’t do it again; do something different." Whereas the second parameter builds on the positive and encourages one to repeat successful behaviors, the third attacks the poor habit. We tend to duplicate learned behaviors habitually, even when we know that the weak habit should be changed. As a coach, I would work with an athlete to adjust his jump shot. The athlete had learned to do a jump shot when he was young and didn’t have the strength to do a jump shot correctly. The shot had to be relearned in order to improve accuracy and consistency in scoring. Many students would not alter their learned habit and thereby negated their potential to score. Our journey is to help students process what works and what doesn’t work, and to encourage them to do more of what works. A cornerstone of solution-focused conversations is to build on successes. The behaviors have to be continually relearned and adjusted. It is truly a process that all of us experience throughout our lives.

Keeping these presuppositions in mind, the first step in the solution-focused technique is to have the teacher help the student define the problem. Ed was struggling with several issues that needed to be pulled apart. Certainly, his mom yelling at him every morning was a problem, as was his relationship with his peers. These problems should be diagnosed in the first conversations, and brought up in all later conversations, as needed. The teacher’s job as the listener is to pull apart the problems and break them down into manageable pieces. Remember, we are not doing therapy. As noted above, some issues move beyond the educator and the school, i.e., clinical depression, suicidal thoughts, etc. Teachers deal with everyday issues that all of us confront, such as getting along with friends, poor grades, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, difficult authority figures such as teacher or coach, and so on. Conversations can wander and digress. Consequently, the task is to separate the issues to make them more manageable. I often use the white board in my office to visually list the issues and ask students which one they want to confront.

The second step in the solution-focused approach is establishing what goals the student wants to accomplish. For Ed, we would speak of his morning drive and what
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he could do from the time he got up until he arrived at school to alter the tension. We would set small goals that could easily be accomplished, and establish a track record of success. What time does he get up? Is he staying in bed not moving, after the alarm has gone off eight times? Does he eat breakfast? Does mom have to call him to the car three times before they leave? One initial question worth asking the student is this: "Imagine that a miracle has happened and the problem is solved, what would the situation look like?" The question sets the ultimate goal and a positive outcome. The subsequent creation of smaller goals will lead to the ultimate goal and a positive outcome. These smaller goals send the student on his or her way with a plan of action.

These two steps do not have to occur during the first conversation. Sometimes, you simply do step one and get a description of the situation. Students may be emotional and not ready to process. Send them away with the assignment to think about how everything would look if the problem were solved. Let them vent, while you normalize their feelings by hearing them out and writing a description of the problem on the board. When you start writing, it often settles the student. You might also have them write the problem on the board and you ask questions. The identifying of the problem usually takes time and is more emotionally charged.

The goal of our Christian classrooms is to impact the soul of the child and let the gospel transform them. By using the solution-focused skills, teachers can easily lead kids to look beyond themselves and see that the gospel can transform them and carry them when they do feel hopeless.

The final step is to meet with the student and see how the goal is being accomplished. If he or she says the goal has not been accomplished, then ask what small steps need to occur to begin to move forward. Was the goal a good one? The key is to be positive and remember the central philosophy noted earlier. If the student indicates the goal has been accomplished, or a part of the goal has been accomplished, focus on the success. Ask such questions as, how did it happen? What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Have the student elaborate on the points. You, as the listener, become the encourager and the motivator. Send the student out with another goal and meet again to see how it is being accomplished.

My experience is that students begin to move forward and, when they feel some
success, they have less need to come in and talk. Oftentimes, they come in regarding the emotional situation and, although the goals are now being accomplished, they want to keep coming back because they have built a relationship with you. How to manage the ongoing relationship is up to the instructor. The conversations should become briefer and less frequent, but a warm relationship has been established that may endure.

As with anything, solution-focused counseling is a developed skill. As you practice and refine the skill, you will see the student moving forward and growing. You also will notice that conversations are briefer and more positive. The nature of the solution-focused process is to encourage, affirm, and guide students to develop a healthy outlook on life. The goal of our Christian classrooms is to impact the soul of the child and let the gospel transform them. By using the solution-focused skills, teachers can easily lead kids to look beyond themselves and see that the gospel can transform them and carry them when they do feel hopeless. Today, Ed is a happily married husband and father. Did the care I offered many years ago positively impact him? Yes! Could I have done more for him? Yes, I just didn’t have the skills at the time. Use this simple method, because it works. You will see your students impacted for good.¶

References and Helpful Resources


An excellent text on the struggle of appropriate boundaries and healthy relationships.


This text is a good example of solution focuses used in the context of grief counseling.

The Christian Teacher as Counselor


The AACC is an excellent organization that provides a number of resources with a healthy approach that the Christian professional can utilize. They have a number of solution-focused materials available for purchase.

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50 Years Ago in Lutheran Education

The practice of distinguishing the secular from the sacred has had a devastating effect upon Christian education. Because Christian parents assume a complete divorce between the two, they can without any scruples of conscience enroll their children in schools that have been wholly secularized. Secularization is a process by which God is excluded from current thinking and from the schools, on the assumption that man is sufficient unto himself; or, not having any evidence of an omnipotent God in whom his life is to center and whose help is always available, he is thrown upon his own resources or the guidance of science and must make the best of a bad situation. Secularism is practical atheism or the dethronement of God and the elevation of man or of science to the throne.

Secularism is not a new phenomenon. Like all other evils, it entered with the Fall, which estranged man from his Maker and changed him to a self-righteous idolater. Prior to the Fall there was no divorce of the sacred from the secular, because there was no estrangement of the creature from the Creator. From God's charge to Adam to "subdue the earth" we infer that God willed man's general education, which included what today is called "the secular." It is usually assumed by the opponents of Christian elementary schools that these schools exist chiefly for religious purposes. As a matter of fact, their chief purpose is general education, just like that of the public schools, but the point of view differs from that of the public school. Our elementary schools and high schools are carrying out God's original intention. In maintaining them we deny that there is any distinction between the sacred and the secular in Christian education, or in what we have called a complete education.

The Principal as a P.O.W. (Prisoner of Work)

As with most professions, being a good principal takes diligence and hard work. The typical principal doesn’t mind hard work, but it can become disheartening when he no longer feels that his efforts are doing much good. He doesn’t see return on the considerable investment of the time he makes in the school. He senses his life has been reduced to merely going through the motions of being a principal. Whether the circumstances of his school have soured his attitude or his attitude has soured the circumstances, he feels as though he’s being held prisoner. He is committed to the school and his calling, but he can’t break the vicious cycle of long hours of labor, undone tasks, longer hours of labor, and even more tasks yet to finish. He is constantly busy, but he seldom achieves. The sheer quantity of work and responsibility in itself can be demoralizing, but even worse is the feeling that his labor has lost its purpose. He becomes resentful. He feels overworked and under-appreciated. He wallows in self-pity. He knows he has to do something to get out of the cycle, but he doesn’t know what. So, he usually just re-immerses himself in his work and keeps flailing away.

Wise principals have acquired coping mechanisms. They also work very hard, but they find more satisfaction in their work. There are reasons why they are less likely to feel as though they are prisoners of their work.

They know that their expectations are often self-fulfilling. They know that unhappy people don’t expect to succeed and therefore usually don’t. Such a person’s motto is, “If you don’t expect too much, you won’t be disappointed.” Successful principals are more inclined to be positive and therefore are more enthusiastic. Their enthusiasm is contagious (Waitley, 1985, p. 72).

Principals who are in touch with reality don’t get hung up on the need to be perfectionists. They realize they’re going to make some mistakes, and they’ve learned to accept that fact. Like great baseball players who get hits only about once every three times at bat and excellent quarterbacks who complete pass attempts only about half the time, good principals know that setbacks are part of being human. They’ve learned to try hard but to accept their failures and to move on to other tasks.

Principals have learned that the effort to engender an atmosphere of mutual approval within the school is time well spent. When people feel accepted and appreciated, they are more likely to accept and appreciate others. A principal who shows appreciation for the efforts and gifts of someone else has really
helped two people: the other person and himself. Benjamin Disraeli once said, “The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own” (Maxwell, 1999, p. 11).

Prudent principals have learned that there are some things that are not worth dying for. They have learned that while some of the issues with which they deal are crucial to the integrity and mission of the school, many are not. Whether or not the principal gets his way on some of the non-critical issues is not worth the anxiety these issues can cause. These principals have learned to take courageous actions when the situations warrant, but they are judicious in picking their battles.

They have learned not to take offense at some of the remarks they hear. They’ve developed a tough hide. “Smart leaders believe only half of what they hear. Discerning leaders know which half to believe” (Maxwell, 1999, p. 44). The successful principal is good at reminding himself that who he is remains his responsibility. People and circumstances need not rob him of his feelings of self-worth. He’s learned that the biggest battles he faces in life are the battles within himself.

Sensible principals realize that the current problems in their schools are probably not any worse than some of those faced in the past. As Paul Harvey once noted, “In times like these it is good to remember that there have always been times like these.” While some people have a “the sky is falling” mentality, the successful principal sees the big picture. He realizes that obstacles have been overcome before. Alfred Montapert wrote, “The majority see the obstacle; the few see the objectives; history records the successes of the latter, while oblivion is the reward of the former” (Maxwell, 1999, p. 99).

The wise principal has learned to admit his mistakes rather than blame circumstances or people. He has learned that confession has a way of freeing up the atmosphere of a school as well as adding to the principal’s credibility. A principal’s willingness to admit his mistakes allows those around him to be less defensive as well. It frees them from the captivity that can engulf a staff when its members play the blame game.

Strong principals learn to deal with fear. They don’t put off unpleasant tasks because they fear the results. Though sometimes afraid, they still summon up the courage to do what needs to be done. Doing so frees them from the nagging feelings of disagreeable tasks continuously hanging over their heads.

Principals, no matter what degree of success they may have achieved, often feel overworked. They sometimes feel overwhelmed. But they keep working. They are assured that their work has a purpose: the development of young minds. Such work can become captivating, but it does not need to lead to feelings of captivity.*

References
Reflections of a DCE on Activating the Church

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." (Prov. 29:18)

As I perceive the situation in most Lutheran congregations, we need a vision for ministry that we feel and own with a passion. We have a general sense of who God wants us to be and what he wants us to be about—“His redeemed people touching the lives of others”—but we lack a specific understanding as to what that means for us as we seek to be his presence in our communities. Consequently, we lack passion for any particular form or expression of ministry.

"The love of Christ compels me." (2 Cor. 5:14)

Without passion we approach our ministry with the mentality: “It is nice that . . .” or “it would be nice if . . .” This mentality is sufficient when things come easily, don’t ask much of us, and are generally going well. This mentality is insufficient, however, when things are not coming easily or going well, and when they do ask a lot of us. At such times this mentality is reflected in the thought: “It would have been nice, but . . .”

It is passion in and for our ministry that sees us through the hard times, the times that do ask a lot of us, the times that ask us to sacrifice. It is passion for our ministry that says “In spite of the fact that . . . “ or “I am going to/we must . . .” It is passion that will not allow us to quit. We need to become passionate about our ministry.

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk. 10:45)

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:10)

I believe passion for ministry arises not from someone telling us what we should be passionate about, but by feeling the needs, the hurts, the pains of those in our families, our neighborhoods, our communities. It involves tearing off the calluses we have developed to protect us from the pains of others. It means slowing down our lives of perpetual motion and activity—motion and activity that keep us from becoming personally and deeply involved in feeling and identifying with others in their needs. It means to become vulnerable, to be willing to experience pain, and
to learn how to cry in another’s pain.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” (Rom. 12:15)
“There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Cor. 12:25, 26)

When we feel the needs of others, out of their pain, I believe God will give us a vision of what can be, of what ought to be, and of what we, empowered by his grace and incarnating his presence, can help to be. This then becomes God’s vision for our congregation and our vision for ourselves. Having felt the pain, we now also feel his compassion and will seek to express his and our compassion with a passion.

“Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity.” (Eph. 5:15,16)
“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.” (Col. 4:5)

With vision and passion we are now ready to seek opportunity. Seeking opportunity does not mean we simply wait for the right moment. If we decide to simply wait for the right moment, we are likely to be waiting the rest of our lives. Seeking opportunity means that we do what we can to create opportunity, to bring about the right moment. We must honestly evaluate the situation, and then we must not stop there. We must also ask what, when, and how we will take the next step in ministry.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (1 Cor. 12:7)
“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph. 4:16)

God has provided his church with the resources to accomplish the vision he gives us, that to which he has called us. The question is not “Are we able?” In and through him we are fully able.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. (Eph. 3:20)
I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13)

The question is “How do we tap into the resources at our disposal—the resources of time, talents, and treasures?” Each of us becomes significant, even vital, at this
DCE Expressions

point. The body will only be as fully functional as each of us is fully functional in our God-given and God-empowered roles.

"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Eph. 4:16)

"Do not neglect your gift." (1 Tim. 4:14)

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (2 Tim. 1:6,7)

"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins." (James 4:17)

As each of us faces the challenge and invitation of ministry, it is easy to look at what we as individuals are already doing and at what others are not doing, and thus to become critical and judgmental. The real challenge to each of us, however, the challenge which reflects the depth of our passion, is our willingness to look at and affirm what others are doing and to ask ourselves “What more am I capable of doing?” God calls us not simply to bear some fruit, but to bear much fruit (John 15:1-8). This call entails actively and wholly presenting ourselves to God and to the opportunities of both word and deed before us today (Rom. 6:13).

"Now about love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the people. Yet we urge you to do so more and more." (1 Thess. 4:9,10)

The passages in this article are meant to express the third use of the law. I assume the article is being read by people who have heard and experienced the gospel, and, now moved by that gospel, desire to live as the new creation that gospel has made us. As we reflect on the challenge before us, we also need to remember and believe Jesus’ promises:

"I have come to give you life, life abundantly." (John 10:10)

"If you obey my commands, you will experience my love, just as I obey My Father’s commands and experience his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:10-12)

"He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Eph. 3:20)

As someone has said, “I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do, by the grace of God I will do!”
“Mommy, Where Do Teachers Come From?”

It’s Maggie’s first day of school. She has looked forward to entering third grade all summer. Maggie’s mom has encouraged her to organize her book bag full of fresh new materials, select her favorite new school outfit, and not forget to take the special present she picked out for her brand-new teacher. When she finally gets to school, she is met at the door with a welcoming smile by the principal. Maggie looks down the long hallway and sees a few adult faces she doesn’t know. Her friend Dawn joins her, and they walk quickly to their new classroom to meet their newly assigned teacher. Maggie can’t help asking her friend a question that has been nagging her for her entire three year education “career”: “How in the world did we get all these teachers anyway?”

Our Lutheran school system has historically operated with the understanding that educators who serve them have been supplied by the colleges and universities which train teachers, administrators, DCEs and other professional church workers. Indeed, for over 150 years, countless Lutheran educators have been produced for ministry in schools, congregations, and mission sites around the world. Such professional church workers could be depended upon for their academic readiness, pedagogical training, and general preparation for their ministry roles. The answer to Maggie’s question could easily have been “a Lutheran college”!

Times have changed. While the system of Lutheran higher education is as eager as ever to prepare young people for lives of service in Lutheran education—and the varied locations and programs allow for a rich diversity of quality learning options—the number of graduates no longer satisfies the growing need for teachers in Lutheran schools. Not as many young people are selecting education as their professional field. Rising costs make attending a private institution a major challenge. Support for educators and interest in teaching as a profession have diminished and caused hundreds of potential candidates (and existing teachers) to choose alternate careers.

While the dilemma of recruiting and retaining Lutheran educators is finally approaching a higher level of attention within the Lutheran system, the situation in the general education community across the United States is getting more and more complex. At a time when education is being recognized as a national priority by the president himself, it would seem that the plight of the educator would receive a similar amount of attention. “Where teachers come from” is,
instead, what seems to be the basis for most discussion these days. Ironically, when confronted with a growing need for qualified educators in classrooms at all levels, the very essence of the teaching profession is now being questioned.

The debate about improving schools has lingered on for many years under the guise of "school reform." Emphasis has been placed on buildings, curriculum, class size, standards, and a multitude of other factors that often became diversions during several recent administrations. Yet, little serious attention has ever been paid at the national level to the education of educators. Institutions with teacher training programs are often constricted by legislative action at the state level. Competition among these institutions—private and public—is greater than ever. Standards for teaching and learning are set without the benefit of collaboration with those professionals who train the very people that will be using the standards.

Today, we face a new problem: the question of teacher quality. One thing about which everyone agrees is the need for quality teachers in classrooms and the correlation between quality teachers and student performance. However, there are two growing camps regarding what constitutes quality and who should be a teacher. Two new reports released in June 2002 demonstrate the differences in thought and, more significantly, the differences in approach to a solution.

The emphasis placed on quality in the "No Child Left Behind" Act of 2001 was the basis for Secretary of Education Rod Paige's annual report, "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge." Citing a series of concerns with today’s teacher education programs, and suggesting that research supports more attention to subject matter as the basis for influencing student performance, Secretary Paige envisions a system in which certification regulations will be kept to a minimum, the quality of teachers will be determined more on the basis of their content knowledge and experience than on pedagogy, and attendance at schools of education will be optional.

In contrast, the Educational Testing Service released "A National Priority: Americans Speak on Teacher Quality," in which pedagogical skills and social abilities ranked as more important than content-area knowledge for good teachers. The case for strengthening—not watering down—teacher education programs is increasingly appearing not only in professional circles but also among the general public who wish to hold the system more accountable for their children’s education.

While the debate continues, Maggie (and her parents) deserve a good answer to the question of how we get good teachers. Underneath it all, it’s not merely the fact that a teacher is present, but that we can assure Maggie that her teacher understands her learning needs, has experienced what it takes for her to reach her potential, and has learned the full extent of what it means to be a quality Lutheran educator.
Things I Learned on Our Summer Family Reunion
(With subtle implications for church/school staffs!)

Fifteen of us—from 6 months old to 744 months old (that’s 62 years for you non-math people!) in one log cabin house in the Rocky Mountains for five days (in a row!) How’s that for togetherness?

We celebrated, played, prayed, talked, laughed, forgave . . . and learned much from each other. Here is what I learned:

1. God is truly a loving God—to put 15 people together in one house for a week . . . and have us survive . . . and still love each other at the end. As Hannah, 7 years old stated, “It was the best 10 days of my life!”

2. The best way to really get to know people (and even family!) is to spend quality and quantity time together.

3. Getting 15 human beings to agree on everything, at any one time, is an unrealistic goal.

4. What marvelous, yet diverse gifts, families have, as well as church staffs, as long as we can accept these differences and build on them. (Where is heredity when we need it?)

5. Humor and forgiveness go a long way at reunions, as well as in church and school staffs. If we can laugh with each other, and forgive at the same time, we’re on the right track!

6. Family reunions should be governed democratically, as long as Grandma and Grandpa get more votes!

7. An activity such as a horseback ride for 11-year-old Rachel can turn a good reunion into a great reunion. (Thank the Lord for Snowflake, the 22-year-old mare (and it’s true—“she ain’t what she used to be”—but she was enough!)

8. Airplane rides are fun, especially with 11 family members, along with all the other 300 plus passengers, singing “Happy Birthday.” And then to have Captain Tom invite Hannah and her sisters into the cockpit to sit in his seat—Wow! Little, special celebrations really do mean a lot! (If only the flight crew would have given a bottle of champagne to Hannah’s Grandparents . . . but, maybe next time!)

9. “Look at God’s Great Creation” can be said in the midst of the majestic Rocky Mountains, and it can also be exclaimed
in the quiet room of a sleeping baby. Sleep well, little Abbey!

10. Mountain-top experiences often come in common, everyday “valley” experiences, such as playing cards, watching birds, looking for deer, cooking breakfast, and digging for rocks for Grandma’s garden.

11. In the words of Yogi Berra (who couldn’t make the reunion this year!), you can sure observe a lot of things just by watching! What fun to spend time just listening and looking at the interactions between kids and grandkids.

12. Children, especially grandkids, seem to talk louder then we used to! As Aaron likes to say when we ask him to speak in his “quiet voice”—“This is my quiet voice!”

13. Rainbows are one of God’s greatest ideas! They help us remember the sign that says, “No Rain—No Rainbows.” After every Good Friday in our lives, there’s always an Easter—and a rainbow!

14. It is easier to try new things, to risk new behaviors, when we have the support of others, whether that is taking a bike trip, feeding the animals, trying new recipes, considering a float trip, or taking a grueling hike to places unknown.

15. Families, and staffs, who pray together, even when songs are off-key, all hands are not folded, parents have their minds on other things, the food is getting cold, are still greatly blessed and brought together in the Oneness of the Lord . . . and the food does even taste better!

Just a few of my learnings at our Family Reunion—a wonderful, powerful experience of the love and forgiveness of our Lord for all of us. It once again helped me to focus, not on what I want, but on what I have.

I am blessed, we are blessed, you are blessed...as God’s people.... in families, churches, schools . . . everywhere. Watch for your “mountain-top” experiences today, with the people that the Lord has put around you!

I think families should have such reunions often . . . like every 20-25 years! And remember, on a scale of 1-10, each family member (and staff member, too) deserves at least a 15! Celebrate your family, God’s family, today!
Spiritual Learning: The Core of the Curriculum

The organizing purpose of Lutheran schools is the spiritual environment and tone we set for children. This is particularly true in schools for young children—the preschools, child care centers, and primary schools/grades of our church.

But is that the only purpose? Of course not! Yet without that purpose, there is nothing unique about our teaching or about children’s learning. What we do makes a difference for eternity, not simply for the tomorrows of a child’s life in the world. However, that eternal difference needs to make a difference today and tomorrow as well.

How children live with and relate to those around them needs to grow out of our teaching and modeling of a relationship with God, the Lord of our lives. How children understand our relationship with Jesus grows out of their teacher-watching in the classroom and in the life of the congregation.

**Spiritual Relationships**

Each child’s relationship to God is the most important relationship in that child’s life. In Christian schools, one of our tasks is to help children come to know, appreciate, and understand the depth and mystery of that relationship begun in baptism and nurtured each day.

That relationship with God is not, however, a unilateral relationship. That relationship requires a response from each child of God—a response of love, of awe, and of worship toward the God of life who began that relationship for us.

That relationship also requires a response that reaches out to other human beings. Our response to God includes a reaching out to others in loving and caring ways.

Every child of God needs opportunities to practice that reaching out, that expression of caring. Even the youngest children in our centers and schools need the opportunity to practice care, to learn and experience empathy.

**Spiritual Fitness**

Expressions of care and empathy are learned. They are learned through practice and through experience. Just as physical muscles atrophy in disuse, the spiritual muscles of love, care and empathy must also be used in order to be strengthened.

Young children learn love by being loved and by being given
opportunities to practice loving others. How love looks and sounds is learned: young children learn what love looks like by watching the adults in their caregiving and teaching world love them.

Young children learn empathy by being treated in empathetic ways. They learn how to respond to others with empathy and caring by being given opportunities to practice empathy and by being encouraged to show such emotions and care.

Young children learn awe at the feet of parents and teachers. Children are naturally full of wonder and awe. But the expressions of wonder and awe that they witness in the adults around them validate those feelings in themselves and encourage them to express those feelings, too.

As young children practice responses to God’s love through their relationships with other people, both children and adults, they grow spiritually. That growth is a central purpose of the Christian school and child care center!

**Spiritual Models**

When Jesus’ disciples asked who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven would be, Jesus took a very young child as a model. Given the word that Matthew uses to denote this child in his eighteenth chapter, that child may have been too young to walk unaided. Can’t you picture the confusion on the faces and in the minds of his audience?

That child was a model of greatness whom Jesus used to make a point. Greatness is not a list of accomplishments. It is a relationship. It is a sense of dependence on the Caregiver. It is a trust that does not demand explanations for every aspect of life and living. That child—and the children for whom we care—could be and was a spiritual model.

At the same time, children look to adults for spiritual modeling. They watch to notice the actions that express love and care. They listen for the words and tones of voice that communicate respect and esteem. They take note of the times in which they experienced love, even when that love was undeserved. As children experience that kind of selfless love, they begin to define the word *love* as it is used to describe the God of love.

**Practicing Love**

Young children learn by doing. This is not just true for the skills and understandings we want them to develop. It is also true for the relationships we encourage them to forge. And relationships take time.

Children need time built into each classroom and caregiving day that encourages opportunities for building relationships and learning to care for and care about each other. Children need a curriculum that values and makes time for love, for empathy, for awe, and for worship.
Teaching the Young

That caring curriculum must be pointed in two directions each day. It must be pointed upward toward God in response to his great love for each of us. It must also be pointed outward toward others, both children and adults. Those others are also recipients of that great love of God. To begin to love them as God loves them is the challenge for each of us, the challenge of a lifetime. To learn to love them, to respect and esteem them, is the task before each child of God, beginning today.

"Still, when we ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares."

Henri Nouwen, Out of Solitude

"Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

Richard J. Foster, Celebrations of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth
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**SUMMER 2002**

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17. Signature and title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner

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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on this form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

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3. Be sure to furnish all circulation information called for in item 15. Free circulation must be shown in items 15d, e, and f.

4. Item 15h. Copies not Distributed, must include (1) newsstand copies originally stated on Form 3541, and returned to the publisher, (2) estimated returns from news agents, and (3) copies for office use, leftovers, spoiled, and all other copies not distributed.

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6. In item 16, indicate the date of the issue in which this Statement of Ownership will be published.

7. Item 17 must be signed.

Failure to file or publish a statement of ownership may lead to suspension of Periodicals authorization.

_P.S. Form 3526, October 1999 (Reverse)_
Who Will Teach Our Kids?

The cover of Newsweek, dated October 2, 2000, struck me hard. On it was the picture of a schoolgirl and the headline: “Who Will Teach Our Kids?: Half of All Teachers Will Retire by 2010.” My first thought, as president of a university that has historically devoted itself heavily to the preparation of teachers, was akin to the old mariner’s prayer: “O Lord, the sea is so great, and my boat is so small.” On further reflection, however, it occurred to me that this is not a bad time at all to be known as a place that does a really good job of readying teachers for students and classrooms.

But the need is so great. And not simply in the public schools. Every indication that I see suggests that the faculty demographics in Lutheran schools are not materially different from the situation in the country at large. Who will teach in the schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the largest group of faith-related schools in the United States after those of the Roman Catholic Church?

As with many difficult social challenges, we can be sure that this one will not yield to either single or simplistic solutions. Part of the answer is to ensure adequate student capacity in the colleges and universities of the church. In this connection, the new, world-class College of Education building to be dedicated in October on our campus makes a contribution, as does the fine, new facility at Concordia University in Nebraska. Part of the answer is to provide accessible alternatives for the preparation of Lutheran teachers via a colloquy program. Here, too, there have been significant, recent advances, especially through the program offered over the Internet by the Concordia University Educational Network (CUEnet). But as is true in other facets of dealing with the shortage of called workers in the church, other partners must play a role. Congregations and school associations must see to it that their schools are not made fiscally possible by holding down wages for teachers. Why shouldn’t they earn at or near the salaries of their public school counterparts? In the alternative (or better, in addition), why can’t we figure out ways to remove the burden of student loan debt for those just starting out? If anything more importantly, parents, teachers, and pastors need to encourage young people to consider the vocation of teacher—a process that begins with speaking highly of both the calling and those who have already answered it.

No doubt, this is but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. But (to thoroughly mix metaphors), there’s much truth to the old jest about how to eat an elephant: one bite at a time. What we can’t do is dawdle. Lutheran schools are too precious a resource to staff (or not) by default.