

The Gift Of God Is Eternal



The Wages Of Sin Is

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH

What the Mission of the Church Teaches Us about Lutheran Schools

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Progression of Thought

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH! What the Mission of the Church Teaches Us about Lutheran Schools

Introduction - "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see."

Christian Education is the Great Commission

Christian Education reveals our Life who is the Truth

Christian Education reveals the truth about our life and excites us for true living

Christian Education builds up the body of Christ

Christian Education opens eyes and hearts to others



Bible references are taken from *The New International Version*, 1984 edition.
References and bibliographical information attempt to follow the Chicago style guide.

In Nomine Jesu

Ten years ago. Yet the images still sear our memories. Images of towers engulfed in flames. Images of precious souls flinging themselves from skyscraper windows, preferring death by falling rather than death by burning. Images of billowing dust and debris engulfing whole city blocks as those towers collapsed. Images of people streaming and screaming away from the World Trade Center. Images of search and rescue personnel running toward death and not away. Such images. These images haunt us as we ponder the horror of such hatred toward innocents. These images terrify us as we contemplate the depth of such commitment to destroy. These images move us to reflect on the sacrifice of some to try to rescue others. Could you do that?

Flashback more than one decade. Flashback about 28 centuries. A scene of terror unfolded in a small town. But a prophet simply prayed, *O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.*¹ The servant of the prophet had seen an army that terrified him. In response, Elisha calmly asked the Savior God to open human eyes that he might clearly see the entire reality. And the servant saw! He learned *if God is for us, who can be against us.*² Did that servant also listen carefully? For the prophet had clearly intimated that the real warfare was not simply a raiding party from Aram surrounding a prophet of the Holy One of Israel. *“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*³ The prophet knew what the apostle knew. *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*⁴ It has always been thus since God decreed, *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.*⁵

Now go back to those painful scenes of 9/11. The world shuddered anew at man’s inhumanity to man. But why be surprised? Since the first murder, sinners have demonstrated persistent proclivity to perform unbelievable atrocities against fellow humans. You and I know why, but those without the Spirit of God simply don’t understand the real essence of the warfare. Horrible and deadly acts of terrorists only mimic the master terrorist who controls their hearts, who *prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*⁶ Such images of evil and war and bloodshed and rebellion are all part of the tapestry of the Revelation of St. John. *But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.*⁷ How can Christ’s precious Church ever imagine that she will enjoy a period of worldly peace and worldly prosperity prior to the trumpet? If such a time seems to exist, does it mask a dying church, a church that no longer sounds a clear trumpet?⁸ The bride of Christ is the *ecclesia militans* this side of heaven, promised by her Bridegroom nothing but visible suffering and trial until he returns for the consummation of glory. Jesus said to his Church: *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world,*

¹ 2 Kings 6:17

² Romans 8:31

³ 2 Kings 6:16

⁴ Ephesians 6:12

⁵ Genesis 3:15

⁶ 1 Peter 5:8

⁷ Revelation 12:12

⁸ *Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?* 1 Cor. 14:8

*it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*⁹

Yet you, dear brothers, you are safe and will remain safe! The Church remains safe. Oh, not safe from ridicule. Not safe from rebuke. Not safe from bodily harm or spiritual threats. Not safe from persecution. Jesus promised otherwise and he does not lie. Remember, since baptism you carry the sign of the cross upon your head and upon your heart. But Satan and the wicked world always see that cross as a crosshairs for their pent-up fury against the Savior God. Yet you are safe forever. United through baptism into Christ, you stand in the Savior God and thus you *are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*¹⁰ Yes, through the miracle of holy baptism you have been sealed into the very triumph of Christ Jesus. *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*¹¹

And now, again by the amazing grace of an amazing God, part of your new life in Christ is a divine call to bring new life to others. A call to be the bringers of eternal life when you bring the waters of life in holy baptism, when you bring the meal of life in the precious supper of our Lord, when you bring the message of life in sermon or song, in lesson or devotion. Yes, God has trained you and then appointed you to serve on Christ's very own search and rescue team. And, by the Spirit's grace, you understand the real mission. You do not run into danger and amidst demons simply to rescue a physical life. Rather, you know that you are really on a search and recovery mission. You are looking for corpses, people who by nature are indeed dead to God and all that is truly good. *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*¹² Yet these spiritual corpses still possess a hellish and perverse power to resist and rebel. But you come with the Word of Life, the message of Christ. You seek to bring the oxygen mask of the living word of God to imbue the Spirit's breath that creates life where once was death. *This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*¹³ You are no hero, *for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*¹⁴ Yet even in your weakness God's amazing strength and power shines forth so to bring glory to his saving name.¹⁵ Just imagine! The Spirit of God has used the living Word of the living God to bring you to life, and to instill in you a desire to be a life-bringer to others.

Can we agree, then, brothers, that the mission of Christ's Church on earth is to be an instrument of life when all around (and by nature all within) is only dying and death? Look around.

⁹ John 15:18-20

¹⁰ 1 Peter 1:5

¹¹ Romans 6:4-5

¹² Isaiah 64:6

¹³ Revelation 20:5-6

¹⁴ Philippians 2:13

¹⁵ See especially 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Though we still see the remnants of the beauty of Eden in the present world, since the fall the creation is in *bondage to decay* and *has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth*.¹⁶ Only inside the Church of the living Savior is there the Life that brings life now and forever. For Jesus, who alone is *the way and the truth and the life*,¹⁷ makes an unbreakable and eternal promise to his people: *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*.¹⁸

By now you muse and mutter to yourself, “What’s this got to do with saving our Lutheran grade schools?” I seek to challenge such thoughts, if indeed they are spooking around in the cranium. Why are we here these two days? What are we trying to save? If our concern is simply to revitalize a system of grade schools and high schools, this symposium is more than a waste of time. We are then engaged in a demonic delusion about the mission of Christ’s precious Church. The Church of Christ is not commanded by Jesus to create private education options for our neighbors.¹⁹ The Church of Christ is commanded by Christ to rescue our neighbors from dead living and eternal dying, and to do so through the message of Jesus, the Life of the world. So if the Church, through the powerful Means of Grace entrusted to her, is truly Christ’s instrument of life to this dead world, the question changes immediately. Why are we on this campus? To examine how everything in our congregation’s ministry, especially our Lutheran schools, is centered in this life-creating and life-changing reality: Jesus is the Christ! So the questions now become, “Is the Lutheran school a place where the Spirit of God can use the Word of life to create eternal life? To sustain this faith life? To raise up and train more life-bringers to carry the water of life to others?” The answers to those questions depend squarely upon the presence of the Gospel of Christ in every classroom in every period. Only the Gospel *is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*.²⁰ What a power unleashed from God himself! A sainted professor understood this life-creating character of the Lutheran school.

Whereas Christian education, if it succeeds, lifts the child out of the muck of sinfulness and sets him on a new plane, with a new outlook upon life and a strong tendency toward righteousness. This, again, is merely another way of stating the familiar axiom that the only educative force in the world is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the power of God unto salvation, which creates spiritual life in man who otherwise is dead in sins and transgressions.²¹

So how we answer those questions impacts how God’s people view the noisy hallways and sweaty gyms and messy lunch rooms and rambunctious classrooms. It impacts the prayer life of

¹⁶Taken from Romans 8:21,22

¹⁷ John 14:6

¹⁸ John 10:10

¹⁹ I do not speak against individual Christians, who, in gospel freedom, seek to establish and maintain private schools. These schools might even seek to use WELS trained teachers. However, considering the mission of Christ’s Church, there is a difference between private education and parochial education.

²⁰ Romans 1:16

²¹ John Schaller, “The Christian Church and Education.” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library essay file (EF 553), page 15. Schaller served as President of our Seminary from 1908 – 1920. It is of interest to this writer that prior to Schaller’s service at Wauwatosa, he served as professor of exegesis and church history in the theological department of Dr. Martin Luther College. He began that ministry at DMLC in 1888, needing a global perspective immediately. During his first school year, seventeen students comprised the theological department. Thirteen were international students (7 from Russia, 3 from Germany, 2 from Austria, 1 from Switzerland). The four U.S. students were from Minnesota. (Information from the 1889-1890 Catalogue of Dr. Martin Luther College.) The reader should also be aware that Professor Schaller served as president of the college from 1893-1908. That his interest in Christian education continued was evident in various articles written on the topic even while he served as Seminary president.

the church in corporate worship and the prayer life of the home in private devotion. It impacts our life of stewardship and the attitude with which we pay the ever escalating expenses of education on any level. Why have Lutheran schools if they are not a place where God imparts and sustains eternal life? Or, God forbid, do our people and our communities only view our schools as an alternative to crumbling educational efforts in America? Do people imagine a place with high moral values in a time when morality is defined individually? Do neighbors seek a safety zone from violence, physical and emotional? Perhaps they do. But if that is the limit of our vision and our eyesight, please *LORD, open our eyes that we may see the real work you seek to do.*

I cannot speak for you, but I can examine my own heart. I fear that often I have lost the sense of urgency our forefathers possessed, for they recognized the reality of the spiritual warfare that rages unabated all around. Satan unleashes an all-out attack against Christ and his Church. The father of lies attacks with brazen temptations that boldly entice a soul to revel in open sin. The ancient serpent is also a master of covert operations, especially among the visible church. He infiltrates with false ideas and deceptive theories. It is no wonder that the Spirit, through the apostle Paul, inspired an encouragement and a warning for God's people that speak directly to Christian education. *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*²² In fact, writing to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us of this evil war that speaks to the urgency of providing true Christian education through the Word of life. *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*²³

Does not Christian education, and especially the Lutheran school, provide the Church with a wonderful tool that God can use to “root” souls, “build up” souls, and help souls “take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ”? Can not the Lutheran school be a weapon of the Word so that God's precious people can *take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one?*²⁴ Others besides Schaller thought so. Pastor H. Koller Moussa is a name familiar to some church history buffs in our midst. In essence, “the Moussa report” encouraged the synod to “authorize and subsidize the establishment of preparatory schools, or academies, in many different parts of its territory, preferably according to conferences.”²⁵ Many of us, however, don't know that the encouragement of establishing Christian high schools in our synod was point three of the committee's recommendation to the synod convention of 1927. Point one was, in my opinion, an even more remarkable fruit of the Spirit's work.

²² Colossians 2:6-8

²³ 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

²⁴ Ephesians 6:16

²⁵ Taken from 1927 Proceedings of the Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States. See page 42. (Fortunately, this report was in English!)

Some context is important before I read you that first recommendation. The Moussa report was sent to the synodical committee on 26 October 1926, only eight brief years after the Great War. Those war years were a difficult trial for our forefathers! Many in America opposed our church and our church schools because they viewed the parishes, pastors, and teachers with suspicion. German language speakers were viewed as sympathizers at best or spies at worst. Any school that conducted instruction - in whole or in part - using the German language must not be patriotic.²⁶ Consider that painful episode for our little synod. How remarkable, then, that in 1927 the synod in convention accepted the committee's recommendations, including point number one! It reads: "Every parish in our Synod should have a day school with the aim of providing eight years of instruction."²⁷

Wow! What a vision! But did it die with the Great Depression? Not entirely, for about a decade later another seminary professor called forth the vision of the Lutheran school as an integral gospel tool the Spirit can unleash in this spiritual conflict that confronts the Church, a conflict between life and death, between God and Gog.

What are our feelings about a church school? Are we prepared to make any sacrifice in order to establish and preserve a church school? Are we not often deterred from having a school at all for lack of educational facilities and programs similar to those of the public schools? And this is despite the fact that we are aware which spirit controls the public schools and indoctrinates its teachers in their preparatory institutions, normal schools, and universities.

If we are willing docilely to stand by while our children's hearts are poisoned with Satan's fundamental lies in the school system, then how can we presume to stand our ground against him? And if such a pitiful state of affairs has become possible, then verily Gog and Magog now control the length and breadth of this world.²⁸

Why this excursus if the Rev. Dr. Braun was assigned to examine how our forefathers viewed the Lutheran school? I pray you permit it (what choice do you have?) because I seek to have each of us examine our commitment and sense of urgency in regard to the Lutheran school. Would any of us walk to the microphone at a synod convention today and support a recommendation like the 1927 recommendation? Or how would a study club react to Meyer's strong encouragement?

²⁶ John Schaller also presented a paper to the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference assembled at Bay City, Michigan in August of 1900. The title of this paper was "The Need of Christian Education by Means of Parochial Schools." Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library essay file, (EF 684). Did Schaller have a premonition of the storm clouds forming above our precious schools? Schaller concludes this article with a defense of the Christian school as the only true means by which God can raise up patriotic citizens. After enumerating from Scripture his rationale, he states: "The arguments set forth above ought easily to convince any unprejudiced Christian mind that, besides the parochial school, there is no other institution in our country where children may be trained to a citizenship which is intrinsically good. For the virtues which we have discussed form the groundwork of all other virtues that are required in social and political life. If this be true, then the love of our country and its institutions will urge us to establish, maintain, and foster Christian parochial schools. The fact that our schools are commonly assailed and libeled as un-American institutions which are hostile to the prosperous development of the commonwealth, will not, must not cause us to hesitate. We defend our schools with the unshakable conviction that they are the best safeguards of civil order." Page 35

²⁷ Proceedings of the Ev. Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States, 1927, p. 42.

²⁸ J. P. Meyer, "The Kingdom of Christ," page 77. Translated from the article that appeared in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 1933-1935, by O. Marc Tangner, copyright 2002. The booklet is privately printed, but available from the WLS bookstore.

We can almost hear the rowdy discussion. Speaker after speaker would question the recommendation from a kingdom balance perspective, the outreach versus nurture debate. Others would question the wisdom in regard to proper stewardship of scant resources. Others would wonder if we are denigrating our fellow WELS members who are faithful Christians and also faithful school teachers in the public districts of our country, wonderful Christians who are letting their *light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*²⁹ Others would raise the fear that we might be perceived isolationist, or even fundamentalist. If that imaginary debate occurred, does that mean the soul of our synod has changed in comparison with the soul of the synod in 1927? Is there a shift in our support and promotion of the Lutheran school as an integral part of Christian education in our midst? But today things are so different, some would say. Or are they? Did the believers in 1927 not face rampant materialism? The growing immorality of the Roaring Twenties? The pressures to reach across cultures and languages? A worldview increasingly antagonistic toward a Biblical *Weltanschauung*?³⁰ Where do you stand, brother? Are you willing to go to Jacob's mat for the Lutheran school? I will, but only if its identity as part of the Great Commission is upheld and promoted in our midst.

In regard to Christian Education and the importance of the Lutheran school, I don't believe the soul of our synod has changed, though it is being challenged. I still remain grateful to a powerful Good Shepherd who yet entrusts to us the Gospel, and so pours out the Spirit to fill the hearts of his people with an eager desire to feed his lambs.³¹ I am thankful to the Lord of the Church for providing Christian leaders in our conference of presidents, who presented to the July 2011 synod convention a recommendation to establish a task force on Lutheran schools.³² I rejoice that Christ has provided our synod with a Seminary whose faculty encourages and supports the Lutheran school as an integral part of the Church's mission. This symposium is evidence of that commitment. I'm excited to consider how the Spirit brought you here with urgency in your heart and a prayer in your soul for the spiritual welfare of the Lutheran school in our midst. All this is testimony to me that the Spirit has opened our eyes to see clearly. We don't want to rescue a visible institution. We're not interested in private education. We are not here to talk about raising sufficient funds to simply offer excellent education in our neighborhood. We are here to ask the basic questions. Is the teaching and the preaching the Gospel of Christ a matter of life or death for souls? Can the Lutheran school be part of the work Christ wants us to do? Is the Lutheran school so integral to our mission and ministry that it deserves our very best in thank offerings to Jesus – the offerings of our prayers that Jesus bless our feeble efforts and accomplish *immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us?*³³ Are we willing to bring the offerings of our own dear children to train as gospel servants?

²⁹ Matthew 5:16



³⁰ *There is nothing new under the sun.* (Ecclesiastes 1:9) Read August Pieper's classic article, "The True Reconstruction of the Church," to see how times never really change, nor do the challenges facing the visible church. The article can be found in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, volume 3. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 245-345.

³¹ John 21:15

³² The COP recommendation was included in a mailing from President Schroeder's office. The mailing was sent to all synod convention delegates and contained various unpublished memorials and reports and recommendations. The mailing was dated June 2011. Subsequently, the 2011 WELS convention passed resolution number 07 from floor committee number 1. (see appendix A)

³³ Ephesians 3:20

Do we enthusiastically bring the offerings of our hearts to commit personal time and sweat energy to the Lutheran school? Do we support our Christian teachers and seek to relieve them of some extracurricular duties by gladly engaging with the children in the classroom or on the court? Do we cheerfully bring the offerings of our dollars to support this Gospel teaching work as a cheerful gift presented to the One who is the perfect Rabbi? There can be no half-hearted commitment. As Christians, we seek ways to bring the Life of Christ to a dying world. And the Lutheran school can be a vital instrument that the Spirit uses to bring life through him who is the Life.

<i>Ninety second interruption</i>	
	
	

Christian Education is the Great Commission

Christian education, by definition, is not limited to Lutheran schools. However, Lutheran schools, if they are truly Lutheran, can only be defined as Christian education. What do I mean? In the broad sense, Christian education is truly any effort to teach Christ as the Life of the world and as the center and purpose of my life, both now and forever. What a contrast to human life, subjected since the first rebellion to the unrelenting reality of sin: the dying and the death around and within. Christian education teaches the arrogant old Adam that every human is a child of death, born dead in sins, born dead to God’s love, born dead to loving others. Paul declares, *you were dead in your transgressions and sins...we were by nature objects of wrath.*³⁴ Christian education teaches that a holy God has decreed a curse for sin and eternal dying for the sinner. In fact, true Christian education teaches the truth so blatantly ignored today: God hates the sinner. *You hate all who do wrong*, the psalmist exclaims.³⁵ So if death is the fate of every human, and God’s just wrath and hatred our only future, what hope is there? The glorious hope that only the Christian witness can proclaim. It is the glorious news of grace. A heavenly Father’s eternal love is so infinite that he provides the answer to his hatred of the sinner. It is in his Son. At the cross you see God’s hatred unleashed upon his one and only Son in whom he is well pleased.³⁶ He made him to be sin!³⁷ He will pour out death upon the One who is the Life, that we dead

³⁴ Ephesians 2:1,3

³⁵ Psalm 5:5

³⁶ Matthew 3:17 and Matthew 17:5

³⁷ *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
2 Corinthians 5:21

sinner might have life with the Father.³⁸ What unfathomable love! Jesus truly is our Life. And any attempt to proclaim life in Christ when all the sinner deserves is death for our sins is the essence of the Christian witness. It is Christian education. So Christian education is also a Christian parent teaching a small child to pray, “Abba, Father.” Christian education is a Christian aunt teaching a niece a favorite Bible lesson. Christian education is the evangelist teaching a neighbor the Good News that *the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*³⁹ Sunday school teachers, pastors and Pioneer leaders, choir members and church elders – all are engaged in Christian education whenever in word and song Christ is presented as our Savior and our Life. Christian education is not limited to Lutheran schools.

However, I will claim that Lutheran schools that are truly Lutheran can only be defined as Christian education. Because, as we shall see, the living Christ pours out his life into a Lutheran school through the Word proclaimed in every content area. The Lutheran school is not a private school that appears like any other school except for a devotion every day, or some crosses on the walls, or table prayers in the lunch room, or some hymn singing. The Lutheran school’s identity starts in the Great Commission.

Do you agree with the formula stated in the heading above: Christian education = Great Commission? We all know Christ’s words to his Church and no doubt we have every catechumen memorize them: *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.”*⁴⁰ Note how Christ speaks words of control and command and comfort to his Church of all times. In so doing, Jesus reminds us of his omnipotence and omniscience, emphasizing that he has the authority over all creation and over all heaven. This authority the Shepherd wields on behalf of his flock so that his people can have the exciting privilege of bringing the life message everywhere, no matter the hellish hindrances. *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*⁴¹ And lest we ever imagine we can do it on our own, he reminds us of his omnipresence when he says, *I will be with you always.* Where is Christian education in these marching orders?

The main verb in the command is “make disciples.” The Greek verb is μαθητευσατε, an aorist imperative of μαθητευω. The verb can be used intransitively, as in “to be a pupil.” It can also be used in a transitive sense, “to instruct, to make a disciple, a follower.” Several lexicons state that the verb flows from the noun μαθητης, a learner or a pupil, and then link that noun in the same semantic domain with the verb μαθησθαι, which means “to learn, to increase knowledge.”

³⁸ *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.* Ephesians 2:4-5.

³⁹ Romans 6:23

⁴⁰ Matthew 28:18-20

⁴¹ Ephesians 1:22-23, emphasis added

Another lexicon connects the noun μαθητης to both μαθητευω and μαθανω.⁴² I'll leave it to others far more qualified than I to debate whether or not the verbs μαθητευω and μαθανω are in the same, or similar, or overlapping, or entirely different semantic domains.⁴³ My point is simply that the verb “make disciples” has clear overtones to the teaching/learning idea. Certainly teaching includes instruction, but it also includes modeling. It includes cognitive and affective and volitional domains. The circumstantial participles in the sentence help us understand the manner and means to do this blessed work: going, baptizing, teaching. But there is only one command, “make disciples, instruct, make followers.” The import of the verb definitely recalls that our dear Savior is also the perfect Rabbi, whose ministry was grounded in teaching. And oh, what a Teacher! *He taught as one who had authority.*⁴⁴

So everything the body of Christ does with the Gospel, the message of life, is teaching a sinner to follow the Savior God. Therefore, the Church is to instruct a person bound by space and place to worship the One who cannot be bound. *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*⁴⁵ The Church is to teach an individual chained to the clock of time about the timeless One, for *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*⁴⁶ The Church is to rebuke the arrogance of the sinful human intellect by teaching sinners to repent of the desire to completely comprehend the great I AM and thus make God into our image rather than rejoicing that God created us in his image. The Church is to proclaim the knowledge of God as he has graciously revealed it. God is Triune. The only begotten of the Father became incarnate. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.*⁴⁷ Therefore, the Church is to teach people to rely on God's miraculous intervention to create a trusting knowledge of the goodness of God in Christ, even when reason cannot fathom. *No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*⁴⁸

But wait! How can one claim Christian education as a component of the Bible's command to baptize all nations? Babies have no developed cognitive powers. We baptize them and then as they grow we instruct in the Scriptures with age-appropriate content and methods. But Christian education already at the font? Yes indeed, for Scriptures clearly declare that *from infancy* (από

⁴² For further study, compare and contrast *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (BAG), and *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*. (Louw & Nida)

⁴³ Professor D. Balge, when asked to evaluate this paragraph, jotted this note: “μαθ is the root of a column of classical words involving learning, or the thing learned, or the person learning. And I would say that the semantic domain is the same.”

⁴⁴ Matthew 7:29

⁴⁵ Psalm 139:7-9

⁴⁶ Hebrews 13:8

⁴⁷ Psalm 139:6

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:7-10

βρέφους) you have known the holy Scriptures...⁴⁹ In Christian education the Bible stresses and the Church teaches that it is all about God's miraculous intervention. When we place undue emphasis on the intellectual powers and prowess of a person, we suggest that the acquisition of faith is a cognitive achievement and we elevate reason about the Spirit's miracle. From the infant child to the infirm Alzheimer patient, the Church teaches souls the precious message of life in Christ. And the Church rejoices to know that the Spirit's power in the Word is not limited by the mental ability or lack thereof in a human.

We Christians take comfort in this miracle power of God. A mother rocking her baby and singing a bed time prayer to Jesus is already teaching the good news that a sinner has a relationship with God through Christ. A pastor sharing Scripture at the bedside of a dying member is pointing a soul to the glory to come, and so teaching that Christ has won him the victory. The congregation singing the liturgy not only is praising the Lord, but teaching each other anew the great truths of salvation in Christ alone. The Pioneer leader giving a devotion before a campout is teaching those young boys and girls that Christ is glorified even as we are good stewards of his creation. The teacher in a Lutheran school, no matter the subject matter, is teaching about Christ. (We will examine this claim in detail later.) The pastor presiding or preaching is still also teaching. The evangelist who comes with the good news of life in Christ Jesus is teaching law and Gospel, sin and grace. I submit to you that Christian education is the Great Commission and the Great Commission is Christian education.

But what about the outreach versus nurture debate? It need not exist. I believe it to be a false dichotomy. Although he approached this question from the other side of the coin, Professor David Valleskey saw only one task for the Church of Christ. *The mission of the church, then, has a sharp focus: It is to evangelize those within the church and to evangelize those outside the church. ...The church, then, has one calling, to preach the gospel, a calling which is carried out in two ways, through nurture, which strengthens and equips the believer, and through outreach, which calls the unbeliever to repentance and faith. ...In both cases, outreach and nurture, the church's tool is the same, the gospel in Word and Sacrament.*⁵⁰ Use the word "evangelize" or use the word "educate." Teach a soul the law and so call to repentance. Teach a soul the good news of Christ Jesus and so invite to faith. The only difference between outreach and nurture lies not in the Church's method, but in how the Church views the Spirit's amazing work. It is the Spirit's amazing power, his "strange work"⁵¹ to use the law to crush and condemn a heart. It is the Spirit's amazing power to create new life in this terrorized heart. So his miracle to call a soul from death to life through the Gospel we think of as outreach work. Yet the heart of a believing

⁴⁹ 2 Timothy 3:15

⁵⁰ David Valleskey, "An Evangelism Perspective of the Lutheran Elementary School." Presented in 1987 to Lutheran Elementary School and Evangelism Symposium, 1987. WLS library on-line essay file, page 3.

⁵¹ "Contrition is meant by one of these; faith is meant by the other. [*The LORD*] will be roused; to do His deed – strange is His deed! and to work His work – alien is His work! (Isaiah 28:21). He calls it the "strange work of the Lord when He terrifies, because to make alive and comfort is God's own proper work. But He terrifies, Isaiah says, for this reason – that there may be a place for comfort and making alive. For hearts that are secure and do not feel God's wrath hate consolation. In this manner Scripture is accustomed to join these two, the terrors and the consolation. It does this to teach that there are these chief parts in repentance: contrition and faith that comforts and justifies." "The Apology to the Augsburg Confession," Article XII (V), 51 & 52. *Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), p.190.

child of God still needs the daily work of the Spirit through the law to crucify the old nature. The believer's heart needs the miracle work of the Spirit through the Gospel to daily *create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*⁵² It is a miracle of the Spirit's work to daily keep a soul alive in Christ, growing in grace, and safe from deadly temptations. Now we speak about nurture. But the Church uses one tool, the Means of Grace. There is one Spirit whose power works the miracle of creating and sustaining new life. So, in this sense, is not evangelism Christian education and Christian education evangelism?

Professor Armin Schuetze offers sage counsel as we conclude this outreach/nurture debate.

Some say: "The church should not spend so much time and effort preaching to itself. It is selfish to use its resources to serve those who already have heard the gospel. Its one mission is to reach out with the gospel. The Lord said, 'Go into all the world.'"

Scripture does not place the two in conflict with one another. The church does not have two missions, one to its members, another to the world. The Lord gave one command: preach and teach the good news to all creation. That includes those who have already been brought to faith as well as the vast world of unbelievers. Both are included in the Lord's commission. You cannot do one and omit the other.⁵³

Forgive me for belaboring the point, but throughout my ministry I have often heard the debate between outreach and nurture. Too few dollars in the offering plate fuels the debate. Too few adult confirmands fuels the debate. Too many young people drifting from the church fuels the debate. Now humans slice apart the one command of Christ to his Church and choose to focus on one aspect that most suits individual interests or abilities, and in so doing we sin. It is a sin to ignore the clear commands of Jesus to seek the lost, to go into all the world to teach and preach the message of life.⁵⁴ It is a sin to ignore the clear commands of Jesus to thoroughly instruct in the Word, equip for service, and train more to go.⁵⁵

Furthermore, present circumstances seem to endanger the identity of the Lutheran school as great commission work. I don't believe it to be an intentional obfuscation, but the clarity of this great mission as part of the school's vision seems to be clouded in the minds of many of our members, and perhaps in our own minds. Here in the Milwaukee area the choice program is an established fact, and it has brought marvelous opportunities to our schools to serve more students and meet more families. But there can be dangers. Do we see government money as the panacea that will allow us to keep open our school, while a congregation doesn't address the underlying, critical questions? Lord, protect us from such temptations. One writer said it well:

And Christian education has its share of ambulance chasers, starting schools and early childhood programs for pure profit or proselytizing motives, or as havens for those who do not want their

⁵² Psalm 51:10-12

⁵³ Armin Schuetze, *Church-Mission-Ministry: The Family of God*. (Milwaukee, WI: NPH), pages 66-67.

⁵⁴ All four gospels conclude with this joyful privilege entrusted to us by Christ. (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21-23) See Valleskey paper cited above, page 2, for his summary treatment of these sections.

⁵⁵ A brief overview of the pastoral epistles will certainly demonstrate Paul's concern for proper indoctrination of God's people and the need to continually train more to go and teach.

children with those of other races or socio-economic status. Too many congregations have lost touch with their parish schools, milking them for the bottom line and refusing to immerse the life of the parish with the lives of the school children and their families.⁵⁶

Concurrently, during these recent years many, if not most, of our schools have adopted a tuition model for funding the parish school. Certainly, in Christian freedom a congregation may decide to do so. It is an adiaphoron. But as our parents “pay the bills” for this Lutheran education, do they begin to assess the “value” of the Lutheran school education from a secular perspective? When people, whether members or non-members, enroll their children using tuition money or choice money, gospel servants have to be proactive in proclaiming the true “life” mission of Lutheran schools. We in leadership positions in the parishes need to redouble our efforts to clearly articulate that the Lutheran school is not a private school but part of the Great Commission work we strive to do. If we don’t, all sorts of difficulties hinder the efforts to share the message of life. Comparing the facility or programs of the Lutheran school to the local public school will be a temptation for people who are now trying to determine whether they are getting “their money’s worth.” How people understand the teacher in the classroom is impacted. Without careful instruction parents no longer view the teacher as a gospel servant embarking on the glorious work of the Great Commission, but simply a “hire” that some can try to have fired if they are dissatisfied. People need to be told upfront that we view our schools as more than just an instrument to impart secular knowledge (is there any such thing?) or train students for successful lives (how do you define that goal?).

I believe that the Lutheran school can be part and parcel of the Great Commission. Christ does not command believers to establish the particular structure of the K - 8 school or the 9 - 12 Lutheran high school. Christ does command us to teach and to feed and to nurture and to train and to equip souls with his word of life. It is a matter of life or death for each individual soul. So if we have a Lutheran school - and this form of ministry is an adiaphoron - we need to make clear its true identity. It is a ministry of the Word in answer to the Great Commission. Its sole *raison d’être* is to teach Christ. This truth impacts our understanding of the LES identity.

This authority [the authority of the keys, ed.] is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, either to many or to individuals, according to their calling. In this way are given not only bodily, but also eternal things: eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These things cannot reach us except by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, “The Gospel...is the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes” (Romans 1:16). Therefore, the Church has the authority to grant eternal things and exercises this authority only by the ministry of the Word. So it does not interfere with civil government any more than the art of singing interferes with civil government.⁵⁷

This truth also impacts our understanding of the faculty’s role in the Lutheran school. In our circles, each teacher in the LES is entrusted with means of grace ministry in his or her classroom. Therefore, normal practice among us is to issue a divine call into the teaching ministry for every faculty member. Means of grace ministry is more than prepping a devotion every morning or

⁵⁶ The Reverend Dr. Stephen Paul Bouman, “Christ with the Children in the Metropolis.” The 2008 Kieschnick Lecture. (Chicago, Ill: Wheat Ridge Ministries’ Center for Urban Education Ministries), p.6

⁵⁷ Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, 8-10. *Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord.* (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 2005), p. 84.

creating a religious bulletin board to match the season of the church year. Means of grace ministry is a constant application of law and Gospel throughout every classroom endeavor, curricular or extracurricular. Such discerning application is to be evident in the teaching of every subject discipline. It is demonstrated in classroom management that reflects Biblical discipline and not behaviorist drivel. It is seen in the hallway “counseling” or the coaching on the court. Only then is the Spirit unleashed to do his work of crucifixion and vivification. *For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*⁵⁸ Whether methods or motivation or content message is the topic *du jour* for the LES faculty meeting, every faculty member understands that in this school, everything starts and ends with the One who is *the First and the Last*.⁵⁹

What a heritage bequeathed to our WELS, that our fathers sacrificed much to establish a college of ministry that views worker training solely as the work of the Spirit. Through the Word that permeates every aspect of the published curriculum and the school culture, the Spirit breathes new life. Students in your college, whether preseminary track or teacher track or staff ministry track, are trained for gospel service. Ministry is paramount! Professionalism and excellence are thank offerings to Jesus in support of this vocation as called ministers of the gospel.

Furthermore, Lutheran teachers know that a Christian school is not simply a school with “values,” nor is its method of motivation insipid moralizing. Return to the Great Commission. What do people understand when they recite *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*?⁶⁰ Sadly, more than a few give a quick read and simply imagine that the role of the church is to train people to obey all the rules in the “good book.” Christianity’s focus, then, is damningly reversed. No longer a focus on Christ and what he has accomplished, but now a faulty focus on the disciple and what he does. Free grace is buried and the *opinio legis* elevated.

The great commission does encourage the Church to provide solid instruction and indoctrination when it says, *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*. But the verb “obey” (τῆρειν) means more than following a rule. God encourages the Church to guard and keep the truth, to entrust the “everything Christ commands” to others, to preserve that truth.⁶¹ And I believe that the “everything” is the reality that truth, ultimate and eternal truth, is centered only in Jesus the Christ. He alone can claim, *I am the Truth*.⁶²

⁵⁸ Galatians 2:19-20



⁵⁹ Revelation 1:17

⁶⁰ Matthew 28:20

⁶¹ Perusing a Greek lexicon for the definition of τῆρειν, we see that “obey” in our colloquial understanding is not necessarily the primary meaning. Bauer/Arndt/Gingrich lists the following. “1) keep watch over, guard; 2) keep, hold, reserve, preserve someone or something; 3) keep = not lose; 4) keep = protect; 5) keep, observe, pay attention to.” Listing 5 is the category BAG assigns to Matthew 28:20. Bauer, Walter; Arndt, William; Gingrich, F. Wilbur. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).

⁶² John 14:6, capitalization added.

Ninety second interruption

Christian Education Reveals our Life who is the Truth

The Lutheran school makes a bold claim, a claim ridiculed and rejected by a world dead to truth. Every teacher in the Lutheran school unabashedly asserts to teach truth - objective truth, eternal truth, truth centered in the One who is the Truth. In this postmodern society, such a claim to objective truth is mocked. And no public school administrator would allow a teacher to make such claims in the classroom. Rather, public school administrators and teachers are trained in colleges that espouse the relativism that society embraces. Society believes that truth is what an individual decides based upon his experiences, his background, his worldview. Thus, truth is in the eye of the beholder; it is relative.

Evidence of this subjective approach is everywhere, but especially in education, whether public or private schools. Parents have lamented the “dumbing down” of expectations, but in reality it often simply reflects a constructivist approach.⁶³ One author enumerates several examples of this trend in education.

Teachers are not to tell students that their ideas are right or wrong, either, but merely to encourage them “to clarify and articulate their own understandings.” Just as in values clarification, the teacher is left with no mechanism to adjudicate between the answers students come up with. Thirty different students may well offer thirty different answers, but each must be considered viable.

This explains why schools now have classes where children construct their own spelling systems (“invented spelling”), their own punctuation and grammar rules, their own math procedures, and so on.⁶⁴

⁶³ Constructivism is an educational methodology that tries to lead students to construct their own knowledge. “Constructivism does not assume the presence of an outside objective reality that is revealed to the learner, but rather that learners actively construct their own reality.” Ernst von Glasersfeld, “A Constructivist Approach to Teaching,” in *Constructivism in Education*, ed. L.P. Steffe and J. Gale (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995) as quoted by Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 2004,2005), p. 241.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

But what is the real danger? Understand that constructivism is more than an educational methodology. This educational fad flows out of a philosophical premise that there are no absolute truths. “Constructivism is an epistemology, a philosophical explanation about the nature of knowledge....In fact, according to constructivism, laws of nature do not exist; rather all knowledge is subjective and personal and is a product of our own cognitive acts.”⁶⁵

If this educational approach is so prevalent in our land and in our public schools, does it not pose a serious spiritual threat? “Thus saith the Lord” is countered by the arrogant response, “That’s only your interpretation.” The Church is to proclaim the absolute truth of the living God, the truth revealed in the Word incarnate. *The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*⁶⁶ I believe that the Church of Christ needs the Lutheran school as a powerful tool through which the Holy Spirit can create a Biblical worldview that is centered only in Jesus, who alone is *the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.*⁶⁷ It is a worldview that understands the origin of evil and suffering. It is a worldview that knows why there is pain and death. Yet it is a worldview that holds up the One lifted up upon a tree, that we might have life. *...so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*⁶⁸

That Biblical worldview is under siege, even among Christians. The temptation is rife for people to compartmentalize their lives and their thinking. Do we wonder how people can come to church on a fairly regular basis, but turn around and defend abortion as another woman’s right even if I might disagree with it? Nancy Pearcey calls it the “Heart versus Brain” divide.⁶⁹ “The first step in forming a Christian worldview is to overcome this sharp divide between ‘heart’ and ‘brain.’ We have to reject the division of life into a sacred realm, limited to things like worship and personal morality, over against a secular realm that includes science, politics, economics, and the rest of the public arena.”⁷⁰ Is not Pearcey simply echoing a truth that the Reformers proclaimed?

The charts below are Pearcey’s and amply demonstrate that the father of lies has done his work of delusion by creating a dichotomy that infects sinful minds and leads people to compartmentalize their lives.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Terry Simpson, “Dare I Oppose Constructivist Theory?” in *The Educational Forum* [Kappa Delta Pi] 66 [Summer 2002]: 347-354), as quoted by Pearcey, *op.cit.*, page 427, note 56.

⁶⁶ John 1:14

⁶⁷ John 14:6, capitalization added.

⁶⁸ John 3:14-15

⁶⁹ In this next section I am indebted to Nancy Pearcey for the charts that help the reader see this division of thought that has infected our culture, and yes, even some of our thinking. Her book, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 2004-1005) is a well researched and documented study that explores the issues of worldview. I found it a fascinating read. With some reservations, I recommend it to you for your study. She did a fine review of philosophical thought down through the ages, exposed the pervasive and destructive influence of Darwinian materialism on the visible church, recapped American church history to demonstrate the sad progression of an anti-Biblical worldview, and expressed the need for Biblical apologetics, among other things.

⁷⁰ Nancy Pearcey, *ibid*, page 20.

⁷¹ These charts are found on pages 20-21 of Pearcey’s book, *Total Truth*.

Modern societies are sharply divided:

PRIVATE SPHERE

Personal Preferences

PUBLIC SPHERE

Scientific Knowledge

Values have been reduced to arbitrary, existential decisions:

VALUES

Individual Choice

FACTS

Binding on Everyone

The two-realm theory of truth:

UPPER STORY

Nonrational, Noncognitive

LOWER STORY

Rational, Verifiable

Today's two-story truth:

POSTMODERNISM

Subjective, Relative to Particular Groups

MODERNISM

Objective, Universally Valid

Have you heard echoes of this dichotomy in comments your people have made? In comments perhaps you have made? Sometimes, perhaps unwittingly, we leaders in the church foster this two-tiered way of analyzing life in this world. How often haven't we explained the difference between the Lutheran school and public education by saying, "We teach all of the content areas in the light of God's Word"? Putting the best construction on everything, we can understand the intent of that statement. No subject matter stands alone. God's Word has final authority in everything. Yet, I ask you: is there such a thing as secular subjects and sacred subjects? For the Christian, Jesus is the Truth. What Paul wrote to the Colossians, he writes to Lutheran schools:

*My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, **namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.⁷² When Jesus said *I am the Truth*⁷³ he made an all-inclusive claim. He did not say that he is the Truth in matters spiritual. He did not say he is the Truth in matters Jewish. He did not say he is the Truth contextualized for the first century Roman empire or the Hellenistic world scene. He is the Truth – the essential, the eternal, the all-encompassing truth. He is the great *I AM*. And the Lutheran school is an instrument of the Spirit to reveal Jesus, who is our Life, as the Truth in all things. It is a Biblical worldview that no public or private school can provide, a worldview taught and modeled and lived by Christian teachers and Christian pastors. In the Lutheran school there are no two tiers. There is one foundation, *for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*⁷⁴*

Pastor David Thompson has written an insightful book that would be an excellent tool for study clubs and faculty meetings.⁷⁵ The second chapter of this book is entitled “THE CHRISTIAN Confessional Lutheran WORLDVIEW – The Standard Against Which to Measure All Others” (emphasis in the original). In this chapter he provides a list of eight worldview questions and lists a Biblical answer. Read appendix B for his eight questions. As you read the list, ask yourself how a teacher in a public school must answer. Then ask yourself if the Lutheran school is a blessing from God and an integral part of a church body that seeks to teach and keep everything that Christ has commanded. (Answers provided in the appendix are truncated from the full answers given in his book.)

Nancy Pearcey, quoted above, provides a simple template that can be taught even to grade school children, helping them to be discerning disciples as they view movies, listen to music, read books. Every author or composer or script writer operates with a worldview, and it will permeate his work.

A wonderfully simple and effective means of comparing worldviews is to apply the same grid of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. After all, every worldview or ideology has to answer the same three sets of questions:

1. **CREATION:** Translated into worldview terms, Creation refers to ultimate origins. Every worldview or philosophy has to start with a theory of origins: Where did it all come from? Who are we, and how did we get here?
2. **FALL:** Every worldview also offers a counterpart to the Fall, an explanation of the source of evil and suffering. What has gone wrong with the world? Why is there warfare and conflict?
3. **REDEMPTION:** Finally, to engage people’s hearts, every worldview has to instill hope by offering a vision of Redemption – an agenda for reversing the “Fall” and setting the world right again.⁷⁶

⁷² Colossians 2:2-4, emphasis added.

⁷³ John 14:6, capitalization added.

⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:11

⁷⁵ David C. Thompson, *What in the World is Going On?* (Milwaukee, WI: NPH, 2010)

⁷⁶ Nancy Pearcey, *op.cit.*, page 134. The author goes on to demonstrate the effectiveness of the simple template by critiquing Marxism, New Age pantheism, and other examples.

From eternity to eternity, there is no truth apart from Christ. This is the one objective Truth that Satan cannot allow, that Satan will viciously and constantly attack. And attack Satan has. Since the fall into sin, the natural knowledge of man is depraved and can only invent a god that is in man's own image. The plaguing questions that persist even in the most hardened conscience can never fully be extinguished, for God *has also set eternity in the hearts of men.*⁷⁷ So, even the hardened unbeliever still hears the nagging questions. "Might there be a God? If there is, what does he want from me? What can I do to make it right with God?" Apart from Christ Jesus the natural man invents a god that reflects the inbred *opinio legis*. "All of the religions on the face of the earth and all of the philosophical systems, from the dawn of antiquity to the Freemasonry and its offshoots of recent times, have been founded on the idea that we must earn the goodwill of God by our own efforts. This is the cardinal lie that has destroyed everything, and given it over to death."⁷⁸

But Jesus is the Truth about God: *No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*⁷⁹ *My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.*⁸⁰ *No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.*⁸¹ And Jesus reveals the glorious truth of unconditional grace and the mercy of God to save. Meyer writes, "A 'truth' that is not connected with grace is no truth at all. Truth that even remotely suggests the idea of merit is falsehood; it stands in direct opposition to God's mercy. ...This pure, sovereign, immutable grace of God is the real essence of His great truth."⁸² About the same time that Meyer was writing, Professor Pieper wrote his classic treatise "The Glory of the Lord,"⁸³ in which he echoed this essential truth, a truth hidden from natural man, but revealed by a gracious God through his Word.

We know only a revealed God. Insofar as He is a hidden God He does not concern us. And the revealed God is always and with all people and under all circumstances the same. ...The eternal, unchangeable God is the God of grace. And that not just since Abraham, but from everlasting to everlasting. ...God is primarily and essentially not a God of wrath but exclusively a God of infinite grace, even as He proclaims Himself as such in Exodus 34:6. We human beings through our defection have turned His grace into wrath for ourselves, without this grace in itself becoming anything else."⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Ecclesiastes 3:11

⁷⁸ J.P. Meyer, "The Kingdom of Christ," translated from the German and compiled by O. March Tangner, Ph.D. copyright 2002. Originally, *Das Konigtum Christi* was a five-part series published in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 1933-1935, p. 31.

⁷⁹ John 1:18

⁸⁰ John 7:16

⁸¹ John 14:6-7

⁸² J.P. Meyer, *op. cit.*, page 31. The reader would do well to carefully study page 31 in "The Kingdom of Christ," especially how Meyer reviews the many psalm verses that closely connect the concept of truth with grace or mercy. Let two references suffice. *Not to us, Lord, but give glory to your name for your mercy and truth.* Psalm 115:1. *For his mercy and truth rule over us forever.* Psalm 117:2.



⁸³ Originally written in German, it appear in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. XXIX, Nos. 2-4, and Vol. XXX, Nos 1-2. The pagination for the quote is from my old copy of the English translation printed by the Seminary Mimeo Company. The article is now printed in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, volume 2, (Milwaukee: NPH, 1977) 417-497.

⁸⁴ Pieper, "The Glory of the LORD." Page 47 in the Seminary Mimeo Company edition.

The Lutheran school, by God’s grace, is a place where the Word of God is taught daily and young hearts and minds learn Jesus revealed as our Life, who is the Truth. Jesus our Life!

What joy to know that each teacher in a truly Lutheran school shares a common Spirit-worked worldview, a Biblical worldview centered in Christ Jesus, our Life and our Lord.

There is no doubt that the people we serve and the people we seek to reach live in societies that foster false worldviews, worldviews that dethrone Christ as Truth and elevate the human individual. Ultimately, there are only two worldviews possible. One worldview is theocentric, or perhaps better spoken of as Christocentric. The other worldview is anthropocentric. Which worldview do you wish to teach to children on a consistent basis? Which worldview do you wish your future pastors and teachers to imbibe? Finally, apart from the Spirit of God working through the Word, the human mind will always create a worldview contrary to the truth of Scripture that reveals Jesus as the Truth. There is a battle of ideas being waged.⁸⁵ And there are no multiple choices. Satan, who masquerades as an angel of light,⁸⁶ can make falsehood look attractive, but the Spirit warns us: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*⁸⁷ Christian education is a matter of life or death. And the Lutheran school is a blessed tool we have chosen that the Spirit can use to keep souls on the narrow way and entering the narrow gate.

<i>Ninety second interruption</i>	
	
	

Christian Education reveals the truth about our life and excites us for true living

The Bible teaches that human life is a precious gift of the living God and a precious time of grace for a soul – born dead in sins – to come to a saving knowledge of this living Savior God.

⁸⁵ My German is sufficient to know that an article entitled *Der Kampf um die christliche Schule als Kampf um die christliche Weltanschauung* would be an interesting and relevant read. However, my German is poor enough that the time required to translate the article would be prohibitive. I commend this article by John Schaller to interested scholars and suggest perhaps a translation might appear in a future WLQ as a follow up to this symposium, or for a MLC preseminary student to translate it and post for *Studium Excitare*. The original article by John Schaller appeared in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, volume 7, 1910.

⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 11:14

⁸⁷ Proverbs 14:12 (also Proverbs 16:25)

Is this precious and Biblical view of life and its purpose now suspect in our midst? Let's start by looking at birth rates and the consequences.

The number of WELS Lutheran elementary schools peaked at 380 in school year 1983-1984. This past school year there were 337. The trend has been downward for some time. Since 1996 enrollment in the WELS preschool through secondary school system has dropped 3%. But according to the researcher who compiled the data, "ECE [early childhood education, ed.] is the great equalizer. Depending on which years you pick to look at, the increase in ECE often matches the decrease in the LES. If you remove ECE from the data, overall enrollment has dropped 19% across all levels of WELS schools."⁸⁸ (And this trend is not unique to the WELS.⁸⁹) Anecdotally, principal and pastor alike bemoan the fact "that our people just aren't having kids anymore like they used to." So do we throw up our hands and surrender to the death throes of a Lutheran school system that has been a tremendous blessing from God to create and nurture life – spiritual and physical – to generations of the faithful? Isn't the battle more than just sustaining a visible educational system? I believe it is a matter of life or death.

I suppose one can accuse this writer of being self-serving. If more and more of our schools close, why support a college of ministry whose enrollment is two thirds teacher track students? Is there a sustainable future for MLC? I leave that in the Lord's hands. Nowhere in Scripture does he declare that MLC will last until the trumpet sounds. The Lord Christ does not need MLC to do his work, nor does he need the WELS. The Lord God Almighty will get his work done with or without us. But what excitement when God allows us to be his *fellow workers!*⁹⁰ Let's continually remind ourselves that we confess, "I believe in the Holy Christian Church." Beware of Satan's temptations to quantify by the visible results. Remember, *we live by faith and not by sight.*⁹¹ You and I are concerned about the growth of the communion of saints, not the visible growth of an outward organization. At the same time, careful shepherds entrusted with flocks dare not overlook those statistics as a blessing from God that forces us to evaluate and analyze and PRAY. And as we turn over the data to expose some underlying causes, any minister of the gospel will be shocked at the realization that the worldview of death has infiltrated the homes and minds of so many people, including precious souls entrusted to our care.

Dr. Ryan MacPherson, a professor at Bethany Lutheran College, helps us to move the stones of the statistics around.⁹² His demographic study of the ELS showed a dramatic drop in birth rate during the history of that synod, from a birth rate of 3.77% in 1928 to a birth rate of 1.87% in

⁸⁸ Data compiled by teacher Keith Bowe for the MLC Governing Board, assembled Feb. 17-18, 2011.

⁸⁹ Detroit once had 30+ Lutheran schools, but the last closed its doors on January 1, 2011. There are no Lutheran schools in Los Angeles. In New York City, where once there were 25 thriving schools, 9 have closed, several more in jeopardy. One school in the city had 550 students in 1992, and now has 50. Statistics from "Is There Hope in our Cities?" by Marlene Lund. Paper presented March 24, 2011, to the Lutheran Education Association Convocation, held in Cincinnati, Ohio. The paper is part of the Kieschnick Lecture Series of Wheat Ridge Ministries, and can be found at www.wheatridge.org/programs/center-for-urban-education-ministries/cuem-events/the-kieschnick-lecture-series/.

⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:9

⁹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:7

⁹² Ryan C. MacPherson, "Becoming Less Fruitful: A Demographic History of the ELS, 1928-2008." He submitted this research report to ELS President John Moldstad on February 25, 2010.

2008.⁹³ Evidently other Lutherans also imbibed from the worldview that fewer children is better. The LCMS birth rate in 1961-2002 went from 3.34% to 1.33%, prompting a Missouri pastor to write, “Our church body has been complicit in its own demise by not emphasizing God’s plan for procreation in marriage. We’re contracepting ourselves out of business.”⁹⁴ Another partner in the old synodical conference had a similar history which resulted in a birth rate of 1.76% in the decade from 1999 through 2008.⁹⁵ We WELSers are that partner.

Why such a precipitous drop in birth rates? Look at any population map and you will see birth rates plunging below replacement population in many continents. But why so among Christians, among people of the Word who believe children are precious gifts from God? They are taught that *Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.*⁹⁶ Has the dominant cultural worldview convinced many people that an empty quiver allows one to substitute a heavier backpack of stuff for earthly life’s brief journey?

One factor MacPherson identifies for this drop in birthrates is a thorny and emotional issue for many.⁹⁷ I remember vividly the sometimes heated discussions in our dorm debates after a dog class that had any allusion to birth control. I commend to the reader MacPherson’s study where he documents a clear shift among Lutheran theologians from equating birth control with sin to leaving it an open question and a matter of Christian freedom.⁹⁸ His study gave me pause. Has

⁹³ *Ibid.*, page 4

⁹⁴ A letter from Pastor H.R. Curtis to the LCMS *Reporter* editor, April 2006, <http://www.lcms.org/pages/rpage.asp?NavID=9773> as quoted in MacPherson, *op.cit.*, page 7

⁹⁵ MacPherson, *op.cit.*, page 6.

⁹⁶ Psalm 127:3,5

⁹⁷ MacPherson outlines three possible causes for such declining rates among Lutheran bodies. First, the trend toward delaying marriage is identified. As more and more young adults aspire to college education, and then even a master’s degree, marriage and family are often postponed. Of special interest to this writer is an observation that MacPherson gleans from reading the work of Allan Carlson. “Today, college students typically graduate with tens of thousands of dollars in loan debt. The unanticipated consequences of this method for funding higher education become especially evident when we consider its effects on family formation, notably marriage and childbearing. Specifically, people assuming student loan debt tend to marry later, delay childbearing longer, and have fewer children during their lifetime.” Last May, 78.2% of the graduates from MLC graduated with debt. The average indebtedness was \$22,176. This is of grave concern to me. Do we then unintentionally force our graduates into marriage and family decisions that don’t reflect the Bible’s priorities or a fourth petition attitude? Or have we unintentionally proclaimed a message to our students that the blessing of training to serve the Lord in gospel ministry is a greater or more important goal than the blessing of having and rearing children? A second factor for such falling birth rates is the rising divorce rate. Permit me to quote MacPherson’s summary statement. “If ELS members, like typical Americans, were getting married at a later age and remaining married for a shorter time than previously, this may explain to some degree why the birth rate suddenly dropped during the 1960s and remained low thereafter.” MacPherson, *op. cit.*, page 12

⁹⁸ MacPherson, *op. cit.*, pages 13ff. MacPherson goes back to examining the views of Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhardt, views upheld in the 40s and 50s by ELS pastors in sermons and documents, but then challenged even by confessional Lutheran writers by the early 60s. That societal inclinations toward birth control were evident in American culture much earlier can be seen in comments by a WELS author already in 1900. “Let us point out one more reason for the retrograde movement of our parochial schools. It is found in a social vice which has begun to find entrance even among those who still profess Christianity. It is the French vice of suppression of offspring – the two-children system – which has become so extremely prevalent in our country as to horrify even callous observers. Shameful though it be, its effects are beginning to be felt among those who belong to our church. Undoubtedly we

the Church watered down the Biblical testimony about the blessing of children, about the Lord as the author of life, about purpose and contentment in living a life of service to the Lord Jesus by serving another soul? Neither time nor space allows us to explore other components of a culture of death in our country: abortion statistics that numb the mind;⁹⁹ the crescendo of voices that raise the issue of euthanasia to the fore, whether discussing the terminally ill, or the weak and infirm, or simply the burden on society that a severely disabled person supposedly presents.

How do you combat this worldview which ultimately flows out of Darwin's famous "survival of the fittest"? How do you stem the tide of those who seek to play God by deciding the when and where and how long the life should be? How do you stem the culture of death masked in the mirage of compassionate voices plaintively pleading for "quality of life," or limited suffering, or sufficient earthly resources for all? How do we prepare the body of Christ to uphold life in the face of such cavalier attitudes toward the weak or the helpless, the very young (prenatal) or the elderly infirm, the disabled physically or mentally, or the unacceptable socially or politically? I submit to you that the Lutheran school can be an instrument of the Spirit to use the power of the Word to teach and instruct and inculcate the value of life more often, more deeply, more consistently. It is a matter of life or death.

Too outrageous a claim? Only the Lutheran school (in our circles, at least) has a faculty comprised of called servants of the Gospel – each and every teacher committed to upholding the Holy Scriptures in accord with the symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. That means each and every teacher proclaims the precious value of life as a gift of the Creator God. "I believe that God made me and every creature" is not just a portion of memory work. Children learn to recite that elemental truth with a sense of awe as further Bible study opens their eyes and hearts to also recite, *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*¹⁰⁰ From preschool to college, students in true Lutheran schools learn that life is precious, each soul a gift of God, each person loved by a heavenly Father, each person gifted according to the wise and perfect stewardship of the Creator. *There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.*¹⁰¹ No classroom in a truly Lutheran school undermines a child's sense of identity by espousing chance as the primordial factor in life's creation. No classroom in a truly Lutheran school will allow students to view their peers through any prism other than the Word of God which declares each one a precious life, loved by God. Peer pressure that fosters identity

must consider it one of the signs of the end of the world – of the days when, as Christ has foretold, men would be 'as they were in the days of Noah.' The school will naturally suffer where the families cease to grow at a natural rate." John Schaller, "The Need of Christian Education by Means of Parochial Schools." WLS library essay file, (EF 684), page 31.

⁹⁹ There have been over 52,000,000 legal abortions in America since 1973. See "Tragedies, Statistics and Making a Difference," by the Rev. Mark Braun in *Clearly Caring, Christian Life Resources*, Volume 30, Number 1, First Quarter 2010, page 10. Also in that same issue, Stefanie Cox concludes the introduction to her winning essay "Abortion Affects All" with these words: "Of course, abortion is by no means a natural event, but it is sadly evolving into a regular and accepted practice." See page 6.

¹⁰⁰ Psalm 137:13-16

¹⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 12:6

based on a GPA on the report card or the RBI from the athletic diamond is not allowed. Peer pressure that fosters a sense of worth based upon parents' wealth and the style of blue jean is not allowed.

Only a truly Lutheran school teacher will help a child understand that since life is a gift from the Creator, we are accountable to him. The Lord God has every right to expect a standard of conduct that reflects his love and his compassion and his just actions toward all. So the child learns a summary of the moral will. And the child quickly learns the reason his fist, small as it is, is so quick to clench in anger against anyone - even God - who seeks to tell him what to do. It is an act of love when the teacher uses Scripture to reveal to the child the rebel within, that old nature that has to be crucified. In formal educational venues, only the Lutheran school will be the Spirit's instrument to crucify that old nature and drown the arrogant pride. No school, public or private, can change the idolatry of self inherent in each student. *The mind of sinful man is death, ...because the sinful mind is hostile to God.*¹⁰² Narcissism is the nature of the old nature. You see and hear it everywhere in our culture. "Well, it might be right for you, but it is not right for me." "You can't impose your morality on my life." So pop culture drugs a generation with the powerful "morphine" of me-first in everything. "It's my life and my choices. Don't tell me what to do."¹⁰³

The Lutheran school holds up life not only as precious, but as a precious time of grace. Every teacher walks into his or her classroom understanding the urgency to make the most of that day. *I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*¹⁰⁴ What an opportunity each day of grace provides. It is a time for the Spirit to use the law of God taught in that classroom to work on many hearts with a miracle result: *godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...*¹⁰⁵ And each day a truly Lutheran teacher marvels at the grace of God that entrusts to sinful humans the message of reconciliation with the holy God. *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors...*¹⁰⁶ What a privilege! Each Lutheran teacher enters the day praying for the Spirit's presence through the Word to bless the day with the gifts of his grace. Each Lutheran teacher prays that each child leaves the day with another "E" on the grade chart - "E" for eternity as the child has again heard the news of eternal salvation in Christ.

Add up the hours in a year of school! Each hour, by God's grace, sanctified by Word and prayer. Each hour Christ the unseen tutor at each desk, including the teacher's. Each hour the Gospel flowing freely in the lives and words of called servants of the Gospel. Do we believe this miracle possible? Christ says the Word works. True, this miracle is worked by God through fallible, sinful teachers. Harsh words can be uttered. Favoritism can rear its ugly head now and

¹⁰² Romans 8:6-7

¹⁰³ John Mayer sings a song popular enough that even this old guy heard it on the radio. The title epitomizes this worldview: "Who says I can't get stoned?" The remaining seven stanzas echo the theme of stanza one: "Who says I can't get stoned? Turn off the lights and the telephone Me and my house alone Who says I can't get stoned?" Lyrics can be found at www.metrolyrics.com/who-says-lyrics-john-mayer.html.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Corinthians 6:2

¹⁰⁵ 2 Corinthians 7:10

¹⁰⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

again. Frustrations can boil over. Yet do we believe that God can work his miracle through clay pots when the Word is daily, prayerfully, lovingly, consistently lived and modeled? True Lutheran schools proclaim Christ on billboards and whiteboards. Christ is proclaimed in songs and in literature. Have we forgotten the power of the Spirit and the promise of the Spirit?

So the child hears every day, again and again, the Name that saves. He sings the Name that saves. He memorizes the Name that saves, the Name at which the demons tremble, the Name at which every knee will bow. Jesus! Always Jesus! Only Jesus! Won't the Spirit work? But of course!

On the other hand, children should be constantly urged and moved to honor God's name and to have it always upon their lips for everything that may happen to them or come to their notice (Psalm 8:2; 34:1; Matthew 21:16; Hebrews 13:15). For that is the true honor of His name, to look to it and call upon it for all consolation (Psalm 66:2; 105:1). Then – as we have heard in the First Commandment – the heart by faith gives God the honor due Him first. Afterward, the lips give Him honor by confession.

This is also a blessed and useful habit and very effective against the devil. He is ever around us and lies in wait to bring us into sin and shame, disaster and trouble (2 Timothy 2:26). But he hates to hear God's name and cannot remain long where it is spoken and called upon from the heart. Indeed, many terrible and shocking disasters would fall upon us if God did not preserve us by our calling upon His name.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the Spirit sustains faith and the child learns that life is a gift of God's hand, the creating hand, and the outstretched pierced hand, and the comforting hand. Life has a purpose! The child begins to see that his life is a time to glorify God and serve his neighbor. *Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*¹⁰⁸

Students also need to learn the hard lesson that the pilgrimage life of a believer is a lifetime of suffering. What Jesus promised to his first disciples he promises to his disciples of all time. We heard it earlier: *'No servant is above his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.'*¹⁰⁹ Only the Lutheran school can prepare a student for the reality of sin and suffering, not as abstract concepts watched on some "world's most painful stunts" episode, but as concrete realities in their lives, even young lives. Life this side of heaven is suffering and pain. Only Christian pastors and teachers can expose the fallacy promoted by media and desired by my sinful nature, the fallacy that *La Dolce Vita* is my inherent birthright. Rather, servants of the gospel take their lead from the apostle Paul. Our ministries are about *strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith*. *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."*¹¹⁰ Read it carefully. "We" – everyone of us here, and every person we serve. "Must" – not an option. "Many" – not just an occasional bump in the road. "Hardships" – painful pressures, physical and emotional, tribulation, affliction.¹¹¹ Over and over again the

¹⁰⁷ Large Catechism, Part I. The Commandments, Paragraphs 70 & 72. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions. A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*. (St. Louis, MO: CPH, 2005), p. 392.

¹⁰⁸ Colossians 3:17, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹ John 15:20

¹¹⁰ Acts 14:22

¹¹¹ The word is θλιψις.

Lord Jesus lovingly forewarns his precious children that the life centered in him will be a life of temporary hardship. Our life is indeed under the cross!¹¹² And a student of Scripture is taught throughout life that a gracious Lord God even turns suffering and pain into wonderful blessings for the child of God. The Father's priority is not our bank book, but our treasures in heaven. The Father's priority is not our social standing, but our standing with him. The Father's priority is not our physical health, but our soul's health. The Father loves us enough to allow sufferings and pain and trials to pull away all false scaffolding that corrupts our sense of security or our sense of identity. He causes us to fall only and totally upon the bleeding corpse of the One who suffered death for us that we might live. The Word proclaims over and over again the blessings that God can achieve for his people through suffering. Permit several passages from that glorious Old Testament hymn, Psalm 119, the hymn that centers every verse on the glory of the Word of the living God. *Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise renews my life.*¹¹³ *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.*¹¹⁴ *It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.*¹¹⁵ *I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.*¹¹⁶

The lifelong student of Scripture learns even from an early age that a life of faith is not immune from bad things in life. Rather, the Spirit fills the child with the promises of God so that he matures seeing the reality of an evil world, understanding why such evil will always be present prior to the trumpet, yet having confidence that in the living Savior there is ultimate triumph, a victory he shares only because of the grace of God. Consequently, only in a truly Lutheran school will a student grow up to understand the truth, "A biblically literate Christian is both a pessimist and an optimist."¹¹⁷

¹¹² I commend to all of you, if you have not yet read it, Professor Deutschlander's excellent book, *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections on His Cross and Ours*. (Milwaukee, WI: NPH, 2008). Every faculty, every study club, every individual called worker needs to carefully read and reread this work that will take us back under the cross for strength to live under the crosses a loving God allows.

¹¹³ Psalm 119:49-50



¹¹⁴ Psalm 119:67-68

¹¹⁵ Psalm 119:71

¹¹⁶ Psalm 119:75

¹¹⁷ John Brug, "Foreword to Volume 107: Optimist, Pessimist, Realist?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 107, Winter 2010, pages 3-10. Through Scripture the reader learns to accept the truth that as the final judgment draws near, wickedness in the world will again submerge society. Yet through Scripture the student learns to relish the truth that Christ is King Jesus who has won the victory, reigns over all for his Church, and will end all evil after the elect are gathered. Professor Brug's short article is a wonderful encouragement for every gospel servant, and provides "realism" as we prayerfully seek to advance the Kingdom of God through the faithful use of the Means of Grace.

Ninety second interruption

Christian Education Builds up the Body of Christ

If the Lutheran school is true to its identity as part and parcel of the great commission work Christ has entrusted to us, then the goal and objective of this school is fundamentally different than any other educational endeavor the world offers. Outcome-based education has educators start with the end in view and work backward as they develop curriculum. What do we want the graduate from this school to be? What do we want the graduate of this school to be able to do? For the Lutheran school, those questions might sound familiar. But the essential question is radically different. What do we pray first happens in this school? What do we ask the Spirit to do through the Word we share every day? Before we consider how we can prepare students to succeed in the science class of the local high school, or be able to handle college-level math courses, or be able to communicate effectively, we pray for the miracle work that only the Holy Spirit can achieve. We pray that the child sitting before us will someday be gathered around the heavenly throne praising the Incarnate Truth.¹¹⁸ Therefore, every pastor and teacher prays that the Lutheran school builds up the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. Whether the school's census reflects a large percentage of mission students, or heterodox Christians, or primarily WELS children, the prayer is the same. "Lord, use me to be an instrument that you use to make disciples for time and for eternity." Never do we outgrow the need for that prayer, or become too educated for that prayer. Is it not true that at MLC the first prayer of every professor for every student is a prayer that the time on the New Ulm campus is a time for the Spirit through the Gospel to graft the branch into the Vine ever surer and deeper? Before we pray that Jesus raise up more and more gospel servants to take the Word to the world, we pray that Jesus keep these students in the saving faith. We pray they cherish the Christian identity as baptized child of Christ before a vocational identity as pastor or teacher or staff minister! That is the essential educational effort in every Lutheran school. Then, and only then, can the Spirit build up the

¹¹⁸ Philip Glende, in his paper "In the Light of the Fourth Commandment: What Is the Responsibility of the Parent, the Teacher, the Pastor and the Lay Person in Educating the Child?", lists four Bible-based objectives to pray for in Christian education. (see appendix C) This list was originally developed by H. Gordon Coiner in "The Scriptural Basis for the Responsibility of the Christian Congregation in Christian Education," *Readings in Christian Education* (1980), p. 72.

body of Christ to rejoice in our common identity while marveling at the diversity of vocations the Spirit assigns to the members of Christ's body.

So already in grade school the child of God begins to learn the wonderful doctrine of vocation. Whatever the Lord Jesus has entrusted to you to do, do it with the confidence that it is a task worth doing well, for Jesus is pleased when his child does his best. Athlete, student, piano player – discover the gifts God has given you and use them to his glory. Pastor, plumber, teacher, technician – every vocation is noble in God's eyes.

What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. For what we do in our calling here on earth in accordance with His word and command He counts as if it were done in Heaven for Him...

Therefore we should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and the work, but on account of the word and faith from which the obedience and the work flow. No Christian should despise his position and life if he is living in accordance with the word of God, but should say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, and do as the ten commandments teach, and pray that our dear Lord God may help me thus to do." That is a right and holy life, and cannot be made holier even if one fast himself to death.¹¹⁹

We teach our students to beware the American cancer of individualism at all costs. We find our contentment in being united to Christ in baptism and thus part of the body of Christ. That means God has given to the individual Christian an important function as God deems best. *In fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If there were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*¹²⁰ What other school will clearly communicate such a heartening and motivating truth to children who are searching and wondering "what good am I?" Other schools of various stripes point students to "self-fulfillment," "finding yourself," "changing the world for the better." Define better. Define self. Define fulfillment. Only a Christian school will do so with a Biblical definition that points back to Christ. Always back to Christ. He is all in all.

That is why as Christian teachers work with parents of their students, they understand a greater relationship than one simply based on vocational interests. That teacher sees a soul before he sees a parent. That teacher understands the great opportunity God has granted to teach someone

¹¹⁹ The original Luther quotes are from the Erlangen edition. This English translation was accessed at www3.dbu.edu/naugle/pdf/devo_9.pdf. I am grateful to Professor James Dannel for his assistance in typing the original quotes in Fraktur. Was du in deinem Hause thust, ist eben so viel, als wenn du es unserm Herrn Gott droben im Himmel gethan hättest. Denn er hat sich deß so angenommen, was wir in unserm Beruf hie auf Erden thun nach seinem Wort und Befehl, das will er dafür rechnen, als sei es ihm selbst im Himmel gethan. (Erlangen Edition, volume 5, p. 102)

Darum sollen wir gewohnen und wissen, daß unser Stand und Werk heilig, und Gott wohlgefällig sein: nicht des Stands und der Werk halben; sondern des Worts und des Glaubens halben, aus welchem hernach solcher Gehorsam und Werk folgen. Kein Christ soll seinen Stand und Leben verantwortungreich, wenn er nur darin hereingehet nach Gottes Wort; sondern soll sagen: Ich glaube an Jesum Christum, und thue, wie mich die zehen Gebote lehren, und bete, daß ich's thun möge. Das ist ein recht heilig Leben, und kann nicht heiliger werden, wenn man sich gleich zu tode fastete. (Erlangen Edition, volume 4, p. 341)

¹²⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:18-20,27

by word and example the Bible's truths about marriage, about the precious gift of children, about the responsibility of the parent to train a child. Furthermore, the Christian teacher seeks to develop a strong relationship with the parents because it is in the child's best interest spiritually. Every member of a Lutheran school faculty believes that the parents have been given this child by God and are primarily responsible for the child's spiritual welfare. No Lutheran teacher seeks to usurp parental authority, but to actually reinforce that authority by faithfully teaching a child the wondrous blessings of the Fourth Commandment. A Lutheran teacher begins parent/teacher consultation with prayer, asking for God's blessing upon the father and mother in their glorious task of Christian parenting. "It is one of the greatest things in the whole round of human activities to take a human life, fresh from the hands of God, and be one of the decisive factors in fashioning it into a temple fit for the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit."¹²¹

Christian education builds up the body of Christ because it builds up parents to see and understand the gospel work God has placed before them in the home. Christian teachers, by word and example, will help parents learn the critical priority of training a soul to find all wisdom in the Lord Christ alone. *For the LORD gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*¹²² A Christian teacher is willing to patiently explain again and again that the child's sense of love and security comes from time with mom and dad, not from the things mom and dad purchase for the child. Too much stuff accumulated for the child can tempt that child to think that is what life is all about. The old bumper sticker adage can become a child's mantra: "Whoever dies with the most toys wins." And, despite the economy's turmoil in recent years, stuff sickness is still an epidemic in America and a scourge that infects a person's sense of worth or ability or even identity.¹²³ A Christian teacher, by word and example, will help parents critically assess priorities in life, priorities a child sees displayed intimately every day. A Christian teacher will also be a ready resource for parents who seek to do more as Christian parents and want help learning how to give home devotions, or to teach prayers, or to discipline Biblically. Over and over again the Lutheran school and its faculty will help teach and display the Biblical truth that children are a blessing from God, and their spiritual welfare is the number one priority for Christian parents.

Indeed, for what purpose do we older folks exist, other than to care for, instruct, and bring up the young? It is utterly impossible for these foolish young people to instruct and protect themselves. This is why God has entrusted them to us who are older and know from experience what is best for them. And God will hold us strictly accountable for them.¹²⁴

In fact, the Lutheran school can be used by the Spirit to help even parents as well as children learn the Bible truths for salvation. A grandmother gave permission for me to use her story, but not her name. In her words, she grew up in an "unbelieving" home. Few were the times anyone

¹²¹ Robert Emory Golladay, *The Ten Commandments* (1915) as quoted by Glende, *op.cit.*, page 5.

¹²² Proverbs 2:6

¹²³ Consumerism still corrupts our culture. Consider the self storage units that house stuff that can't fit into our overstuffed houses. "There is 7.0 sq.ft. of self storage space for every man, woman and child in the nation: thus, it is physically possible that every American could stand – all at the same time – under the total canopy of self storage roofing." From the Self Storage Association Fact Sheet, dated 6/30/11, found at www.selfstorage.org/ssa/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutSSA/FactSheet/default.htm.

¹²⁴ Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of all cities of Germany, that they should establish and maintain Christian schools." *Luther's Works*, American Edition, volume 45. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1962), p. 353.

went to church. When she married, she married a Lutheran man, but had difficulty understanding the worship, let alone the *fides quae* proclaimed in the liturgy. Yet, when the young couple moved to a different locale, there was a WELS school where they enrolled their children. It was this school that helped this mother *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*.¹²⁵ She learned from her children. She learned as she reviewed their homework for Bible history or catechism. She learned as her children reviewed the day's lessons, the songs and the stories of the Savior. She learned as her children helped her understand the path of worship we call the liturgy. She learned as her children witnessed to the Word received earlier in the day. This grandmother, decades later, remains ever grateful to God for what he did for her through the Lutheran school. To this day, she is a strong proponent of the Lutheran school as great commission ministry in the congregation.¹²⁶

Christian education in a Lutheran school builds up the body of Christ because students are taught to use the Word of God as the foundational truth through which they view all of life and evaluate all the claims of knowledge. The apostle exhorts us, Dear *friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*.¹²⁷ How is this discernment accomplished? When children learn to memorize *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*.¹²⁸ Therefore, *Sola Scriptura* is not just part of a Reformation history lesson. Children are breathing from the Spirit the cardinal truth of hermeneutics: "let Scripture interpret Scripture." These young believers are taught the only method by which their soul will be kept safe from the lies of the father of lies, that hissing serpent who drips the poison of heresy every time he speaks. So, the mature Christian teacher urges the student with each memory assignment, "Child of God, rely on these passages you memorize. Jesus promised that the Counselor *will remind you of everything I have said to you*.¹²⁹ So memorize the Scriptures, keep them alive in mind, meditate on them day and night.¹³⁰ Then you can pull out the only sword, *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*,¹³¹ to cut off that serpent's lying and tempting tongue."

Furthermore, the Lutheran school is the Spirit's boot camp as He uses the word to prepare future soldiers of the cross. I'm not just speaking about future called servants of the Gospel, though it is no secret that the LES is fertile soil for nurturing and raising up the next generation of full time Gospel heralds.¹³² Rather, I'm talking about the valuable training a Lutheran school provides in training all of God's people to learn how to "talk Jesus" and share the "one thing needful." Appropriate and well-designed collaborative learning techniques can allow children to practice

¹²⁵ 2 Peter 3:18

¹²⁶ The interview occurred during this past summer, and at a location out west. The original purpose of the visit was to thank a wonderful Christian lady who supports Christian education in a variety of ways, including gifts to MLC. My visit to this donor was to express the appreciation of the campus family for her support of MLC through her prayers and gifts. God allowed me to learn her story and marvel anew at how the Spirit can use the Lutheran school in ways beyond the classroom.

¹²⁷ 1 John 4:1

¹²⁸ Psalm 119:105

¹²⁹ John 14:26

¹³⁰ Psalm 1:2

¹³¹ Ephesians 6:17

¹³² See appendix D for a chart demonstrating the Lutheran school background of MLC graduates from 2005-2010, data compiled by MLC board member Keith Bowe. Of concern to this author is the downward trend in several categories.

using Scripture with each other. The Spirit through this Word work can develop important skills so essential for the body of Christ, skills to clearly proclaim law and Gospel. But for a person to rebuke sin and call to repentance presupposes an understanding of the Lord's immutable will as revealed in his law. For a person to witness to the unconditional Gospel of grace in Christ Jesus presupposes a knowledge of this truth that can only be revealed. In the Lutheran school, students are trained to understand that rebuking a person is first and foremost an effort to reach a soul. *If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.*¹³³ Students learn to witness to the love of Christ, not simply to win a debate nor to argue a person into the faith.¹³⁴ But rather, in humility and gentleness, that child realizes the joy and privilege to be a mouthpiece for the message of new life in Christ. Peter tells us, *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*¹³⁵ Therefore, the Lutheran school not only allows children to practice serving volleyball. It not only provides opportunities to sing in a musical. The school first and foremost is a safe and directed environment for children to practice their greatest calling – to be witnesses in word and deed of Christ's love for them, in them, and through them.

In light of Peter's inspired admonition above, one might also ask the question "What is the role of apologetics in our Lutheran schools?" I surmise that such a question has not often surfaced on the agenda of the school board nor of the faculty meeting. But in our post Christian society, dare we ignore that question?¹³⁶ Can our adults, let alone our children, *give an answer to everyone*

¹³³ Matthew 18:15

¹³⁴ And this important lesson is a life-long attitude that the Spirit needs to keep alive in every pastor and teacher's heart. How often haven't we succumbed to the old nature's raging pride to prove ourselves "echt" at all costs, including the cost of trampling on another soul. What a warning Koehler provides. "On the other hand the opponents' improper language is rolled into review instead of taking as the point of departure his probable sound intent, or his difficulty in finding the right expression, or that his manner of expression merely is different from mine, so that my limited faculties did not at once understand him. If this then goes to such extremes that the speaker is further held up to disparaging ridicule, then it is clearly demonstrated what spirit's child is holding forth. I do not wish to come to the defense of the touchiness that takes umbrage at the most casual remark. A man of temperament may on occasion make a whimsical remark, which is not to be pounced upon and summarily turned to his discredit. What we are at here is to try to understand from the innermost impulses the nature of the different approaches to the records of the great deeds of God, lest they become a strange thing to our fingertips. The above described procedure is a thing of evil not only because, overshooting its mark, it misses its aim completely and is found wanting just in this point of the mastery of logical acumen, and, because of its personal attacks, hinders the friendly advances of the other side and the acceptance of the defended position, thus making the other side obstinate; no, it is of itself evil in that, instead of living in the content of the gospel and heralding that joyfully to trusting faith as something to be desired, and thereby winning its confidence, it clings to the external address, to the sound of form-words and dead letters, acts the legalist by muzzling the bite of life by fragmentation and closed compartments through the discipline of academic exercises, and makes of the hope of so great salvation a lawyer's code. To be sure that is something else again that one wishes to make Scripture and, especially the gospel, into another law, for which intellectual acceptance is demanded." J. P. Koehler. *Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns: Our Own Arts and Practices as an Outgrowth of the Law.* Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, August 5-12, 1959. Available through the WLS library on-line essay file.

¹³⁵ 1 Peter 3:15-16

¹³⁶ A helpful study resource for pastors and teachers who wish to explore the relationship of apologetics in our schools is an unpublished paper written by Professor Lyle Lange. Entitled "Lutheran Apologetics: From Our Classrooms and into the World," the paper was presented August 9, 2010, to the Lutheran College Conference held

who asks...? Do we train our people to give a loving and credible defense of the Christian faith when challenged and confronted by contradictory worldviews? Two authors give us pause to ponder. Nancy Pearcey is one.

Now, I had gone to church all my life (my parents made sure of that) and also attended Lutheran elementary school. Over the years, I had memorized hymns, Bible verses, the creeds, and the Lutheran catechism, and I remain immensely grateful for that background. Yet I had never been trained in apologetics, or given tools for analyzing ideas, or taught to defend Christianity against competing “isms” - and when I read Watts’s book, I was entranced.¹³⁷

The second author wrote a book entitled *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith and How to Bring Them Back*. His name is Drew Dyck. He synthesizes some of his sad findings in an article entitled “The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church.” Please permit extensive excerpts.

I also met leavers who felt Christianity failed to measure up intellectually. Shane, a 27-year-old father of three, was swept away by the tide of New Atheist literature. He described growing up a “sheltered Lutheran” who was “into Jesus” and active in youth group. Now he spoke slowly and deliberately, as if testifying in court. “I’m an atheist and an empiricist. I don’t believe religion or psychics or astrology or anything supernatural.”

In my interviews, I was struck by the diversity of the stories – one can hardly lump them together and chalk up all departures to “youthful rebellion.” Yet there were commonalities. Many de-conversions were precipitated by what happened inside rather than outside the church. Even those who adopted materialist worldviews or vogueish spiritualities traced their departures back to what happened in church.

What pushed them out? Again, the reasons for departing in each case were unique, but I realized that most leavers had been exposed to a superficial form of Christianity that effectively inoculated them against authentic faith. When sociologist Christian Smith and his fellow researchers examined the spiritual lives of American teenagers, they found most teens practicing a religion best called “moralistic Therapeutic Deism,” which casts God as a distant Creator who blesses people who are “good, nice, and fair.” Its central goal is to help believers “be happy and feel good about oneself.”



Where did teenagers learn this faith? Unfortunately, it’s one taught, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, at every age level in many churches. It’s in the air that many churchgoers breathe, from seeker-friendly worship services to low-commitment small groups. When this naive and coldly utilitarian view of God crashes on hard rocks of reality, we shouldn’t be surprised to see people of any age walk away.¹³⁸

at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, MN. I’m confident that the author would respond positively to any requests for copies of the resource.

¹³⁷ Nancy Pearcey, *op.cit.*, page 124. The Watts book she refers to is named earlier in the context: *Behold the Spirit*. In Pearcey’s words, “Watts was a key figure in introducing Eastern religions to the West. ...Watts taught that *all* religions are merely cultural window dressing over a common core of beliefs – a “perennial philosophy” – which regards everything as an emanation from the divine Being.” Pages 123-124, italics in the original.

¹³⁸ Dyck, Drew. “The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church.” The article is found online at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27.40.html>. According to footnotes after the article, his book is available from ChristianBook.com. Other resources for additional reading are also provided.

What a gift of God's grace when a congregation has the blessing of Lutheran education. By God's grace in a Lutheran school children can be planted deeply into the Word and so the LES hums as a factory of the Holy Spirit for the sharpening of the Church's witness to the world.

<i>Ninety second interruption</i>	
	
	

Christian Education opens eyes and hearts to others

The Lutheran school, inasmuch as it clearly and constantly communicates the Gospel of Christ, is the Spirit's tool to purge prejudice from the human heart and to stomp out stereotypes from a student's mindset. The student learns the inseparable and unbreakable connection between a living faith and a faith that lives for Jesus by also living for others. Teachers and pastors proclaim and practice what Paul preached. *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*¹³⁹

Every teacher sees it often, the cliques in the classroom that isolate the unpopular student, or the less gifted student, or the differently dressed student. Every day in every year of schooling, students need to see that the souls of others are precious neither because of what they have nor because of what they can do. Souls are precious because Jesus says so, and he backed up his words with his blood streaming into his eyes, dripping from his hands and feet, pierced from his very side. How critical this Spirit-worked understanding for every Christian! The world views the skills or the style or the status or the stuff possessed by the individual and quickly judges the worth of the possessor. In so doing, the doctrine of grace is destroyed.

But students in the Lutheran school learn of the Savior who touched the leper, who fed the destitute, who blessed the little children. In the ministry of Christ Jesus they see a life of perfect

¹³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:14-16a

love toward all, a love that achieved justification for all.¹⁴⁰ And the students have learned that baptism now wraps them up in this wondrous love of Christ and clothes them with that same love for souls, *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.*¹⁴¹ A sainted seminary professor reminded his readers of this truth.

He (Jesus) was totally sinless yet He was every inch a human being. He was a man who died to rescue other men from hell, and those who believe that, **those who see in every other human being a creature for whom the Son of God laid down His life, they can never be uninterested and unconcerned about other people.** And that concern will not be limited only to their eternal salvation in heaven. Christians do feed the hungry and clothe the naked and heal the sick...¹⁴²

Can our congregations and schools then model corporately what the students learn individually? Are there appropriate ways for a congregation to utilize its campus as a bridge into the community by demonstrating love and concern for souls? Some of our congregations have food banks. Some schools have participated in packaging meals to be sent to impoverished people whether in America or abroad. What amazing opportunities we have to create concrete opportunities for our church and school family to engage our communities with deeds of love. In so doing, we actually then foster a learning environment that continues outside of the academic classroom and permeates a disciple's daily life. Can we then plan to integrate such activities so they coincide with the Bible history curriculum when it teaches the lesson of Jesus feeding the multitudes?

Certainly, there have been times when we as a church body have appropriately recoiled against the "social gospel" emphasis that detracts from the soul rescue emphasis that is always the priority purpose for the Church of Christ. But in our concern to uphold "the one thing needful"¹⁴³ have we undervalued James' admonition, *I will show you my faith by what I do?*¹⁴⁴ Does the community we serve know we exist? More importantly, does the community we serve know that we love them? Yes, we love them enough to especially share the gospel of Christ Jesus. But do we love them in ways they immediately recognize? There are manifold ways for a congregation and its school to participate in various community projects without giving a false or confusing witness: clothing drives, food banks, toys for tots, health screenings, polling places, to name but a few. And the school facility provides an easy entry for our neighbors to walk into a Christian environment where hall art and bulletin boards point visitors to ponder the love of God in Christ.

Once such community engagement occurs, it is but a small step for some of our neighbors to wonder about the availability of Christian education for their own children. Numerous papers have been written in the last decades that explore the use of the Lutheran elementary school as a mission arm of the congregation. (Several will be listed in the bibliography; others can be found on the WLS library web site.¹⁴⁵) Furthermore, a few states have specific financial incentives

¹⁴⁰ Romans 3:23,24 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 among others.

¹⁴¹ Galatians 3:27

¹⁴² Becker, Siegbert. "A Lutheran Educator in a Secular World," page 4. Article can be found in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on-line essay file. Emphasis added.

¹⁴³ Luke 10:42

¹⁴⁴ James 2:18

¹⁴⁵ www.wlssays.net

that encourage parents to consider educational options for their children. It is truly a different time than my boyhood. At that time, alternatives to public schools were rather limited. Private education consisted mainly of religious schools (primarily Roman Catholic or Lutheran, though also a few others) or some kind of preparatory/ military academy school. So if you weren't Lutheran, or Catholic, or military, or well-heeled, it simply didn't enter your mind to consider other schools. Most were content with the public system. Today, the educational climate is far different. Charter schools, magnet schools, non-denominational schools, for-profit schools, Montessori schools, public high schools that exist only on-line, Sylvan learning centers, and a host of other options exist for concerned parents to consider. Why? Because many people are dismayed by what they see as failing public education.¹⁴⁶ This is not to belittle our public schools, nor public school teachers. I have known many fine Christian people who have been excellent teachers in excellent public schools. In many ways, choice programs and the alternatives mentioned above have spurred some local districts to strive for higher standards - often with notable results. We dare not imagine that we can promote Lutheran education by belittling public education. What a sin! We are Christians who are also American citizens. As Christians we gladly pray for our country in all its efforts. Yet, as Christians, we recognize that the Lutheran school provides what the public school cannot. We know that the Spirit through the Gospel creates a culture of life in the school, life centered in Christ and a life that seeks to serve in love. Only the Spirit can work such fruit, and he does so through the Gospel. Our neighbors don't understand that theological premise. But many still want moral values for their children and a safe environment for learning. And many parents are willing to explore Lutheran education because they wonder if such a school will provide those characteristics.¹⁴⁷ Are we willing to open eyes to the community around us? Are we willing to open conversations with those seeking enrollment? Are we willing to open doors? Might a gracious Lord Jesus be positioning our church body to consider our Lutheran schools as platforms for the proclamation of life in Christ to our neighbors?

A myriad of questions needs to be examined by the school board of the congregation and all the called workers: faculty size and faculty attitudes, funding, facilities, and fellowship concerns all need to be explored. The list could go on. But a congregation needs to be proactive and prayerful in asking whether or not the Lutheran elementary school can be an integral part of the congregation's total ministry of both outreach and nurture - one Great Commission. If we are eager to accept students in order to strengthen the financial foundation of the school's ministry, then I would question the motivation and the stewardship. If we are willing to "market" the school by downplaying our Lutheran identity, then I would question the commitment to the Great Commission and our conviction that Lutheran education is a matter of life or death. If we are willing to downplay doctrine lest we offend others who might yank their children from our school, then I would question whether we are serving God or mammon.¹⁴⁸

Therefore, it is imperative for pastors and teachers to be proactive in their meeting with prospective families and clearly explain what we believe, why we have schools, what Biblical

¹⁴⁶ If you have not yet seen the movie documentary, "Waiting for Superman," it is worth your time in order to ascertain the climate of desperation many experience.

¹⁴⁷ We are not just talking about American parents. A few grade schools in our fellowship have international students enrolled.

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 6:24

discipline is, and what the children will be learning.¹⁴⁹ Remember, Satan will not stand idle and allow such wonderful exposure to the truths of salvation for so many precious souls. He will attack. So understand that there is a temptation for parents (both members and non-members) who pay a hefty tuition to succumb to a consumer mentality. They quickly imagine that since they paid for it, they can dictate the policies or practices of the school. Indeed, all of us have probably heard some rather sad stories when non-member families caused some turmoil in the school by insisting that their child will not attend a catechism class. Or perhaps the heterodox family imagines that Bible history or catechism class is a place where doctrine is challenged or debated, to the ultimate confusion of many children. Or perhaps the parents will have no part of the child worshipping in chapel or in church. I don't believe that our schools exist to cater to persistent errorists who persist in challenging and undermining the church's doctrinal foundation. Lutheran schools are to be used by the Spirit to build up the body of Christ, not to be a place of discord and dissension in the presence of impressionable minds.¹⁵⁰

But even with such caveats expressed, dare we ignore the possibility that the Lord loves us so much that he confronts us with challenges in how to engage our communities? Education is of extreme importance to parents regardless of their ethnic or economic or educational background. And WELS, under God, has a track record of doing education well. Imagine each congregation with a school or preschool reexamining ministry planning with a focus on featuring Lutheran education proactively and intentionalizing a missional emphasis. Imagine the called workers God is currently sending forth, more and more coming with mission experiences via MLC Daylight programs at home and abroad. These young workers have experienced different places and different people and return with an excitement to reach across culture and community to share the Good News. What a blessing for a time when one in ten Americans is foreign born, and one in five Americans speak a language other than English as the mother tongue.¹⁵¹ I can't help but think that God is setting the stage for our little church body to seize the day.



In fact, might Lutheran education be a key strategy in penetrating a community? We have consistently thought about a model in which the church grows the school. Perhaps a model to

¹⁴⁹ Already in 1980, Pastor David Valleskey had a helpful list of proactive guidelines for using the LES as a mission arm. "1) Be properly motivated. 2) Emphasize your philosophy, aims, and purposes. 3) Present the message of salvation to the family. 4) Discuss doctrinal differences. 5) Do careful screening. 6) Make clear the way the school operates. 7) Expect church and Sunday school attendance. 8) Secure agreement to participate in the BIC. 9) Specify an annual enrollment. 10) Take care how you advertise. 11) Keep non-member families informed about church events. 12) Maintain a close working relationship with the pastor and/or evangelism committee. 13) Remember whom you are dealing with." See "Using the Christian Day School as a Mission Arm," a paper presented at the Arizona-California District Teachers' Conference, Tucson, AZ, Nov. 6, 1980. Available at the WLS library online essay file.

¹⁵⁰ Additional resources include an unpublished paper by Pastor Bruce McKenney entitled, "Using our Schools for Outreach: (The Potential and the Pitfalls.)" The paper is available from the author. Pastor Mike Jensen has a presentation outline entitled, "The Doctrine of Church Fellowship and School Enrollment" which was used this past June to engage the Western Wisconsin District Pastor/Teacher Conference in dialogue.

¹⁵¹ My apologies for lack of substantiation. These two stats are gleaned from my faulty memory after reading a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article back in early summer 2007. That was shortly before a subsequent move upset my organizational apple cart. Time pressure now prevented adequate detective work, but I'm sure that time with the internet would provide updated and accurate data from appropriate government agencies.

also explore is the model in which the school grows the church.¹⁵² In the middle of August, several mission pastors from the South Atlantic district presented to the fall faculty conference of Martin Luther College. Under the overall theme of “eye-opener exercises,” these men opened the eyes of the faculty to see the how the Lutheran school is being used by God in distinctly mission settings. The three models presented were not identical. All reflected their unique context of ministry. But all were identical in maintaining a clear Lutheran identity for the school, with a WELS faculty and Christ Light curriculum. All were clear on the need to carefully communicate to parents the doctrinal basis for the ministry and the expectations placed upon them as parents. All maintained a governance model connected with called workers and appropriate congregational oversight. Practical issues of implementing such a model are beyond the scope of this paper, but I can assure you that careful and Biblical attention has been given to a variety of practical concerns. The pastors involved are willing to converse with anyone who seeks to learn more about the ministries in those locales, ministries that are utilizing Lutheran education as an integral component of the congregation’s mission.¹⁵³ I do believe that a generous God is pouring out manifold opportunities for our church body to reexamine our Lutheran schools as a key part of the great commission work we strive to do. In gospel freedom we can reevaluate and reexamine and under God renew and revitalize the precious mission of Lutheran education: teach about life in the One who is our Life.

<i>Ninety second interruption</i>	
	
	

¹⁵² I am not speaking about the Hope School model with a different governance model and limited connection, except perhaps through referral, to a local congregation. Nor am I necessarily speaking of attempts such as “The Charlie Project.” However, this initiative of Wheat Ridge Ministries - which seeks to build a coalition for urban Lutheran schools – also prompts some questions. “Through the development of a new kind of school, Charlie aims to provide a measurable difference in sustainable financials and in quality education in urban Lutheran schools. Its schools will be known for excellence in education, for their Christ-centered service, and for building on the assets of their communities.” Quote taken from the executive summary of the phase one report, page four. It is available online at www.wheatridge.org/charlieproject. It is also clear from the website that no governance connection with a congregation is planned. *"Schools implementing the Charlie Project Model are independently operated."* (From the website www.wheatridge.org/charlieproject. Italics in the original) “The Charlie Project” included a couple of WELS people on its list of people engaged in the project.

¹⁵³ Pastor Donn Dobberstein serves at Our Savior’s, Port Orange, Florida. Pastor Philip Huebner serves at Christ the King, Palm Coast, Florida. Pastor Carl Leyrer and Pastor Carlos Leyrer serve at Divine Savior, Doral, Florida.

Concluding remarks

It was a poignant scene. A young Christian couple. Small children. The parents wondering aloud, “What will the world be like when our children are adults?” I heard the unspoken concern in their words. Jesus’ question was personalized. *However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*¹⁵⁴ Then both rejoiced knowing that they were not alone as instruments of the Spirit to train another generation. They rejoiced knowing that the Good Shepherd had also called other servants of the Word to assist them in sharing the Word of life to their children. They were grateful for the blessing of Lutheran elementary education for their children and viewed the LES with this eternal perspective.

This form of ministry called the Lutheran school is not commanded by God. Other forms of educational ministry have been utilized by the Church in the past.¹⁵⁵ In gospel freedom, other forms of educational ministry no doubt can be created in the future. But a gracious Lord God has allowed a distinct blessing to prosper in our midst, even now during trying times. Are we convinced of the blessing of Lutheran education? That will be true only if we are convinced that it is a matter of life or death.

*We thank you, Lord, and sing your praise For blessings you have given;
Be with us still in future days To guide our youth to heaven.
Lord, grant that we May clearly see The worth of Christian training
That youth may grow Your love to know, Eternal riches gaining.*

*Your Word alone, great God of pow’r, Can feed our soul and spirit.
Christ’s love gives strength for ev’ry hour Without our deeds or merit.
Grant schools that teach And men who preach True Christian education.
Let youth grow strong By Word and song In ev’ry land and nation.¹⁵⁶*

SDG

¹⁵⁴ Luke 8:8

¹⁵⁵ One need only think of the model of the “catechumenate” in the early church, or the “Saturday School” model so prevalent in years past.

¹⁵⁶ CW 5ll.3,4.

Appendix A
Synod resolution to establish a task force on Lutheran schools

Floor Committee 01: Conference of Presidents

Subject: Strengthen School Ministries

Reference: Conference of Presidents Recommendation

Resolution No. 07

WHEREAS 1) the Lord has instructed us in the Great Commission, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28: 19-20); and

WHEREAS 2) our Lutheran schools are actively carrying out this great commission; and

WHEREAS 3) the devil is powerful and is looking to destroy the wonderful work being done through our Lutheran schools; and

WHEREAS 4) it is vital that our Lutheran schools be as strong as possible during this time of challenge and change; therefore be it

Resolved, a) that all synod members keep our schools, their students, teachers and leaders in their regular prayers; and be it finally

Resolved, b) that a task force on Lutheran schools be established and given the charge of working with the Commission on Lutheran Schools to find ways to build awareness of and to promote and strengthen Lutheran schools in our congregations, federations and synod.

Pastor Douglas Free,
Chairman
Pastor Mark Gartner,
Secretary

Appendix B

Eight worldview questions taken from What in the World is Going On? by Pastor Thompson

Question 1: How does the Christian worldview explain the Prime Reality? Answer: **The Christian God.** He is the Prime Reality that does exist, always has existed, and always will exist. His existence explains all else.

Question 2: How does the Christian worldview understand the source of knowledge and truth? How does it claim to know truth and right from wrong? Answer: The Christian, Biblical worldview recognizes two sources for obtaining knowledge: **natural knowledge** and **special revelation (the Bible, Holy Scriptures)**, with the latter having the higher authority.

Question 3: How does the Christian worldview understand and explain the universe? What is the universe and its relation to the Prime Reality; that is, to the triune God? Answer: **God created and preserves the universe.**

Question 4: How does the Christian worldview understand man and his relation to the Prime Reality and the universe? Answer: **Man was made in the image of God.**

Question 5: How does the Christian worldview understand and explain evil? Answer: **The fall into sin.**

Question 6: What is the Christian worldview's solution for evil? Answer: **Justification** through Christ and **sanctification** by the Holy Spirit.

Question 7: How does the Christian worldview understand the future, the final reality, or the "end game"? Answer: The Christian worldview teaches the historical reality of the **second coming of Christ, the resurrection of all flesh, the final judgment, the end of the universe,** and either a believer's **glorification** or an unbeliever's **damnation** in eternity.

Question 8: How is the Christian worldview reflected in various disciplines (such as theology; ethics, philosophy, science, history, art, music, sociology, and politics) and various media? Answer: (Pastor Thompson then uses about four pages to work through the list of disciplines and demonstrates how each reflects Biblical truth.)¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ David C. Thompson, *op. cit.*, pages 15-32. Emphasis in the original

Appendix C

Objectives to strive for in educating a child in the way of the Lord.

From H. Gordon Coiner, "The Scriptural Basis for the Responsibility of the Christian Congregation in Christian Education," *Readings in Christian Education* (1980), p. 72
as quoted in

Philip A Glende, "In the light of the Fourth Commandment: What is the Responsibility of the Parent, the Teacher, the Pastor, and the Lay Person in Education the Child?" Paper presented to the Pastor/Teacher/Lay Delegate Conference in Jenera, Ohio, January 21, 1986. The paper is available on the WLS library on-line essay file.

1. That children be led to understand, accept, and share the Gospel as they feel and express active concern for others who are fellow members of the body of Christ.
2. That children be led to experience God's love as forgiven sinners and express in concrete ways this kind of love (*agape*) in their personal relationships (*koinonia*).
3. That children be led to develop a conviction of responsibility and the growing skill of effective participation in the life of the Christian community.
4. That children be led to understand the nature and mission of the church and the ways in which they may participate significantly and personally in its life and activity.

[Naturally, we Lutherans read these "objectives" from the premise of Means of Grace ministry. No doubt, we would clearly articulate the theological premise that is foundational for any such objective. Each item would begin with wording such as, "By the Spirit's power through the Gospel, children are led..., ed.]

Appendix D

MLC Graduates 2005 - 2010

Graduation Year	% of Graduates Who Attended a Lutheran Elementary School at least 1 year	% of Graduates Who Attended a Lutheran Elementary School 8 or 9 years	% of Graduates Who Graduated from a Lutheran High School	% of Graduates Who Attended a Lutheran Elementary School at least 1 year and graduated from a Lutheran High School	% of Graduates Who Attended a Lutheran Elementary School 8 or 9 years and graduated from a Lutheran High School
2005	85.2	74.0	83.4	78.5	70.0
2006	88.8	71.4	84.5	79.1	64.1
2007	85.4	71.7	88.9	80.3	68.7
2008	79.4	70.3	87.9	73.3	64.8
2009	78.0	64.3	86.9	70.2	57.7
2010	74.7	62.3	83.6	69.2	58.2

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Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
2011 Symposium

Reaction to President Mark Zarling's Essay
Christian Education: A Matter of Life or Death

REFRAME THE QUESTIONS

You have accomplished something simple but incredibly profound. You have reminded us why Lutheran schools are such a blessing.

And I think you succeeded so ably at this because you properly reframed the question. In a similar but slightly different vein, one might ask, for example, "Can you say that the only way to be a true Christian is to join regularly with other Christians, so that you can worship together often?" Surely we would grant Christianity to a converted inmate in solitary confinement. But would not even—and maybe especially—such an inmate appreciate and long for the treasure of Christian fellowship? The question is not, "Could such a scenario exist?" Rather, the question is, "With all things being equal, would we prefer that such a situation exist?"

While we would never say that the only way to be a Christian parent is to send your children to a Lutheran elementary school, yet after hearing Mark's paper, one feels so much better prepared to help all Christian parents appreciate just what God offers them via a Bible-centered educational walk. Such Spirit-filled persuasion pulls powerfully at the heart. Perhaps too often we flee to the refuge of Christian freedom regarding the education of our children, overlooking the fact that while the decision of whether to send our children to a Lutheran grade school certainly includes elements of freedom, we risk employing freedom in spiritually risky fashion if we are not fully aware of the purpose, value, and benefits of such an educational approach. We have been re-equipped for such personal reflection and for conversations with and presentations to others. For that we thank you.

You also highlighted, and then reframed, the question regarding nurture and outreach. If lung function were under discussion, we'd puzzle at a debate over the relative value of inhaling and exhaling. You moved us quickly past the unproductive question and positioned us both to embrace the opportunities and to address the challenges that come when aggressively pursuing the Great Commission.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Aim not first to save the institution, but to serve Jesus
- Understand the real enemies
- Mission of the school = mission of the church
- Christian education = Great Commission
- Objective truth rather than simply secular knowledge
- The world is very different from us
- Students learn lifetime lessons
- Make disciples
- Build up parents
- Apologetics—prepare students to defend the truth
- Serve the community
- Market, but not in a way that changes your Lutheran identity
- The Lutheran school is a great tool for penetrating and ministering to a community
- The heart of Lutheran education is properly viewed as a matter of life and death

Step back and see the whole paper not in intricate detail, but in broad strokes. There is a clear theme. The philosophy of the world remains opposed to Jesus. We have the greatest treasure in Jesus. Lutheran elementary schools serve as a light in our world when they eagerly proclaim Jesus. Looking at it that way, there's no question that Lutheran elementary schools can serve God's purpose. That's the point.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Mark helpfully broaches territory that benefits from careful consideration, occasions where brothers see openings to present Christian education to a broader audience and in a new fashion. No doubt there is eagerness to take full advantage of every opportunity, even as there is a desire to measure and then position such pursuits so that the Lord is honored in all respects. Such issues need to be contemplated with care, with penetrating and guiding Spirit-wrought principles front and center.

THE BLESSING OF CHILDREN

Mark cites, in eye-opening fashion, the impact of birth rate on enrollment. His comments call to mind the many Scripture verses highlighting children as blessings, and his discussion of the issue leads us to ask, “Are we being influenced by the spirit of the times more than we realize?” One thinks not simply on the immediate impact it can have on enrollment numbers. Were that the focus, we’d fall into the trap of viewing Lutheran elementary schools as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end. So, one thinks not simply on enrollment numbers, but on numbers of gospel tellers. Every godly offspring given to Christian parents is also one more soul ready to carry a cross and confess. The Lord gives moms and dads the privilege of raising up not simply Christians—as if Christians were ever *simply* that—but missionaries, more voices to witness to earth’s ends. How easily we can lose focus. How sharply, when Spirit truths are brought to our eyes, can focus return.

FOCUS

And perhaps that would serve as a final thought. Mark, I think you have done us and our synod a service, the service of bringing things into focus. If the other listeners were as I, I wasn’t reading your words and saying, “I’ve never heard anything like that before.” Yes, there were surely many new and insightful observations, but that wasn’t the general effect. Rather, in reading your words, I had a rush of clarity. Sometimes it can feel hard to know what to say to parents who perhaps are not yet understanding precisely what Christian education offers. Sometimes one is even hesitant to engage the issue, thinking that inevitably we will step inappropriately on the toes of Christian freedom. Because of the clarity your words bring, I think we’re all better equipped to have such a conversation, as your words ring with gospel allure rather than legal compulsion. They ring not with frustration, but with humble and heart-felt passion to bring Jesus to more. They ring not of uncertainty combined with fear, but of clarity combined with humble confidence.

You’ve reminded us of what we have and what we have to offer. With God’s blessing, let’s strengthen our hold and proceed with purpose. Then we will know, whatever the future of our Lutheran elementary school institution, that we have identified the real issues and moved forward with Spirit-consistent solutions. For us, to do this is peace enough. Surely we also pray that contemporaneous with and through such action, the Lord would graciously preserve and blossom the blessing of Lutheran elementary schools for children now and yet to come.

*Prof. Steve Geiger
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
2011 September 19*