

# **Evangelism in the Christian Day School Classroom**

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[Milwaukee Lutheran Teachers' Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, February 21, 1985]

Exciting things are happening in our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod at the present time. The fact that you have invited me here to address you on the topic of evangelism is further evidence to me that our Synod is riding the crest of a new wave that, properly handled, cannot help but be a blessing to the Synod as a whole and also to congregations and to individual members of our congregations, including the boys and girls of our Christian day schools.

In the life of a church body circumstances tend to dictate what part of the church's mission receives the greatest emphasis at a particular time. In the 1940s and 1950s the emphasis was on doctrinal purity as the Synod struggled to maintain the sound doctrinal position to which it had only gradually come after a rather shaky theological beginning. This time the shoe was on the other foot. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, which years before had helped the Wisconsin Synod to take a strong doctrinal stand, now was wavering itself. Years of patient testimony on the part of the WELS to her sister synod in the Lutheran Synodical Conference failed to turn Missouri back from her wandering. The result was the suspension of a long-treasured fellowship with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod in 1961 and the dissolution of the Synodical Conference in 1963. This move on the part of the WELS necessitated a new kind of emphasis in the 1960s and 1970s, that of synodical home and world mission outreach. We don't mean to imply, of course, that doctrinal purity now took a back seat and was no longer a matter of concern. When that happens a church body, no matter how "successful" it might be, is not truly serving either the Lord of the Church or people; for only the truth makes people free (John 8:32). What we are saying is this: Since the Synod was no longer able to hold on to the shirt-tails of big sister Missouri, it had to get more deeply involved in the Father's business of mission outreach on its own. The results, under God's blessing, have been amazing. The WELS has emerged from its Midwestern cocoon. We are now a world-wide church body with congregations in all fifty states and world missions around the globe.

Now we are in the 1980's. As a Synod we are still concerned about remaining true to the Word and by God's grace have continued to be an orthodox Lutheran church body. As a Synod we are still concerned about reaching out to the world with the Gospel. The whole-hearted support given to our recent Reaching Out capital funds offering is an indication that a continuation and even increase of such mission outreach here and abroad is truly the will of the people of God within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

At this particular time in the Synod's history we are witnessing an escalation of concern for personal evangelism within our midst. This is the "new wave" referred to above. It is new not in that it is something which has never been in the Church before. Personal evangelism, believers sharing Law and Gospel with their unbelieving friends, is as old as the fall into sin after which the world was divided into sons of God and children of men. It is as old as Noah, described as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), warning his unbelieving neighbors of the wrath of God against sin and unbelief. Nor are we talking about something that is new to our Synod. Already in 1957 the Synod created the synodical Commission on Evangelism which, together with district commissions on evangelism, has been producing materials to assist the congregations of the Synod in the work of outreach to their communities.

What is new is the emphasis that evangelism is receiving at the present time. In 1984 the Synod called the first full-time evangelism executive, a position now being ably filled by Executive Secretary Paul Kelm. Almost simultaneously the Seminary in effect established an "evangelism chair" at the Seminary by calling a man into the Pastoral Theology department who was to put emphasis upon instruction in evangelism. This increased emphasis upon evangelism in the Synod appears to be a natural outgrowth of our expanded home mission program. We have greatly broadened our base of operations. We now have congregations in all of the major population centers in the nation. The number of congregations in the Synod has increased dramatically,

41.4% since 1960 (from 829 to 1172 congregations). Now has come the time to make even more effective use of this growing number of congregations, the time to utilize them as bases of operations from which growing numbers of congregational members will reach out into their communities with the one message that saves.

Our members need to grow in their zeal and ability to reach out with the Gospel to their friends and neighbors. This becomes clear from facts such as the following: 1. Though the Synod has increased in communicant membership by 33.3% since 1960, that increase averages out to a mere 1.4% per year growth rate; 2. Quite consistently over the years there has been only one adult confirmand each year for about every 100 communicant members of the Synod. In other words, it takes 100 communicants on the average to bring one person into the church by way of adult confirmation. Think of the results if each one would reach one each year. Last year's 3429 adult confirmations Synod-wide would have been multiplied by almost 100; 3. So much of our nation remains unchurched. Nation-wide 50.3% of the population has no church home. Even in Wisconsin, which ranks #7 in the nation in the percentage of people who claim membership in a church, 35.4% of the population does not have any kind of church membership. One out of every three people in this comparatively heavily-churched state has no church connection!

There is a vast mission field before us, then, right in our own backyards, a mission field which we, generally speaking, have been only marginally successful in reaching. One of the problems, it appears, is that historically Lutherans have been somewhat reticent about sharing their faith with others, hesitant to use the name of Jesus when talking with people. Things won't change noticeably simply by setting up evangelism programs in the congregation. Certainly some things will be done by structuring for evangelism in the congregation that won't get done as well otherwise. We think here about following up on visitors to the church services, conducting community religious surveys, training evangelism callers, etc., all important components of a congregation's program of outreach to the community. But the most essential component of all cannot be programmed because it is an attitude, a Spirit-induced attitude of heartfelt, overflowing love for the Savior and love and concern for the lost and dying, an attitude which impels a person to say with Peter and John of old, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Right here is where the Christian day school and the teachers within it can play a big role. Your calling as teachers is not simply to convey facts to students so they can grow in knowledge of history, science, math, the Bible, etc. You are involved in molding attitudes. Through your teaching you want to affect the way the children of your class look upon life. You want them to recognize and appreciate how God is involved in every aspect of everything that they learn and above all how God is directly involved in their lives through Jesus Christ.

How does this relate to evangelism? In this way: The more fully our children come to realize their privileged position as children of the King, the more deeply they come to appreciate what it means that Jesus Christ has "redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil . . . with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death," the more natural it will be for them to spontaneously "serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

A part of that spontaneous service will be to do the same as the early Christians did, to tell the Good News to all who will listen. As Pastor Werner Franzmann so ably put it in an essay, "Evangelism in Action among Early Christians": "The joy of hope fulfilled cannot be caged and confined. It cries out for early release." Think of the shepherds who "spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child" (Luke 2:17); of Anna who "spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38); of Andrew who with joy and excitement exclaimed to his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41); of Philip who enthusiastically told his skeptical friend, Nathanael, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45); of the woman at Jacob's Well testifying to her fellow townsmen, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). We could go on, couldn't we, through the whole book of Acts where we see the early Church in action, its members spontaneously evangelizing, that is,

telling the good news about Jesus, whenever and wherever they could, heedless of the threat of persecution, even death.

That's our challenge today, brothers and sisters, to seek to rekindle this love and joy and enthusiasm and zeal which will surface only when people, young or old, are convinced that they have something that is so valuable, so precious, so wonderful that they want the whole world to know about it. "The things that fill the heart to overflowing must pour out over the lips" (paraphrase of Matt. 12:34).

### **The Teacher As Role Model**

Instilling such an attitude begins, I would suggest, with the teacher's own attitude. We should not underestimate the importance of a teacher's example. Our Savior recognized that one teaches by example as well as by word. He called the Twelve, we are told, "that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). "That they might be with him." The apostles would learn much from Jesus simply by being with him. He would teach them much by word, of course, but they would also learn as they observed his lifestyle. Not only would Jesus say, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33), but his life would be a demonstration of what it means to put God first in every way. Not only would Jesus say, "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7), but he would show by personal example the value of a life of prayer and daily close and confident communication with God. Not only would Jesus say, "The Son of Man came to seek and to, save what was lost" (Luke 19:11), but he would also do just that. He would seek out the lost Zaccheus, the woman at Jacob's Well, all the people of Jerusalem, over whose stubborn obstinacy to the Gospel he would weep bitter tears. And then he would go to the cross to save them.

The Apostle Paul, too, knew the value of the example a spiritual leader sets. He writes to the Corinthians, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). He tells the Philippians, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me -- put it into practice" (Phil. 4:9). He reminds the Thessalonians, "We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:7-12). He writes to his co-worker Timothy, "You know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings" (2 Tim. 3:10). He urges Timothy to do for others as Paul has done for him: "Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12).

Let this suffice to illustrate the value of the example of a spiritual leader. Such the Lord has called you to be. What the children see in you as one representing the name of Jesus to them will have an effect on the way they feel about Jesus. This in turn will have a direct bearing on how eager they will be to tell others about Jesus and what he means to them.

One thing especially that your example should be communicating to the children is the security and joy one can have in his or her relationship with the Lord. Look at the Apostle Paul again, writing to the Philippians from imprisonment in Rome. It wasn't easy to be a Christian in those days, certainly not in Philippi. So Paul encourages them, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! . . . Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:4-7). Then he reminds them that these aren't just words. They are the truth of God which he has personally experienced and which the Philippians themselves have seen in Paul's life. "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances," he writes. "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living

in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:11-13). Here is a child of God, a spiritual leader, whose life backs up his message. His example tells them that there is the deepest of joy, that there is true and abiding security for one whose hope and confidence is in the Lord.

Christian teacher, you are a “letter,” “known and read by everybody” (2 Cor. 3:2), especially by those who sit in your classroom more than one thousand hours every school year. If your life were an advertisement for Christianity, and it is, would it lead others to want to “buy” it? The way you act day by day in the classroom preaches a powerful sermon. A teacher whom children view chiefly as cross, grumpy, irritable, temper-prone, who seldom smiles or displays a cheerful disposition is not giving a positive image of the joy of the Christian faith to the class. But when the “fruit of the Spirit” is blossoming in a Christian teacher’s life -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23), then it’s a different story. Then the children see Christianity as something good, positive, something to be desired for themselves and others.

The German philosopher Nietzsche once said about the Christians of his day, “I would believe in their salvation if they looked a little more like people who have been saved.” Shouldn’t it be obvious that we have been saved, rescued from death and hell, that we are now a part of the family of God? By saying this we are not maintaining that a teacher should at all times be bubbling over with joy and merriment. There are occasions in every classroom that call for sternness, even anger. But at the same time it is valid to ask the question, “How will my children remember me -- as a stern, unyielding, unsmiling, dour individual or as one in whom they could see daily all the different aspects of the beautiful fruit of the Spirit?”

Think back, if you would, upon your own formative years. Can you think of anyone outside of your immediate family who has had a deep spiritual influence on you? If you were to describe your relationship with that particular person or persons, how would you illustrate it on the following continuums?

Warm -----	Cool
Personal -----	Impersonal
Two-way -----	One-way
Close -----	Distant
Relaxed -----	Nervous

Wouldn’t warm, personal, two-way, close and relaxed be the way by which you would describe that relationship? If you want to be a positive spiritual role model to your students, then won’t you want to strive for that same kind of relationship with them?

So much of what we have been discussing above is directly related to a teacher’s self-image. And, as a Christian, your self-image in turn is directly related to the way you feel about God and the way you think God feels about you.

How do you picture God in your mind’s eye? Is he frowning or is he smiling? How do you picture yourself to yourself? As a poor, miserable sinner deserving nothing but punishment or as a redeemed child of God, dearly loved by God who spared nothing, not even his Son, to make you his very own? Such questions cannot be answered in the way you ask them, you might respond. For sometimes God smiles and sometimes God frowns. And I am both a poor, miserable sinner deserving nothing but punishment and a redeemed child of God, dearly loved by God who spared nothing, not even his Son, to make me his very own. You are correct in your observation. But that is not my point. My point is this: When you think about God, when you think about yourself does your thinking tend to be Law-oriented or Gospel-oriented? In your mind’s eye is your primary picture of God that of someone carrying a big stick or that of a loving Father? In your mind’s eye do you primarily picture yourself as someone who is no good or as someone who is a unique creation of God, created by him, dearly loved by him, redeemed by him and equipped with a unique combination of gifts and abilities by him? The spiritually healthy Christian, while in no way denying the wrath of God against sin and the fact that he or she is a poor, miserable sinner, will be one who daily lays hold of and rejoices in the love of God in Christ

and in what God has made of him or her, a unique creation of God, created, loved, redeemed, gifted to carry out God's purposes in the world.

Proper self-esteem, then, stems from looking at yourself as God looks at you and from looking at God as he wants all of his redeemed children to look at him. God loves me, God accepts me, God has use for me. Then it must be true that I am not a nobody. I'm a somebody, a VIP in the eyes of the one whose opinion of me counts the most.

Do you see what this will do for the children in your class? What a beautiful role model of a Christian you will be. How much the children will want to have what you have which, of course, they can have through the same Gospel that liberated you and has given you such joy and security in Christ. And, to carry it a step further, how much more natural it then will be for the children to want to talk to others about what gives them such joy and security.

### **The Teacher As Minister of the Gospel**

We should not, then, underestimate the importance of the teacher's example in the classroom. Nor should we underestimate the importance of the teacher's role as teacher of the Word; for while the teacher's example can serve to make the Christian faith appealing to the child, only the Holy Spirit through the Word can give to the child that new spiritual life which rejoices in and finds true peace and security in the Lord.

As you well know, the Bible contains two chief doctrines, Law and Gospel. Both need to be used, not just in Word of God classes but in any teaching situation that calls for the use of the Word, the Law to reveal sin and the wrath of God against sin and the Gospel to announce the grace and love of God, the forgiveness he has secured for every sinner through Jesus Christ. Teachers need to learn how to properly distinguish between Law and Gospel in their teaching so that they do not use the Law when the Gospel should be used, which can only either burden consciences or produce pharisaical pride, and so that they do not use the Gospel when the Law should be used, which will produce a smug self-satisfaction with the status quo instead of a trembling before the wrath of a holy, righteous God.

Having said this, we will want to remind ourselves that, as our Lutheran Confessions put it, the Law is the "strange work" of the Holy Spirit, that is, the Law is not what God longs to bring to us. Rather it is what he must bring to us so that our hearts will be prepared to receive what his heart of love really desires for us -- the Good News of his mercy and love and grace for us in Christ. C. F. W. Walther in his classic work, *Law and Gospel*, put it this way: "The Law is merely an auxiliary doctrine; it is not the real doctrine of Christ." Therefore, he maintains in the final thesis of his book, "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching" (Thesis XXV). Just as the Lord wants you to have primarily a Gospel perception of him rather than a Law perception, as we sought to bring out above, so he wants you to instill in the children the same kind of perception of him as you let the Gospel predominate in your teaching.

The now-sainted Seminary professor, Dr. Siegbert Becker, in an essay delivered ten years ago to the Arizona-California Lutheran Teachers' Conference, "The Use of Law and Gospel in Motivation for Christian Living," emphasizes this same point. After calling attention in no uncertain terms to the need to use the Law in all its severity to awaken and to keep alive the consciousness and true nature of sin, Dr. Becker then turns to the use of the Gospel in the classroom:

While our teaching of the Gospel must never become a minimizing of the seriousness and earnestness of the wrath of God and the horribleness of sin, our teaching of the Law dare never, on the other hand, overshadow our teaching of the Gospel . . . .

If we want to produce in our classrooms, as tools of the Holy Ghost, a truly God-pleasing atmosphere, we must surround these boys and girls with the warmth of the marvelous love of God, and we can do that only as we bring them the assurance of the full and final forgiveness of all their sins. There must be none of this "God will love you if you are good" business, or "God

will forgive you, if you repent, if you are sorry, if you believe,” unless we are very careful to explain what we mean. The Law says that God will love you if you are good, but neither Law nor Gospel say that God will love you if you believe or if you are sorry, in the sense that our faith or our sorrow are conditions that we must fulfill before God will be gracious.

No, God loves these boys and girls, with all their sins and all their faults. He has already long ago forgiven all their sins. You are to be a messenger of God to bring them this good news. You are to tell them without conditions and without reservations, “God loves you. God has forgiven you all your sins. No matter what you do or have done or will do, God has already washed away all your sins with the holy precious blood of his own Son.” You must tell them this because it is true.

In a helpful little book, *Basic Principles of Biblical Counseling*, author Lawrence J. Crabb states (correctly, we believe): “The basic personal need of each personal being is to regard himself as a worthwhile human being.” Crabb maintains that for individuals to be able to look at themselves and say, “I am worthwhile,” they must be rationally aware of two elements in their lives. They need to have a feeling of security and of significance. Security results from knowing that I am loved; significance comes from knowing that I count for something. Do you see how the Christian Gospel satisfies both of these primary needs of every human being?

Apart from the Gospel people, including the children in our classrooms, tend to meet their security needs in one of two ways. Either they put their worst foot forward to test the sincerity of those who say they love them (you’ve all had such behavior in your classrooms) or, more typically, they put their best foot forward in order to gain acceptance. They try to be good in order to be accepted. Both methods fail to achieve their goal. The one who puts his worst foot forward only to be reprimanded thus confirms his feeling that he’s really not liked after all; and the one who tries to win people’s love by trying to put his best foot forward never knows if he’s doing enough. What does the Gospel say? Just as you are God loves you in Christ. You don’t have to strive to be accepted. God has already accepted you.

Sir Oliver Cromwell, prime minister of England, was a homely man. When his official portrait was painted, the artist attempted to touch up some of Cromwell’s coarser features. Cromwell sent the painting back with the message, “I want to be painted warts and all.” That’s the way God has accepted the children entrusted to your care -- warts and all. And a big part of your job is to let the children know that this is really true, that God loves them in Christ in spite of their warts.

One of the primary ways by which you can give them this assurance is by demonstrating to them, as Christ’s representative in the classroom, that you love them in this way, for why should your standards be any different from God’s? By the way you deal with the children you will want to make amply clear what God’s love is like. You will want to demonstrate to them that they don’t have to earn the love and approval of God by making it clear that they don’t have to do anything special or be anything special to merit the love and approval of their teacher. You will want to love them with an unconditional, God-like love.

But won’t this open up the floodgates of all sorts of bad behavior if such unconditional love is announced and demonstrated? Just the opposite is true. Dr. Becker in the essay cited above says it well:

Those who charge that the doctrine of salvation by grace alone without works takes away the chief motivation for good works in the life of men, since it teaches that men need not do good works in order to earn salvation, by that charge simply betray their own lack of understanding of the Christian faith. The same Word of God which convinces us that the eternal Son of God took flesh and blood and bled and died that we might be redeemed from the everlasting fires of hell, that in him we have forgiveness, and life, and salvation, also rouses in us a consciousness of the debt that we owe him and which we can never repay. It places us under a compulsive feeling of obligation that cannot rest. The same Holy Spirit who works in our hearts that faith which knows what Jesus Christ has done for me, which knows that he loved me and gave himself for me, will also waken in our hearts a responsive love for him who first loved us. Those who have been

down the Damascus road with the apostle Paul will also know what he meant when he wrote, “The love of Christ constraineth us.”

And when we know and understand this, we will be done once and for all with the nonsense which says that we preach too much justification and not enough sanctification. Those two can never be preached at each other’s expense. They complement each other. Love for Christ is aroused through the contemplation of the love of Christ. I will be moved to serve the Lord, and this is sanctification, by being reminded of the great things which he has done for me, and that is justification.

The Gospel totally satisfies the need for security. It likewise supplies the answer to my need for significance. How much am I worth? I am worth enough in the eyes of God that he gave his dearest treasure for me “that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom.” I’m secure for God loves me. I’m significant for God chose me to be his very own. Therefore I am a worthwhile human being. How do I know this? God himself says so. And if God says so, that’s all I need.

By now you might be asking why so much time is being spent on such basics as the teacher as role model and the teacher as minister of the Gospel in an essay on evangelism in the Christian day school classroom. Let me repeat what I said above:

The more fully our children come to realize their privileged position as children of the King, the more deeply they come to appreciate what it means that Jesus Christ has “redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil . . . with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death,” the more natural it will be for them to spontaneously “serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”

Evangelism, outreach to others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is a fruit of the Gospel. It cannot and will not be produced by the Law. It is only when the children in our classrooms know and rejoice in their privileged position, in the security and significance that the God of all love and mercy in Christ has freely given to them, that they will be ready and eager to want others to have what they have.

### **The Teacher As Creator of a Mission-Minded Classroom Atmosphere**

Having said this, we hasten to add that there are ways by which a teacher can help to channel in the direction of evangelism this Spirit-produced desire in the children to serve their Lord. A teacher can do this by striving to create a mission-minded classroom atmosphere.

One way by which a teacher can accomplish this is by demonstrating that it is only natural for the name of Jesus to be on a believer’s lips. We sing, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear,” but then so often we are hesitant to use his precious name. I’m thinking here, not merely about using God’s name when teaching the Bible story or when praying, but about becoming more comfortable with using the name of our Lord in our normal conversation. How can we expect to be at ease using the name of Jesus when speaking to an unbeliever if we seldom use his name when speaking among ourselves? In the classroom let the teacher demonstrate by personal example that it is only natural for Christians to talk about God, to name the name that is above all names in conversation with one another, to express verbally the joy of salvation. You will accomplish this best, not by telling the children that this is what they should do, but by doing it yourself and letting them learn from your example.

We tend to be so reticent, so bashful, if you will, about sharing our spiritual joys, our sorrows, our hopes, our fears, our failures, our successes with one another. Listen to people as they talk to one another immediately after a worship service. They have just been fed a generous helping of the Word; they have just spent an hour receiving from God as well as giving back to him their prayers and praise. But you would hardly

know it from the conversation you overhear. Everything is discussed except, for the most part, their Lord. Imagine going to a Packers football game and after the game talking about everything else except the game. Win or lose, what you just experienced the past few hours is the primary topic of conversation. Why don't we talk about Jesus this way? Because our Christian day schools educate such a large percentage of our church's young, what happens or doesn't happen in the Christian day school classroom in this regard will have a direct effect upon how natural it will be for the new generation to speak to one another freely about their Lord and their faith. Evangelism executive secretary, Pastor Paul Kelm, in an October 1984 essay to the Wisconsin State Teachers' Conference, "The Joy of the Gospel," an essay which most if not all of you heard, makes an appeal that I would like to second, an appeal

for spontaneity in the classroom. What I mean is that instead of restricting prayer and praise to time-slots in the schedule we be free enough to interrupt the schedule with a hymn or a prayer where the mood of the classroom or the subject under discussion recommends it. I mean that singing in the classroom doesn't have to be done always in a seated posture. I mean that the teacher can express himself to the class by saying, "Do you know how I feel? . . ."

To that I would like to add a further appeal, that we make greater use of extemporaneous, or *ex corde*, prayers on the part of both the teachers and the students. I was somewhat taken aback by a rather lengthy article on school prayer that appeared in the Life/Style section of the Sunday, December 9, 1984, *Milwaukee Journal* which stated that "Wisconsin Synod schools use three primary prayers, including The Lord's Prayer and Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers . . . Unlike the Missouri Synod schools that encourage more extemporaneous prayers, the Wisconsin Synod uses more prayers from published sources." If the reporter was correct in his assessment, I would suggest that this is one area where changes can and should be made as a simple first step if we want our teachers and children to feel more comfortable about verbalizing their own rather than pre-packaged spiritual thoughts.. Not that we should cease to use the prayer our Lord taught us to pray, not that we should put Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers into mothballs, but that opportunities should be given on a regular basis for both teachers and students to be able to offer up extemporaneous prayers to God in the presence of their fellow Christians. Such spiritual openness among fellow Christians will help to overcome the fear of bringing up the name of Jesus to an unbeliever. I would suggest that the time to begin such a practice is in the primary grades before the self-consciousness of pre-adolescence and adolescence sets in. Make it clear right from the beginning of a child's formal educational process by your own example and by class involvement that talking about and talking to God and Jesus in the presence of other Christians is what Christians just naturally do.

Another way a teacher can help to create a mission-minded classroom atmosphere is through his or her participation in the congregation's evangelism Program. Your class will benefit from this not only by your increased expertise in teaching them how to teach others the way of salvation, but also by what you will be able to share with them about the joys of witnessing from your own first-hand experience. Granted, our Christian day school teachers tend to have a number of extra-curricular duties. But perhaps one teacher at a time could be given one semester of a somewhat reduced extra-curricular schedule so that he or she could be given some on the job training in personal evangelism. Undoubtedly some of you, once given a taste of this way of serving the Lord, will find that evangelism is one of your gifts and will therefore make time in your schedule for ongoing participation in the congregational evangelism program.

A third way by which a teacher can create a mission-minded classroom atmosphere is by bringing up on a regular basis the subject of mission work and evangelism. Annual mission fairs are an excellent tool for creating a mission-minded class. You will also find, if you are but alert to the fact, that many Bible stories lend themselves well to mission and evangelism applications. Pastor Kelm, in the essay cited above, said it well. He urges that

we teach Christian truth, not merely in dogmatic or catechetical terms, but in life-related context. Each truth of Scripture has application to life, our own life and the lives of others. The fun of Christian teaching is to see children discover the purpose of Christian truth. Help them to see how each truth they learned has meaning for, and can be shared with, an unchurched friend.

### **The Teacher As Trainer of a New Generation of Evangelists**

And then, I would suggest you might also want to give to the children some simple instruction on how they might share the Gospel with their friends. This is not to deny what we have been asserting throughout this essay, that evangelism is spontaneous and requires nothing more than a regenerated heart and lips that want to sing the Savior's praise. We think, for example, of the healed blind man of John 9 who with no training whatsoever witnessed to the Pharisees, "I was blind but now I see" (John 9:25), and of the man from the region of the Gerasenes out of whom Jesus drove the evil spirits who "went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him" (Mark 5:20). He did this without so much as a five-minute evangelism training course.

Little children are particularly adept at this spontaneous testimony. Unfortunately, the older children get the more inhibited they tend to become. What we have been talking about in this paper is aimed at breaking down some of these inhibitions and making both teacher and children more open in their talking about Jesus to others.

One further inhibition destroyer which can also be a useful evangelistic tool for the children is personal "what Jesus means to me" testimony. Personal testimony tends to be looked down upon in our circles as being too subjective. The way that it is sometimes used, pointing to self rather than to Jesus, makes understandable our uneasiness about it.

But there is biblical warrant for personal testimony evangelism, properly given. The psalmist writes, "Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me" (Ps. 66:16). Both the Gerasene demoniac and the man born blind mentioned above demonstrate a proper use of personal testimony. Both in very simple language tell what Jesus has done for them and how he has had mercy on them. The Apostle Paul often makes use of personal testimony. Listen as he marvels over what Jesus has done for him:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners -- of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:12-17)

That's personal testimony, pure and simple -- and beautiful. St. Paul gives all glory to the Lord and in the process does not hesitate to tell the truth about himself because that makes the mercy of Jesus that much more marvelous.

I suggest that we encourage such "what Jesus means to me" testimony in the classroom. This will help both teacher and children to be a little more ready to do what every Christian is expected to be able to do: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Pet. 3:15).

You might start in a very simple way by asking the children to define what it means to be a Christian. Then take a second step: Lead them to personalize their definition of a Christian by asking them to give thought to the question, "What does it mean to me to be a Christian?" Work through with them the Scripture references

cited above, the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1ff), the man born blind (Jn. 9:1ff), and the testimony of Paul (1 Tim. 1:12-17) to show them how God's children of Bible times made use of personal testimony to give glory to Jesus. You might want to suggest that they consider four questions as they ask themselves, "What does it mean to me to be a Christian?": 1. What was I? 2. What am I now? 3. How did this happen to me? 4. What does this mean to me?

Encourage class discussion on this topic to give the children an opportunity to verbalize in the presence of their fellow Christians the hope that is in them. Following such discussion you might also ask them to put into writing, "What It Means to Me to Be a Christian." Make clear, however, that this is not just a writing assignment, but that it is a way to help them do what the Lord looks for from all his children, a way to help prepare them to give to others the reason for the hope that is in them. Have them do some role-playing, perhaps. Let one child be the Christian, the other his or her unchurched friend. Let the Christian share with the "non-Christian" what it means to him or her to be a Christian. By this you will be helping them to do what the Spirit through the Gospel will be inspiring them to do -- to share their faith, and to do it in a meaningful way, with their unchurched friends and neighbors.

I would like to suggest that you as teachers also engage in the activity of developing a personal testimony. In that way you, too, will be ready at all times to "give an answer," to joyfully and unhesitatingly tell others -- be it the children in your classroom or the unchurched friends, relatives and neighbors with whom you rub elbows in your daily life -- what it means to be a Christian and what being a Christian means to you.

Without a doubt the Lord of the Church has given to you, as Christian day school teachers, a deep and weighty responsibility. For several hours each day you stand before and with the children in your classroom. Those entrusted to your care are in the formative years of their lives. What they learn or don't learn now will affect all their remaining years. Brothers and sisters, they need the Gospel. They need the assurance that in Christ God has called them O.K. as he has called you O.K., that he accepts them unconditionally as he accepts you unconditionally, that he deeply loves them as he deeply loves you, that he highly treasures them as he highly treasures you. They need to sense that because God loves them in this way you do too. And then they need the gentle encouragement to remember those around them who still don't know about God's love in Christ; and it would be well to give them opportunity to verbalize their faith in the presence of fellow believers in preparation for sharing that faith with their unchurched friends.

In order to continue to be such Gospel-oriented teachers you need, of course, a steady flow of the life-giving stream of the Gospel into your own life. You can't give what you don't have. Dwight L. Moody, an evangelist of the past century, put it this way: "I am a leaky vessel; I must stay constantly under the tap." The "tap" is the Word. St. Peter writes, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Pet. 2:2,3). As you are refreshed daily through personal devotional study of the Word, streams of the living water of the Gospel will flow from within you not just into the heads but into the hearts of the girls and boys in your classrooms. And then evangelism will happen.