

What About Women Visitors?

by Wilbert R. Gawrisch

At times some of our school visitors have felt a certain inadequacy. They have not felt qualified to give sound, practical advice to women teachers of the primary grades.

The question has, consequently, arisen, "Why not have successful women teachers serve as school visitors?" The argument is offered that an experienced woman would be in a much better position to help the inexperienced primary teacher solve her problems. She would know how to gain and hold the attention of little Johnny, who, as one veteran of the classroom once put it, "has hundred muscles to wiggle with, but not one to sit still with."

To answer this question we must first of all consider: What do the Scriptures have to say concerning the place of women in the life and work of the Church?

Scriptural Principles

According to Scripture, the first and highest calling of a woman is that of a wife and mother. When God created the woman, He clearly indicated what her role in life was to be. "It is not good that the man should be alone," God said. "I will make an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

The word "help" plainly shows that God intended the woman's role to be subordinate and auxiliary to that of the man.

The fact that the woman's position is subordinate in no way detracts from its importance, however. That her place in the created order is a vital one is clear from God's statement, "It is *not good* that the man should be alone."

In their sinless state before the Fall both the man and the woman were supremely happy in their God-appointed stations in life. The woman was not resentful because of her subordinate position, and Adam, on his part, gratefully recognizing her as a gift of the heavenly Father, treated his wife with the utmost consideration, honor, and love.

What a tragic effect the Fall into sin had, however, on this beautiful relationship! Ever since the Fall sin manifests itself in the woman in the form of a deep-seated resentment against her subordinate role, and in the man in the form of loveless domination.

The Lord admonishes Christian wives, therefore, "Be in subjection to your own husbands," and Christian husbands are exhorted, "Dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life" (I Pet. 3:1,7).

Since both are "heirs together of the grace of life," it is evident that the distinction between male and female is without significance in the matter of inheriting eternal life. What a high honor, in fact, God bestowed upon womanhood by choosing the woman to be the bearer of the promised Savior, the woman's Seed (Gen. 3:15).

Nevertheless, though Scripture declares that "there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), it also clearly teaches that God has not abrogated or changed the arrangement which He established at creation. "As in all the churches," God plainly tells us, "let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let

them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church” (I Cor. 14: 33-35).

In addition, in I Timothy 2:11-14 we read, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”

Paul is speaking about the teaching of God’s Word. Women are not wholly prohibited from such teaching, but they are not to function publicly as teachers of men. They are not to usurp authority over men. They are not forbidden to teach the Word to other women or children. On the contrary, this is enjoined on them both by precept and example in the Scriptures (*e.g.*, Titus 2:3-5; II Tim. 1:5).

If, therefore, the Church commits the all-important task of teaching children the truths of God’s Word to women who have a natural talent for this work and whose native gifts have been developed through formal training, this does not overthrow the divine principle that women are not to lord it over men. It is just in this field, on the contrary, that the particular talents and gifts of consecrated Christian women may find a God-pleasing and useful outlet. Here those God-given characteristics, qualities, and abilities may properly find expression which are so necessary to win the confidence and touch the hearts of children, especially the little ones.

Here, then, we find one area—Scripture indicates others also—where women can and do have a significant role to play in the life and work of the Church.

It would be contrary to God’s will, however, for women to serve as pastors, to lead an assembly of men and women in public worship, to take an active part in the business meetings of the congregation, or in other ways to exercise authority over men.

In all of this God’s concern is not to guarantee certain inalienable rights to men. His sole concern is the welfare of His Church. It is His will that the special gifts which He has given to each sex be utilized to the best advantage for the benefit of the entire Body. The restrictions which He has put on the activity of women in the life and work of the Church flow from His insight as man’s Creator into the peculiar nature and the special characteristics, abilities, and limitations of each sex.

Applying These Principles

Would, then, the use of women as school visitors conflict with the divine command that women are to keep silence in the churches and are not to usurp authority over men?

If one were to envision a visiting team consisting of a man and a woman at the end of the visitation meeting with the faculty, the pastor, and possibly the school board, giving advice, sending an official report to the congregation (services which our school visitors now customarily render), the conclusion is inescapable that such a procedure would be contrary to God’s Word. Women would unquestionably be put into the position of teaching men. They would not be silent but would have an advisory voice in the affairs of the Church.

But what if such women visitors were restricted to visiting the classrooms of women teachers? Would they not be much better qualified to help inexperienced women teachers solve their problems than men who have perhaps never taught the lower grades?

Before we answer this question, let us recall the purpose of our Synod’s school visitation program. Its objectives are outlined in the Handbook for School Visitors entitled *The Wisconsin Synod Program of School Visitation*. Giving assistance to a teacher who is having difficulty is,

naturally, one of the purposes: "The basic function of the school visitors of the Wisconsin Synod is to encourage and help the teachers of our Lutheran elementary schools do their job better..."

But this is not all that our school visitation program aims to achieve. "The evaluation and assistance should reach beyond that of the individual teacher. It should be a study and an analysis of the entire school. Leadership and cooperative action are very important. The visitor is there to encourage Christian education... This will naturally, where necessary, involve a discussion on various subjects with the faculty and the pastor..." The statement of objectives concludes with the thought that our education is to be Christ-centered with the goal of "winning and developing members for Christ's Kingdom."

It is apparent from this that the role of the school visitor goes beyond that of personal assistance to the individual teacher. If women visitors were to carry out the visitation of the classroom of women teachers, their work would necessarily have extremely limited objectives if it were not to violate Scriptural principles. The man visitor's analysis of the effectiveness of a school's work would then also be based to a lesser degree on personal observation. The important objectives which we have recognized as a vital purpose of the visitation program would, consequently, also either be drastically reduced or seriously impeded.

School visitation is a form of supervision, as the *Handbook* recognizes. Certainly we do not want to deprive our schools of the many benefits which have accrued to our Christian day school system through our present visitation program by curtailing its scope, by reducing its goals, or by limiting its effectiveness. Surely in these days of ever rising educational standards we can not afford to do this. We ought, rather, to seek out ways to *increase* the effectiveness of our visitation program.

Should not our love for Christ and our concern for the children entrusted to our care motivate us to search out the best in educational methods, in textbooks, in curriculum, and in tools on every level and in every department, in every aspect and phase of the educational process? We ought not to wait until we are prodded by the state to improve our schools. Is our high, divinely appointed goal of communicating the Gospel and bringing up our children and youth in the nurture and admonition of the Lord worthy of anything less than the best?

Will we not then also move forward speedily to upgrade our teacher-training program, increasing it as soon as possible to a five year course? Will we wait until we are compelled to take this step by the threat that our schools may possibly be closed by the state? Surely we do not want to give ground for complaint against our schools because of inferior standards! Is not the day long past when we can be satisfied with emergency teachers and stop-gap measures?

Is it not high time also that all of our congregations remember that "the laborer is worthy of his reward" and establish adequate salary schedules so that their teachers can devote their summers to *professional growth* rather than to outside employment needed in order to feed, clothe, and educate their children?

And is not an *effective visitation program* an essential ingredient of an improved educational system? Certainly, then, any thought of cutting back our present program (which would be the inevitable result if the use of women visitors were to remain within Scriptural bounds) ought to be entirely out of the question.

Improving Our Visitation Program

If we are going to effect the desired improvements in our school system, it is clear that we are going to have to attack our problems boldly and imaginatively. We are going to have to

think big. We dare not be satisfied with the old simply because we have always done things that way. We will need to be receptive to fresh ideas, new methods, bold ventures—all, of course, within the framework of the Gospel and the directives which God Himself has given us in His holy Word for our Gospel ministry, specifically, that vital phase of it which we call Christian education.

Is not the cadet program of practice teaching which has been inaugurated by DMLC an example of such a fresh and imaginative approach? Are not the adult education and in-service training courses offered by MLTC another example of an alive and progressive search for new avenues by which to offer people the opportunity to grow in Christian knowledge? It is this forward-looking, wide-awake type of thinking that must characterize our approach to educational problems in this space age.

We are not ashamed of being conservative in our theology, but neither can we afford to be outmoded or ossified in our methodology.

With regard to the visitation of primary classrooms we venture to suggest, first of all, on the basis of personal observation over a period of years, that our men visitors are not wholly at a loss when it comes to assisting primary teachers in solving their problems. Often they are principals who have had to cope repeatedly with similar problems in their own schools.

Although District Boards of Education have, admittedly, at times had difficulty in enlisting as visitors men with the broad range of experience which is the ideal, this problem will be considerably alleviated as greater strides are made in staffing our schools with more men teachers, a policy which ought to be pursued with vigor. We can not afford to close our ears to the well-founded criticism that there is a tremendous waste of synodical funds in financing approximately half the cost of the education of women who, on occasion, get married right after graduation and all too often render a maximum of only one or two years of service to the Church.

We would suggest furthermore, that the visitors might be given special training, in the Visitors' Workshop for example, to equip them for more effective visitation of the primary grades. The professors in the education departments of our teacher-training schools, men who are well acquainted with the most effective teaching methods for the primary grades and who know on the basis of theory, observation, and experience how to deal with the many problems that arise, might be called on to share this knowledge with the men who serve as visitors.

Another suggestion which has been made and which deserves to be tried is that of the friendly counselor. When a visitor discovers that a woman teacher is having trouble, he would call in an experienced teacher. She would spend a day or two with her, observe her in the classroom and then advise her as a friendly counselor. The cost of this program, like that of the visitation program as such, would be borne by the Synod. Such an arrangement would not violate Scriptural principles. It would not reduce the responsibilities or services of the visitor. It would have the advantage of being flexible. The visitor could draw on this resource when he considered it advisable and promising.

Still another idea, already being employed but deserving much wider utilization, is that of inter-school visitation. School is closed for a day to enable the teachers to sit in and observe the actual classroom procedure of capable, experienced teachers. Schools ought to encourage their teachers to avail themselves of frequent opportunities for such observation. Selected rooms might be released, or a substitute teacher engaged for the day. It would surely be a wise investment for the congregation, amply returned, we believe, in the form of improved teaching in the future.

Finally we ought to weigh the advisability of having full-time, professional school visitors. This was, in fact, the duty of our Synod's first full-time school executive. His title was "school visitor." It was his responsibility to visit all the schools of the Synod in the interest of greater uniformity and improved standards. In its report to the Synod the School Committee expressed regret that a full-time school visitor had not been engaged much sooner. A return to this tried and tested plan may be in order.

We see, then, that there are a number of acceptable, scriptural alternatives to the appointment of women as school visitors. Others, hopefully, will come forward with still other suggestions.

Let us not shrink, however, from a thoroughgoing and continuing self-examination. Our aim must ever be to improve our program of Christian education. Obsolete and ineffective policies and practices must be scrapped. We need to venture forth boldly into new areas and new programs. We need to examine our endeavors constantly in the light of actual accomplishments and failures. Weaknesses ought to be recognized honestly, promising new methods tried out. We ought not to shrink even from such formidable tasks as producing our own textbooks which will reflect our Christian approach.

Such a continual upgrading of our program of Christian education will, naturally, require a greater commit to this cause and a greater willingness to support it financially also. But does not the Gospel of God's free grace in Christ Jesus which has been entrusted to us obligate us not only to carry it to all nations, but also to teach it diligently to our children?

Let us not look upon our Savior's great commission as an *either-or*, but rather as a *both-and*, missions AND Christian education. He bids us, "Go ye therefore and *teach* (make disciples of] all nations...*teaching* them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

This is a grave responsibility. This is a holy task. But we have Jesus', own solemn pledge of His unfailing help and blessing, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."