

# **The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher**

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## **Prologue (from Isaiah 6)**

You have set me upon this earth for a moment such as this;  
That your name might be glorified  
In the words here written and spoken.

Even the angels fear to stand in your presence.  
Your throne is high and exalted,  
And your majesty fills the earth.

Hear my cry, oh Lord, for I stand in your temple ashamed  
And unable to cleanse myself;  
Make me fit to utter your name.

You have purified me with a glowing ember;  
You have claimed me for your own  
With the life-blood of the Lamb.

Now send me, that I may go forth among the heathen

To warn this nation of its sin  
And call the people to repentance.

Open their eyes and soften their calloused hearts  
That they too may be healed  
And their burden lifted.

Search my thoughts, Oh Lord, and fill me  
With your strength, that I may  
Witness to the truth of your promises.

Accomplish your eternal purpose in me  
So that every living creature on earth  
And under the earth may praise your name forever.

What a privilege God has given us that we should be chosen to “declare his glory among the nations” (Psalm 96:3)! With humble hearts of thanks let us praise the most holy name of our Creator, our Redeemer and our Sanctifier, for he has done “Marvelous deeds among all peoples.” As his created, redeemed and sanctified children let us, by the power of his Spirit, now mine precious gemstones of truth from his Divine Revelation. And may our eyes always be fixed on our Lord Jesus, who authors and perfects our faith, that we may ever grow in our own understanding and not “receive God’s grace in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Christian ministry is showing Christ-like love and concern for people by touching the truth of God’s Word to their hearts as often as possible to as many people as possible. The work of Lutheran teachers is ministry. That it is ministry has not always been self-evident. There are a lot of nonspiritual activities in the day-to-day professional lives of Christian educators that tend to obscure the spiritual nature of the position. Even the most recent official call forms published by Northwestern Publishing House fail to employ the word “ministry.” At the center of this paper then stands the theme that it is incumbent upon educators in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to be involved in ministry.

It is humanly important and divinely commanded (Colossians 3:16) that we first come to scriptural consensus for ministry as it applies to the Lutheran teacher. From such a biblical platform we can then view the needs of God’s people, and discover how the Christian educator can best serve to meet those needs.

### **Part One. A Gospel Ministry**

The gospel of Jesus Christ lies at the heart of an evangelical ministry. The Apostle Paul wrote, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). Our hope is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the salvation that makes ministry possible, and he is the motivation that causes ministry to happen in and through us. Christians do ministry because the joy of the gospel compels them to do it (2 Corinthians 5:14). With fellow redeemed everywhere the Christian can chime in with Saint Paul in declaring, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Romans 1:16). Such ministry is directed by God himself “...who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the

fragrance of the knowledge of him” (2 Corinthians 1:14). A gospel ministry founded and fostered in the Word carries with it the full force of God’s promise that it will not return unto him empty, but that it will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sends it (Isaiah 55:11).

**1.1** In his second pastoral letter to Timothy, Saint Paul summarized ministry as he urged, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and one who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). In many ways this passage holds the key to a correct understanding of ministry. The one doing the ministry is compared to an artisan who has been fully certified by the Master Craftsman. With these prestigious credentials the artisan is now qualified to “correctly handle” the appropriate tools of the trade. And what are the tools of the trade? Nothing less than “the word of truth,” tools sent by the Master Craftsman for the building of his masterpiece. What beautiful imagery! We ought to return to that picture often to be reminded that our tools can be mishandled as well as handled correctly. There is a theme here that is central to ministry. We will consider it several times as we look at the ministry of the Lutheran teacher.

**1.2** Ministry in the Word appropriates the Word for carrying out three functions. The Apostle Paul encourages young Timothy to “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). Correct handling of the Word of Truth then involves instructing people so that they understand right from wrong according to God’s will; pointing out sin as people disregard God’s will; and directing them to the new hope that forgiveness in Christ brings to guilty hearts. Actually, the Apostle repeats the same concept in his letter to Titus. Only here he reduces the functions of ministry to the lowest common denominator. “These then are the things you should teach. *Encourage* and *rebuke* with all authority” (Titus 2:15). In essence, these two verbs “rebuke” and “encourage” describe actions that correspond to the two great doctrines of the Bible: law and gospel. Teachers committed to the concept of ministry will be fully involved in applications of both law and gospel. In and of itself that should hardly be cause for surprise to teachers. Teachers are forever applying God’s law and the sweet message of the gospel to the sinners/saints of their classrooms. What needs to be said, however, is that teachers must become more involved in the evangelical process of admonishing parents when admonition is properly called for. And in many ways the Christian educator will continually need to sound the warning bell of the law if people stubbornly refuse to change sinful parenting practices.

Congregation leaders and school administrators would do well to keep a sharp distinction between applying God’s law and creating their own legislation. Ministry is not policy-making. Policies with regard to minimum church attendance or Bible class attendance tend to eliminate the possibilities for ministry before ministry in law and gospel can take place. Attendance records are useful aids to ministry in bringing people and the Word together, and in pinpointing sin. But that is all that they can accomplish. Real ministry is done not by making law, but by applying God’s law and gospel so that it can have its Spirit-directed effect. Impatience with people’s level of sanctification is a form of legalism.

On the other hand, teachers must also be able to sense when the comfort of the gospel is needed to encourage parents when they feel guilty about parenting sin. They need to be reminded often that Jesus died for those sins too. Parents need to hear that wonderful news in places apart from the pulpit, and from people apart from the clergy, because that message is the glue that holds Christian families together. We need to share the precious comfort of the gospel that we know with others. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of

compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

**1.3** J. P. Meyer wrote, “The public ministry and the common priesthood of all Christians are two species of one genus, the ministry of the Word.”<sup>i</sup> Both species of the ministry share the same tools and serve to carry out the same functions. “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Furthermore, both public and private ministries have the same goal. The Apostle continues, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God.” Perhaps the most definitive text in all of Scripture for directing ministry is in Jesus’, Great Command. “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” (Matthew 28:18-20). Much has been said and written about Jesus’ commission with regard to its nurture and outreach implications for our church. A careful study of the text reveals that ministry is not an either/or proposition. Pastor Joel Gerlach puts it this way:

Jesus tells us in Matthew 28 to (paraphrase) ‘Be about the business of making disciples...’ Jesus added two participles to explain how to make disciples, baptizing, teaching. Baptizing recruits disciples. Teaching trains and equips the recruits for authentic discipleship. What baptizing initiates teaching perfects... Teaching makes disciples.<sup>ii</sup>

Pastor Gerlach goes on to make the point that it takes a disciple to make a disciple. To be a disciple one:

1. drops everything to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:19).
2. is totally committed to Jesus Christ (Matthew 8:22; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 2:6; Matthew 16:24-25; Philippians 3:7-11).
3. continues to grow in God’s Word (Ephesians 4:15; 2 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 6:1).
4. loves (John 3:34-35).
5. is courageous in and for the gospel of Christ (Acts 4:13).<sup>iii</sup>

**1.4** Leaders of the New Testament church recognized that good order would call for a distinction between public and private ministry. God’s Spirit, of course, had pre-ordained that it be so (Matthew 28:18-20). Acts 6 gives an account of their solution. “They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed, and laid their hands on them.” Saint Luke also records the fore-ordained results: “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Public ministry was not for everyone. In fact, Saint James recommended to the church at large that “not many of you should presume to be teachers...because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). This recommendation is appropriate, for a position in public ministry carries grave responsibilities with it. “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God” (I Corinthians 4:1). Nor should anyone confer this position on himself. In a very real sense it is God who does the calling (Hebrews 5:4), even though he does so through the actions of men.

**1.5** For those who are called to serve, the Holy Spirit offers a veritable bounty of gifts (I Corinthians 12:6-8). In that way he provides certified artisans “...to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...” (Ephesians 4:12). The amount of gifts and the kind of gifts will vary, but each one is a gift given with a purpose. We read that

“...to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men’” (Ephesians 4:7-8). God’s gifts then are a critical factor in determining the various roles in the church, with each gift purposefully designed to meet the spiritual needs of God’s people. Nevertheless, all of these gifts come from the same source, and have the same end goal (I Corinthians 12:4-11). That they are different and varied is yet another blessing. For in their variety each Christian can find fulfillment and identity in God’s kingdom while God uses him or her to carry on the various phases of ministry. We dare not minimize the gifts we have been given. We dare not hide them. We are to use them in the spirit of cheerfulness and thanksgiving (Romans 12:6-8). We are to develop our gifts and exercise them (1 Timothy 4:14). Teachers have a particularly important role to play in this matter of gifts for service. Young people need to be able to identify their spiritual gifts for service early in life so that they can develop them and become life-long, active parts of Christ’s body whether it is as a worker in public ministry or private ministry. Teachers are in a position to guide young Christians in gift identification and development. Then too, as the teaching ministry expands to include more parent/teacher interaction, the Lutheran educator will seize every opportunity to help troubled parents recognize that they too have been given spiritual gifts that will enable them to lead their own family toward deeper spiritual convictions.

Paul encouraged young Pastor Timothy to “...fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6). God’s Spirit had given young Timothy a gift that could be used in public ministry. The ‘laying on of hands’ Paul refers to is a blessing to signify Timothy’s commission to be a public minister. In his orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:33,40) God gives workers for public service in his church. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...” (Ephesians 4:11). It is interesting that “pastors and teachers” appear together in the same phrase as though the two were actually two facets of the same work. Kretzmann explains:

With “pastors and teachers” the apostle describes the regular ministry of the Word, which in all periods of the church has been and remained the same, the public office of preaching. The expression “teachers” probably refers chiefly to the public activity of preaching, “pastors”, to the activity which applies the Word to individuals of the congregation.<sup>iv</sup>

It is unfortunate that in our present day through the process of defining, refining, and redefining ministry we have in a sense gone beyond focus to a point where role distinctions between pastors and teachers are blurred once again by too much definition. In some cases the roles themselves are jealously guarded to the detriment of ministry. Perhaps some of the confusion stems from a misapplication of Jesus’ instructions to Peter: “Feed my lambs...Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17). Christian teachers have a way of finding limits in those words. There is a mindset among educators that says, ‘I’ll take care of these little lambs. You, Pastor, minister to the big people.’ Jesus never intended these words to limit ministry. In fact, quite the opposite is true. By his choice of words, “lambs” and “sheep,” Jesus was describing for Peter the full scope of ministry. Lenske writes:

When he first says “my lambs” and the finally “my young sheep” Jesus certainly does not intend to transfer to Peter’s care one section after another of his flock, for “my sheep” embraces all of them...It is as though the Shepherd comes to Peter, leading his entire flock. First he says: Look at these lambs in the flock; I am placing them into your care. They especially need feeding; feed them aright!” Then he points to the whole flock, as if

to say,” look at this entire flock; I am placing the whole of it into your care. It needs all that shepherding implies; be its true shepherd!”<sup>v</sup>

The ministry of the Lutheran teacher goes beyond the confines of a classroom. It touches the lives of young and old alike. Pastor Gerlach said it well:

To play your proper role within the congregation, you need to remember that your call from the congregation is not as much a call to serve the congregation as it is a call to build Christ’s kingdom. The teacher who views his call as a call to serve a congregation is likely to see his call as something which puts limitations on his need to serve... Those people in your church are God’s people, people with needs, people who need shaping up. If they have certain needs and you have certain gifts to match, you do not need a call on paper to match your gifts to those needs.<sup>vi</sup>

Christian teachers are shepherds in ministry. The Apostle speaks to us as he spoke to the elders at Ephesus. “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

But the scope of the call is determined by the calling body, not by the person being called. And Scripture gives to congregations no specific prescriptions as to the forms of ministry to follow. Therefore congregations are at liberty to choose forms of ministry that will truly serve to meet the needs of its people.<sup>vii</sup>

Many of our congregations today are beginning to recognize that the spiritual condition of the Christian family presents special needs for ministry. Larry Richards expressed this concern as he wrote:

Today the church is on the edge of many great decisions. But certainly one of the most significant is this: Are we willing to do what must be done for the church to help the family face the future? Or will we abandon the family to face alone those forces it was not designed to overcome without the support of the body.<sup>viii</sup>

If the church is to become instrumental in providing the spiritual help that is needed, it must begin to consider alternatives to its current ministry forms. Congregations that own and operate schools are doubly blessed by being able to consider their called teaching ministers as resources for family ministry. The choice is a logical one. Christian teachers are in the front line when it comes to families. They are often the first to recognize the signs and symptoms of family tension as it plays against the attitudes and behavior of children in the classroom. Classroom teachers are almost daily in contact with at least one member of those families that so often need genuine law/gospel ministry. May wisdom prevail in voters assemblies that may be tempted to view less spiritual teaching activities as being more important. And let them not harken to the cry that teachers everywhere raise in unison ad nauseam: ‘We’re too busy!’ In his fine book about church and family Charles Sell simply states, “If we are too busy to minister to the family, we are too busy.”<sup>ix</sup>

Four years ago, in what now seems to have been a rather crude fashion, the teachers of Gethsemane in Milwaukee began to examine ways in which they could begin a ministry to families. It was intended that such a ministry should include materials and organization for a Bible study program, a re-evaluation of teacher involvement in family counseling, development of a family resource center, a family devotional program, and an agenda for home visits. The argument that got prime time and carried the most weight always danced to the ‘I’m too busy’ tune. Over the protests and grumblings, the need for family ministry prevailed. While the problem of teacher time has never been fully overcome, there have been expressions of joy and

accomplishment over family ministry that are rarely heard among educators. The staff is nowhere near achieving the goals that were first envisioned. But there is a sense of being on the right-road. For the first time in a long while the teaching staff of this school feels that what it is doing is making a difference.

## **Part Two. A Pedagogical Ministry**

Ours is a ministry to teach. Teachers nurture the mind and the heart so that they may grow. Christian teaching places Jesus Christ at the center of that growth to give learning its spiritual purpose and meaning. In other words, the Christian teacher nurtures the minds, hearts, and souls of students so that they may grow. To do that the Christian educator needs to be concerned about two rather expansive topics; the learner and the curriculum.

**2.1** To fully understand the learner it is necessary to come to grips with the learner's environment. Christians view their child's growing environment as three interacting spheres of influence: the church, the home and the school. Of the three, the home is the most effective for discipling. There is not a shred of research evidence to suggest otherwise. And the amount of research in this regard has been impressive. Parents may be deceived into thinking otherwise, but the things that happen to people in the family setting have more impact and influence on lives than any other single factor. Even where contemporary society has de-emphasized the family to some degree, that fact does not change. This is not a discovery of modern man's research. It is part of God's divine order. God commanded Moses to say to the people, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). How God understands learners! Of this passage Pastor Steven Degner writes:

The Hebrew word for teach (*shanon*) is used to show how the Lord expected the people of Israel to be totally dedicated to teaching the Word of God in the home. Teaching was to take place whenever the opportunity arose.<sup>x</sup>

Edersheim adds, "From the first days of its existence a religious atmosphere surrounded the child of Jewish parents."<sup>xi</sup> That God's people often failed to heed those words in their homes becomes clear from this sad chronicle recorded in Judges: "At that time the Israelites left that place and went home to their tribes and clans, each to his own inheritance. In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." (Judges 21:24-25).

**2.2** Hebrew parents were to teach their children. And who was instructing the parents? The task of educating Hebrew parents was always delegated to a class of teachers.<sup>xii</sup> In our generation a reversal of sorts has taken place. Where the home formerly served as the primary agency for Christian training, and the Christian school served to reinforce that which was taught in the home; today Christian schools have become the training ground for the Christian life with parents taking on the secondary role of reinforcing agent. This presents the most important challenge facing Christian education today. The lead role of training children in God's way must be shifted back to parents, and Christian education must find greater emphasis in the home.

As we view the spiritual bankruptcy of some of our families, there is the temptation to acknowledge defeat, abandoning the current generation of parents and marshalling our efforts toward preparing the next generation of parents for more effective family leadership. We must resist that temptation for two reasons. The first is obvious. Parents that have made a mess of their Christian parenting still need law/gospel ministry for the sake of their own souls. Less obvious is

the model-damaging precedent that such a course would set. Such action would indeed run counter to the order that God himself has set in motion. In spite of the dreadfully discouraging state of parenting in Luther's day, Luther did not encourage the clergy to act as parents. Nor can Christian educators today begin to act as parents.

In order to keep a balance there are two cautions for Lutheran teachers to consider. On the one hand, the teacher dare never shrink from opportunities for carrying out law/gospel ministry to Christian families. On the other hand, Christian educators must recognize and respect the birthright of parents, for it is the primary responsibility and privilege of parents to be concerned for the physical emotional and spiritual nurture and well-being of their own children. In simple fact, the two roles are not interchangeable. They are not in conflict. Nor do they compete against each other. But instead they are in harmony—a partnership that brings the Christian teacher into ministry to the child, the parent, and indeed the entire family. Nearly sixty years ago Koehler supported this thesis as he pointed out that:

The Christian home and the Christian school are the two most effective agencies for the training of children. However, in point of importance and responsibility the home stands first. Parents may not neglect Christian training at home because their children are attending a Christian school...This prerogative and privilege no one may take from them, nor may they forego it voluntarily.<sup>xiii</sup>

As we consider the learner and his environment there is yet another factor regarding the parental view of which the educator must be aware. Our generation of ministry takes place in the context of a society that thinks about family and parenting in rather sophisticated ways. We minister to parents that are, for the most part, well informed when it comes to theories of childhood, education and family growth. Most of what is read is applied humanistic psychology. Some of it is generated by those who would attempt to wed man's theories with God's will. Both can be spiritually deadly. Both represent a formidable barrier to effective family ministry. Saint Paul described the peril this way: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine...They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). This is not a business for the faint of heart. To the Galatians the Apostle wrote, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

**2.2 Curriculum is the stuff of education.** It involves virtually everything that is used to maintain learning growth. Thus the term "family-centered curriculum" implies that such a curriculum is made up of family-oriented subject matter to be used to meet family-oriented goals. Educators love to use catchwords to describe the curriculum in brief. Terms like "the child-centered curriculum and "a Christ-centered curriculum" are not uncommon in our circles<sup>1</sup>. The concept of a family-centered curriculum is not original, although this writer has never seen that term in print. And Lutheran educators are not the first to recognize that trouble on the home front usually means trouble at school. In an article that recently appeared in *Educational Leadership* one of the four major objectives proposed for the '90s was listed as "writing parallel curriculums for the classroom and the home."<sup>xiv</sup> Again Koehler saw the same need six decades ago:

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The terms "child-centered curriculum," "Christ-centered curriculum" and "family-centered curriculum" are not mutually exclusive of each other. A Christo-centric curriculum can also place children and families at their center as long as the cross of Christ dominates the substance and goals of the curriculum.



Nevertheless, Christian education at home must be essentially the same as at school. Both have the same objective, employ the same means, follow the same principle...There must be an understanding between the parent and the teacher lest each follow a different course and the child be subjected to conflicting influences...For successful cooperation, parents and teachers must clearly understand what is the aim and objective of Christian training...<sup>xv</sup>

These two pleas for parallel home/school curriculums have a significant difference. Where secular education will still be struggling to develop its family-centered curriculum (And it will never be achieved to satisfaction.), Christian education already has, and has had for all ages that parallel family-centered curriculum that secular education longs for so desperately today. It is called the Bible. Christian parents and Christian teachers should have little trouble agreeing with a curriculum that is essentially God's plan. There will always be two parts. The learner must know what God has done for him; and the learner needs to know how he can in turn serve God with his new life in Christ. In the interest of systematizing such a curriculum, this writer has suggested the following eight key areas for emphasis in this "new" curriculum. In every case teaching for application should find an appropriate balance to teaching for cognitive outcomes (Matthew 7:24; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:21).

1. Teach the value of God's Word.
2. Teach law and gospel.
3. Teach how to build and maintain relationships in Christ.
4. Teach accountability.
5. Teach speaking the truth in love.
6. Teach commitment.
7. Teach Christ-like sharing.
8. Teach what it means to be sanctified.

The concept of a family-centered curriculum, to be true to its name, must of necessity involve more learners than just children. (It was not unintentional that the "learners" were not fully identified at the onset of this section of the paper.) Luther certainly understood that when he prefaced his *Small Catechism* with the words: "The head of the family should teach them in all simplicity to his household." Luther once said (Hauspredigten), "I preach in my home because of the office I hold and for my conscience, simply because as a family father, it is my duty to preach it to my family."<sup>xvi</sup> In more recent history Donald Abdon contended that "The function of evangelists, pastors, and teachers is to equip the saints for the work of ministry... The 'laymen' are to be trained and equipped to do ministry of their own."<sup>xvii</sup> Dare we be so bold as to add the words 'in their own homes first?'

Permit a few brief remarks regarding some of the above proposed parallel curriculum.

God's Word at times can be inhibiting, even overwhelming. If it is so for the professional Christian educator, how much more unnerving can it be for a father or mother, perhaps new to the faith, or rusty to the lesson, to teach a Bible story, application and all, to their child. Lutheran teachers can show parents how to become comfortable with the simple truths of Scripture so that parents too can know the joy of teaching their children to know who God is and how sure his promises are.

Luther once remarked that the concept of law and gospel was the most difficult of all lessons to apply. It isn't difficult to see that many Christian parents are confused. They need to learn that law and gospel, justice and grace, judgment and forgiveness must exist side-by-side in the Christian home—the law to quicken the conscience, and the gospel to pronounce

forgiveness—the gospel to motivate the New Man, and the law to guide the New Man’s actions. The Lutheran teacher can be an important instrument in aiding parents to teach and discipline with the Bible tools of law and gospel. When parents begin to explore ways and means for motivating children, Christian teachers are needed to teach them that children are best motivated by God’s love for them. When parents get caught up in demanding obedience to parental authority, Christian teachers can be there to lead them to understand that only the gospel of Christ can move the hearts of young and old alike to love God and keep his commandments. Where law exists to the exclusion of love; where love exists without accountability for sin; where law and gospel are misunderstood or misapplied, the Lutheran teacher can encourage parents to remember how God deals with us. He “demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

There is a popular conviction among parents that they cannot or at least should not be held accountable for wrong-doing. Parents seem to be able, and sometimes all too willing to recognize their own sins. Sometimes they may even appear to be proud of them. They simply refuse to be held accountable for them. Where this occurs children are quick to follow this example. It is an easy way to deny guilt. And denial is a powerful ploy of the tempter. Christian teachers can lead parents to see that their children need their examples of humble repentance, fully reliant upon God’s merciful forgiveness in the face of sin. Teachers can help parents become living examples as they stand at the foot of the cross to find there the reconciliation with God that is theirs in Christ Jesus.

We have lost what Peter Berger calls ‘the Sacred Canopy,’ a term for an awareness that human affairs should be conducted with a heavenly sanction. Perhaps this loss, more than anything else, makes people today what one psychologist calls ‘commitment cripples.’<sup>xviii</sup> Christian teachers must teach parents and children alike that God shows us that he is fully committed to us by keeping every promise. Ministry to the family can restore that sacred canopy of commitment to God, and one another.

Finally, teachers can lead parents in understanding that being a disciple of Jesus means that while we operate in this world as salt and light for the sake of those who have not come to know of their salvation, we nevertheless are not to become worldly. At Mount Sinai an omniscient God foresaw the kind of temptations his immature “children” would be visited with in the new land of Canaan. Here he set his people apart from the other godless tribes of the earth by giving his people the Levitical law. These laws are the ordinances of a jealous God telling his children, ‘You are mine. I have created you. I have delivered you. You are not to be like those wicked tribes that will be living among you.’ In the New Testament the people of God are called “a holy nation,” a chosen people belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9). It is for his ministers and their ministry that Jesus prayed when he petitioned, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Parents need to hear that as we are elected by God, so also does he ‘set us apart’ to live in service to him and none other.

**2.3** There are obstacles to overcome. The most serious of which lies in the very relationship that exists between parents and teachers. Though the problem is not a new one, researchers have all but ignored it until quite recently. The parent-teacher relationship was alluded to earlier with a quotation from Koehler. Let us sharpen the focus a bit with some secular research. In a recently published article that appeared in *The Education Forum*, David Orst offered a digest of research literature concerning the parent-teacher relationship. He summarized one such study with these thoughts:

...it was recognized that parents and the society-at-large feel disenfranchised from the schooling process. Teachers and schools tend to operate in isolation from the culture and, basic to this isolation, there is a hiatus between parents and teachers. Gone is the sense of community—the mutual respect for home and school and the trust of teacher for/by parent. The model of shared responsibility for the education of children seems no longer dominant.<sup>xix</sup>

Orst goes on to cite six studies that identified commonly held fallacies regarding parent-teacher relationships. They were as follows:

Fallacy One: Teachers have the skills and techniques to work effectively with parents or the community.<sup>xx</sup>

Fallacy Two: Teacher-parent interaction is the same at all levels of schooling.<sup>xxi</sup>

Fallacy Three: Teacher-parent interaction is the same regardless of the school or community setting.<sup>xxii</sup>

Fallacy Four: Teachers are professionally and personally secure to the point that working with parents poses no threat or intimidation.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Fallacy Five: Family structures will essentially remain the same throughout all of the years that a youngster is in school.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Fallacy Six: Teacher-parent relationships are formed as a result of objective and rational behavior and in isolation of the child's relationships.<sup>xxv</sup>

Orst completes his summary with this statement:

Teachers who do not understand the complex patterns of parental expectations and beliefs cannot be expected to be able to develop strong and meaningful teacher-parent interactions that will foster student development.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Christian educators will need to overcome barriers with bridges of love, forgiveness, hope, trust, peace, and joy. These are the ingredients for healthy parent-teacher relationships. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection bond Christian parents and teachers together like no secular strategy for parent-teacher interaction can. But it is up to schools and educators to initiate the process. To begin to heal the breach between parents and teachers, Christian educators will need to use the language of Jesus. His was a message of love, of forgiveness, and of trust. The healing message that Lutheran educators must continue to carry to parents is: 'We love you. We want your forgiveness and we want you to accept our forgiveness. We trust you, and we want your trust. We want you to care about us and about the things that are going on in our school. We care about you and your family.'

**2.4** In general, the teachers themselves report that they have little knowledge about the value of parent involvement and have few skills in dealing with parents.<sup>xxvii</sup>

So states a study from the Truman Pierce Institute. Do we have reason to believe that WELS teachers are any better prepared for the kind of ministry described in this paper than teachers in the public sector are prepared to work with parents? New skills will need to be developed. Teachers need to become ever more comfortable at using Scripture. Prayer skills need sharpening. Ministry to parents will require better listening skills so that teachers can better determine how to approach a presentation of law and gospel. In the light of data that indicates

that one fourth of all American homes struggles with the abuses of drugs and alcohol, educators need to come to a fuller understanding of the implications this sad fact has for family ministry. Skills needed for helping families crippled by drug abuse or alcoholism will increase in demand.

It is time to begin to explore the frontier of new challenges for ministry that God places before us. In spite of the many unanswered questions that haunt the issues at hand we cannot afford to simply mark time with the wonderful blessings in Christian education that God has seen fit to give to the WELS. Ours is a complex society that calls for a ministry that appears to be getting more complex. Yet God provides simple answers to complex problems. Take heart, oh Man of God, and be assured that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17). And be assured that Jesus will be with you in your ministry, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

## Appendix A

### **The Family-Centered Curriculum Objectives for Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum**

1. Teach the value of *God's Word*.
2. Teach *law and gospel*.
3. Teach how to build and maintain *relationships in Christ*.
4. Teach *accountability*.
5. Teach speaking the *truth* in love.
6. Teach *commitment*.
7. Teach Christ-like *sharing*.
8. Teach what it means to be *sanctified*.

## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### **Objective One: Teach the value of *God's Word*.**

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *John 5:39*.

Why must this objective serve as a prerequisite and foundation for the other objectives in this curriculum?

Why must this objective be shared by both home and school?

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum. (Be prepared to report on the goals you have written.)*

How can the goals for teaching the value of God's Word become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?

## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### **Objective Two: Teach *law and gospel*.**

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *Romans 3:20; Romans 2:4; and 2 Corinthians 5:15*.

What is the purpose of the law?

Read John 20:31.

What is the purpose of the gospel?

Which does God want us to use to motivate children?

Where only can mankind find the gospel?

Why can only Christians discipline with law and gospel?

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum.*  
(Be prepared to report on the goals you have written.)

How can the goals for teaching law and gospel become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?

## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### **Objective Three: Teach how to build and maintain *relationships in Christ*.**

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *John 15:12*.

How is a relationship that is built in Christ different from other human relationships?

What are some elements found in Christian relationships?

Make a list of some Biblical relationships that serve as good models.

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum.*  
(Be prepared to report on the goals you have written.)

How can the goals for teaching how to build and maintain relationships in Christ become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?



## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### **Objective Four: Teach *accountability*.**

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *Acts 3:19*.

What are the spiritual implications for people who have never learned to be accountable for their actions?

List several Bible stories that help to teach this concept.

What are some current societal attitudes that seem to run counter to this Biblical concept?

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum.*  
(Be prepared to report on your work.)

How can the goals for teaching accountability become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?

## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### **Objective Five: Teach *speaking the truth in love*.**

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *Ephesians 4:25*.

How is a Christian's understanding of truth different from an unbeliever's understanding of truth?

How are truth and love related?

Why is dishonesty such a spiritually deadly temptation for Christian children?

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum. (Be prepared to report on the goals you have written.)*

How can the goals for teaching to speak the truth in love become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?

## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### Objective Six: Teach *commitment*.

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *Numbers 30:2*.

How has God committed himself to resolving mankind's problem?

Make a list of ways in which people commit themselves to one another.

How can parents and teachers demonstrate commitment?

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum.*  
(Be prepared to report on the goals you have written.)

How can the goals for teaching commitment become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?

## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### **Objective Seven: Teach Christ-like *sharing*.**

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *2 Corinthians 8:9* and *1 Corinthians 10:33*.

What is the opposite of sharing?

What is the most important thing we can share with others?

Where do we find a model for sharing?

In which ways do families have difficulty sharing with each other today? (Consider physical, emotional, and spiritual opportunities for sharing.)

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum.*  
(Be prepared to report on the goals you have written.)

How can the goals for teaching Christ-like sharing become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?

## Developing a Parallel Home/School Curriculum

### **Objective Eight: Teach what it means to be *sanctified*.**

Dear Father,

Nurture each of us in your Word so that in all humility we are able to share our wisdom and understanding with one another to the end that our thinking, our speaking, and our planning here will serve to bring others closer to you and your Word. Amen.

Read *Luke 6:46-49* and *John 17:17*.

What does the word “sanctify” mean?

How does God sanctify us?

What is the difference between knowing and showing that we are Christians?

What are some specific areas we would want children show that they are sanctified in Christ?

*Write a set of goals designed to accomplish this objective of a parallel home/school curriculum.*  
(Be prepared to report on the goals you have written.)

How can the goals for teaching what it means to be sanctified become the shared goals of teachers, parents, and students alike?

## Appendix B

### Parent/Teacher Interaction

male       female                      grades taught \_\_\_\_\_

years of experience:  0-5,  6-10;  11-20;  more than 20

school size:  (over 200);  (75-199);  (0-74)

1. I believe that the home life of the children in my classroom is:

a. generally none of my concern.

b. of great concern to me.

2. In my experience parents generally believe that their home life is:

a. not the concern of teachers.

b. of great concern to teachers.

3. In your discussions with parents who talks the most? [only one answer]

a. teacher

b. parent

c. equally shared

4. The one-on-one discussions that I conduct tend to be more:

a. descriptive (describing behaviors).

b. analytical (searching for causes for behaviors).

c. prescriptive (offering concrete strategies).

5. In the one-on-one discussions that I conduct with parents the strategies we discuss tend to be:

a. proactive (preventative).

b. reactive (problem-solving).

6. In the one-on-one discussions that I conduct with parents we tend to focus on:

a. what the child should do.

b. what the parent should do.

7. In the one-on-one contacts I have with parents I offer spiritual counsel most often in the form of:

a. teaching.

b. rebuking.

c. correcting.

d. training in righteousness.

e. a mix of all four.

8. In the one-on-one contacts with parents that I conduct my concerns generally attend to:

a. academic growth.

- b. physical growth.
- c. emotional growth.
- d. spiritual growth.
- e. a mix of all four.

9. In the one-on-one contacts I have with parents I tend to more frequently encourage parents in their:

- a. church attendance.
- b. spiritual growth and renewal.

10. Do you frequently pray with parents in a one-on-one setting?

- a. yes
- b. no

11. How often do you select a Bible story or Bible text as the focus of a one-on-one meeting with parents?

- a. never
- b. seldom
- c. occasionally
- d. frequently

12. Do you consciously try to encourage spiritual growth in parents through your classroom teaching or the curriculum?

- a. yes
- b. no

13. In an average week how much time do you spend working with parents in a one-on-one situation?

- a. less than one hour
- b. between one and two hours
- c. between two and five hours
- d. more than five hours

14. When I am working one-on-one with parents I usually feel: [Select one from each set.]

- a. relaxed and at ease.
  - b. tense and uncomfortable.
- 
- a. purposeful and well-prepared.
  - b. disorganized and unfocused.
- 
- a. well-equipped for dealing with parents.
  - b. ill-equipped for dealing with parents.

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<sup>i</sup> J. P. Meyer, *Dogmatics Notes*, Vol., II, p. 164.

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- <sup>ii</sup> Joel C. Gerlach, "The Call into the Discipling Ministry," *Symposium on the Lutheran Elementary School and Evangelism*, Madison, 1987.
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>iv</sup> Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The New Testament*, Vol. II, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1923, p. 278.
- <sup>v</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, Lutheran Book Concern, Columbus, 1942, pp. 1421-1424.
- <sup>vi</sup> Joel C. Gerlach, "More About a Teacher's Call," *The Lutheran Educator*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Dec., 1969).
- <sup>vii</sup> *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS*, Commission on Inter-Church Relationships, 1970, p. 6.
- <sup>viii</sup> Larry Richards, "How the Church Can Help the Family Face the Future," Plenary Session, St. Louis Continental Congress on the Family, 1975, p. 15.
- <sup>ix</sup> Charles M. Sell, *Family Ministry*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981.
- <sup>x</sup> Steven Degner, "Encouraging Christian Education in the Home," Arizona-California Pastoral Conference, Phoenix, 1978.
- <sup>xi</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Erdmans, Grand Rapids, 1969, p. 227.
- <sup>xii</sup> Lucien E. Coleman, Jr., *Why the Church Must Teach*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1984, p. 130.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Edward W. A. Koehler, *A Christian Pedagogy*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1930.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Thomas Lickona, "How Parents and Schools Can Work Together to Raise Moral Children," *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 45, No. 8 (May, 1988).
- <sup>xv</sup> Koehler.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Author Unknown, "Luther in Our Language," *Lutheran Witness*, June 6, 1976, p. 38.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Donald Abdon, *Training and Equipping the Saints*, 1974.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Sell, p. 11.
- <sup>xix</sup> Mario Fantini and Rene Cardenas, eds., *Parenting in a Multicultural Society*, Longmans, New York, 1980.
- <sup>xx</sup> Edward Gotts and Richard Purnell, "A Review of Major Programs and Activities in Parenting," *Appalachia Education Laboratory*, Charleston, 1979.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Edward Gotts and Richard Purnell, "Evaluation of Home-school Communication Strategies," Presented at the American Education Research Association, New Orleans, April, 1986.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organizations of Schools, "A Study of Teacher Practices Regarding Parent Involvement: Results from Surveys of Teachers and Parents, Summary Report," Baltimore, 1983.
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- <sup>xxv</sup> Sari Biklan, *Teaching as an Occupation for Women: A case study of an elementary school*, Education Desgins Group, New York, 1983.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> David C. Orst, "Teacher-Parent Interactions: An Effective School-Community Environment," *The Educational Forum*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Winter, 1988).



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<sup>xxvii</sup> David H. Ost, Fay Schillings, and Maria Lagana, “Analysis of Teacher Perceptions of Training and Credentials Programs,” Auburn, Alabama: The Truman Pierce Institute (unpublished).