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The Lutheran Educator

The WELS Education Journal



**"How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good
news, who proclaim peace, who
bring good tidings, who proclaim
salvation, who say to Zion,
'Your God reigns!'"**

Isaiah 52:7

The Lutheran Educator

The education journal
of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
edited by the faculty of Martin Luther College

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The Myth of the Ivory Tower

The suggestion that colleges and universities are somehow removed from the real world is utterly absurd. The concept of the Ivory Tower with its disconnection from the real world has been with us for years, and often it is a misplaced scapegoat for whatever ails an organization. The Ivory Tower fallacy developed when universities went off into sometimes esoteric research on topics the public perceived as useless and impractical. Ivory Towers are accused of being behind the times or not up to current practice. Hence, the Ivory Tower got a bad rap for failing to train students to work in the real world.

Some WELS teachers also invoke the myth of the Ivory Tower. When it comes to teacher education critics often point the finger of responsibility at those educational theorists who are no longer in the elementary or secondary classroom. Those theorists become easy targets for what the critics see are the shortcomings in our profession. The critics castigate new ideas and methods, even if they don't have all the facts or haven't done the reading to find out why or how these ideas might revitalize teaching. It's safer to say it won't work because those people in the Ivory Tower don't know what real teaching is.

College teaching is not removed from the real world. College teachers are in daily contact with the results of our educational system. College students are not perfect, nor are they devoid of family or personal problems which affect their classroom performance. College instructors can expose students to knowledge; they can model innovative teaching techniques; they can demand deadlines and organization in student presentations; they can expose students to professional experiences; they can give students practical advice and counsel. What they can't give students are the traits many successful teachers have: the experience, the grasp of the classroom situation, the sensitive understanding of the needs of the children.

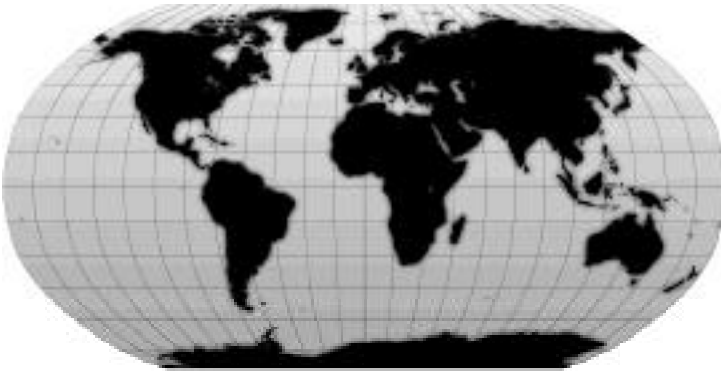
Six years ago when I first came to college teaching, a colleague asked why I was ready to "retire" to the Ivory Tower of New Ulm. I was stunned. The college teachers I know are interested in producing quality graduates who know their subject matter, have been exposed to a variety of teaching styles and methods, and are dedicated to the teaching ministry. Locking us into a philosophical Ivory Tower diminishes the task we have. I know at the MLC Ivory Tower I've used technology in my teaching, explored new teaching methods, and discussed current issues in education more often than I ever did at the elementary or secondary level.

Beware when we entreat the myth of the Ivory Tower, its presence leaves a miasmic mist over all we do in Lutheran education.

Larry Czer

Bringing a Global View to the Classroom

Earl R. Heidtke



TODAY'S TEACHER has many tools available to give students a global perspective. While teaching geography as a discrete subject may have been lost with the curriculum changes that brought us social studies, the value of having the place network to accompany the historical framework is still apparent. The current emphasis on multicultural viewpoints, travel, global business and worldwide interaction highlights the need to bring a global perspective to our WELS classrooms.

Teachers might quickly point out the shortage of time needed to present geography and the global view that comes with such a study. Some may even feel that the background that they themselves have is insufficient. Many

tools are available to bring the world into today's classrooms. Some involve technological advances now open through computers and the internet. Others are tried and true methods used by creative teachers for ages. The intent of this article is to describe some of the media and methods available for teachers to bring a truly global view into today's WELS classrooms.

Multimedia atlases have flooded the market. Those classrooms with computer access can place these tools at the disposal of the students for creating reports, browsing, and research. The ease of use allows these to be used at almost any level. The quality and depth of content also allow for elementary grade through adult use, while the graphics and sound opportunities cap-

ture the interest of all.

National Geographic has produced one of the best products, *Picture Atlas of the World*. The multimedia opportunities of this CD-ROM allow viewers to travel to the country of their choice, hear the language and the music of the land, view topographic and political maps, and view climate and population information. The collector feature allows the teacher the opportunity to place favorites into a mini-lesson. The school version is available from National Geographic for \$79.95 and is available for both Macintosh and Windows.

Microsoft has the *Encarta World Atlas* CD-ROM (\$54.95) for the Windows format. It has many similar options as the *Picture Atlas*. The family portraits available along with the animal slide show are particularly noteworthy. It also has excellent indices and outlines for the articles.

For viewing the United States, there is *National Parks of America* CD-ROM with photos by David Muench published by Multicom. The program is filled with 900 quality photos from 230 parks. Videos, although limited in size, help transport the viewer to the park. Visitor information including addresses and phone numbers, along with a park search option, helps to plan trips.

Many companies offer software for those without CD-ROM access. Typically these multidisk packages are excellent for data comparisons, while the multimedia opportunities are more limited. *US Atlas* and *World Atlas* often come packaged with computers. Both

of these products, produced by Software Toolworks, serve as quick reference points for data comparisons of countries and states.

For those classrooms still waiting for technology, or for those who would like to incorporate a letter writing lesson with a global twist, other options do exist. Since all students like to get mail, the teacher can suggest a letter writing exercise aimed at gathering travel guides from all 50 states. The Travel Industry Association of America pub-



lishes a *Listing of State and Territorial Travel Offices of the United States*. This brochure provides a comprehensive listing of state and US territorial travel offices from which vacation and travel information is available. Students can create a permanent file. Updated information can be added or pulled for student reports and presentations. Toll free numbers are often included for the impatient. Nothing can beat the Texas

travel book (available from 1-800-88-88-TEX), but you will also be pleasantly surprised by the materials from Wyoming and Nevada. If you do have the students write for information from the different states, be ready for phone calls in the middle of summer. The students will call as soon as another large envelope of documents arrives at their home address.



This author has developed a database that has been available for students at Martin Luther College. The database offers addresses for US States, Canadian provinces, some Internet addresses, and toll free numbers for smaller regions (i.e. Wisconsin Dells, Fredericksburg, or Black Hills). Search drivers for Internet can provide numerous hits for states, countries, and cities. It is quite easy to have a virtual tour of Amsterdam, for example (<http://city.net/regions>). You can even find out what the weather is (<http://www.intellicast.com>). Caution should be used as students using Internet sites can easily wander off into areas dealing

with nudity or drugs. At times these wanderings might even be quite innocent, such as viewing a site with digital art.

Returning again to non-technological teaching resources, The *Northwestern Lutheran* recently featured the letter writing of a grade school class to a truck driver. *Teaching K-8* reported on the reports that a stuffed animal sent back to his classroom as it traveled around the world. Pen pals across the world can provide a global perspective, an exchange of culture and an opportunity to witness. The travel section of any weekend newspaper can provide the opportunity to visit other lands. Discovery Channel often takes students on similar field trips.

Your state may have its own Alliance for Geographic Education. Minnesota's Alliance publishes *The Geography Connection* a resource of geography teaching ideas and aids. They also published "101 Ideas for National Geography Awareness Week."

One last review of one of the newest CD-ROM offers will close this listing of teaching aids. National Geographic has just published the entire 108 years of its magazine on thirty CDs. The power of



this resource lies in the search option. Type in the topic of your choice and the computer does a search for all articles on your topic. A color printer allows you to print out the graphics, or simply view them on the screen. The best part is the \$199 suggested retail price.

No access to CD-ROM? Rummage sales and library book sales are always a great place to pick up *National Geographic Magazines*. Stockpile them and have the students cut and paste the pictures into their reports.

Whatever technology is available to you, provide your students with a geographic perspective. God's creation is so vast, so wonderful. Help today's student become aware of the world into which God has placed him.

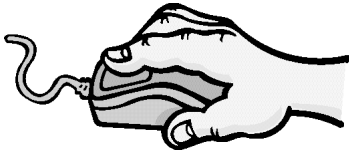
Source list of products reviewed in this article

Encarta

Microsoft
One Microsoft Way
Redmond, WA 98052
(800)426-9400

Picture Atlas of the World, The Complete National Geographic

National Geographic
P.O. Box 98019
Washington, DC 20090
(800) 368-2728



*A Listing of State and Territorial
Travel Industry Association of America*
1100 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20005-3934
(202) 408-8422

National Parks of America
Multicom Publishing
1100 Olive Way, Suite 1250
Seattle, WA 98101
(800) 850-7272

US Atlas, World Atlas
The Software Toolworks
60 Leveroni Court
Novato, CA 94949
(415) 883-3000

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Making a Referral for Children With Special Needs

John E. Meyer

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES faced by teachers, public and parochial, is to find strategies that will meet the needs of all students within a classroom. Because God has created each person differently, no two children will learn in exactly the same way. In every classroom there are children who seem to learn easily and there are those who need extra help. Sometimes the classroom teacher may find that a particular student has extraordinary difficulty making progress despite the teacher's use of a variety of teaching strategies. The teacher may fear that the student is falling further behind his or her peers.

In such a situation, the teacher will often make a referral to the public school for special testing to see if the difficulty the student is having is caused by a disability. The goal of such referral is to identify the child's needs so that appropriate strategies can be employed to help the student achieve to the best of his God-given ability. Many teachers within the WELS have received little or no training in the steps that should be taken when a disability is suspected and a referral needs to be made. This article serves as a guide to teachers when making a referral. The actual process will be similar in each state but terms may vary.

Before a referral is made, every other avenue of help should be explored. Parents and principal should be made

aware early on of a teacher's concern regarding the progress of a child. Warning signs such as failing grades, disinterest, or misbehavior will tell a teacher that the student's needs in the classroom are not being met. Together with the parents and principal a plan of individual assistance should be made. Extra practice at home or school can be initiated. Modifications in the style of teaching may also be employed. If these strategies do not seem to be helping and general patterns seem to be emerging as to the child's difficulties, the teacher in consultation with the parent may make a referral to the public school for assistance in identifying the problem so that appropriate strategies may be employed.

To initiate the assessment the classroom teacher should contact the principal at the local public school so that he or she is aware of the request. The public school principal will help you direct your request to the appropriate individual with whom you can explain the areas of concern you have for the student. At this point a parent's written permission will need before assessment can begin.

Once permission is granted, the public school will set up a Multidisciplinary team (M-team). The M-team is made up of public school professionals who are specialized in the areas that the student needs to be tested. A school psycholo-

gist or qualified special education teacher may be asked to administer an individual intelligence test, achievement test, or an evaluation in social skills. These experts may also wish to observe the student interacting with the teacher and with peers within the classroom setting. A social worker may be asked to gather information regarding the child's social and developmental history. If a potential need exists for speech, occupational, or physical therapy, another component is added to the assessment, and professionals in those areas complete assessments as well. Although the classroom teacher is not a part of the M-team, the M-team will rely heavily on the experience and observations of the classroom teacher.

When the assessments have been completed, the M-team, together with the parents and classroom teacher, meet to discuss their findings and make several decisions. They first determine if the student does indeed have a disability which is hindering his progress. If it is determined that a disability as defined by law does not exist, the M-team members will give parents and teachers strategies to maximize the student's strengths so that optimal learning will occur.

If it is determined that a disability for which the student is eligible by law to receive services does in fact exist, the M-team will suggest a program of instruction appropriate for that child. School districts are required by law to offer parents a "Free Appropriate Public Education" (FAPE) to meet the student's needs. In Wisconsin this pro-

posal will assume that the child will enroll as a full-time student in the local public school. This does not mean, however, that a student must be enrolled in the public school in order to receive services. If the parent in consultation with the classroom teacher and principal feels that his child can be served within the parochial school and does not require help under FAPE, the parent may refuse such an offer without fear that the child will not then receive the help from the local public school that he needs.

In Wisconsin, if the parent refuses the offer of a FAPE, the M-team is required to make the offer of a "Genuine Opportunity for Equitable Participation" (GOFEP). In essence, the only difference between a FAPE and a GOFEP is that an offer under GOFEP may require that the district arrange transportation to a neutral site to provide the special services required by the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Most states have similar provisions in place. In June 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public school teachers can be sent to parochial schools to provide remedial education. This ruling only applies to programs which use federal funds. At the time this article was written, it could not be determined how this ruling would affect students receiving instruction for a disability.

If a parent decides to enlist the services offered by the M-team, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be written for the student. The IEP is the document that outlines the present

level of functioning, all goals that parents and teachers have for the student, and the special education services the student is to receive to achieve those goals. The goals will include annual goals and measurable short term objectives. Members of the M-team and a parent will sign the IEP. The IEP must be reviewed and adjusted at least once each year. A three-year reevaluation is conducted by an M-team in order to determine if the student's needs have changed.

Two laws concerning special education to which one often hears reference are Section 504 and Public Law 94-142 or IDEA. Section 504 is from the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is a civil rights law that prevents discrimination against all individuals with disabilities in programs that receive federal funds. It ensures students with disabilities equal opportunity for participation in the full range of school activities.

P.L. 94-142 (now called IDEA) was passed by Congress in 1975. It set the federal guidelines which outline the entire foundation on which current special education practices occur. Many of the ideas outlined in this article are a result of P.L. 94-142. Categories of disabilities that receive help, FACE, IEP, and rights of parents to due process are all a part of this law.

There are some important safeguards given to parents under P.L. 94-142 (IDEA). Parents must be given written notice and schools must receive written permission from the parent prior to initiation of assessment or changes in the identification of a disability or educa-

tional placement of the child. Parents are also allowed to participate actively in the formation and review of the IEP. Parents have the right to review the educational records regarding their child's services under IDEA. After a parental request, a school district must provide information on where the parent can obtain an independent evaluation. If parents disagree with the school's findings, they may request a hearing in order to ensure their rights of due process.

The process of referral can seem a daunting one with all the procedures and acronyms. You might wish to keep this article handy so that when the need arises, you can review the procedure and feel confident in the process of referral. Since we are committed to helping our students grow to the best of their abilities, we glorify our God when concern leads us to make a formal assessment of our students. God has given us a means by which the government can help us to that. Let's not be afraid to use those agencies when the need warrants it.

Selected Resources

Friend, Marylin, and Bursuck, William.

Including Students With Special Needs: A Practical Guide for Classroom Teachers Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1996.

Silvers, Jim. "Memo on DPI Bulletin No. 92-7 regarding special education services for children enrolled in private schools." 1993.

John Meyer teaches at Zion Lutheran School, Hartland, Wisconsin.

A Survey Regarding Teacher Graduates of Martin Luther College

John R. Isch

MUCH IS MADE in education today regarding accountability.

Schools are to be accountable to the public and to their students for the education they provide. Accountability in education is a tricky subject because education is a complicated process, affected by many factors. There is also a special difference in Christian education, particularly an education which prepares teaching ministers for the church.

The Lord of the church, in a most loving and accurate manner, makes the best assessment of how well Martin Luther College fulfills its mission to prepare qualified teachers for the elementary and secondary schools of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. That same Lord continues to bless the less-than-perfect efforts of the college.

MLC feels a strong obligation continually to assess its work of training men and women for the ministry of the synod. As part of this assessment the college conducted a constituency survey of the graduates of the Studies in Educational Ministry. (The college had previously conducted a survey which

polled graduates directly on their education.)

Study design

In a constituency survey such as this the college sought feedback from those who are served by the graduates of the educational ministry program. The constituency survey was conducted in the following manner. The Institutional Assessment Committee of the college solicited suggestions and ideas from a number of persons including principals serving in schools which receive graduates, parish pastors, administrators of synodical agencies which have oversight of our schools, and college personnel who supervise student teachers or who have expertise in some particular area of teacher education. The committee also consulted rating scales used in the student teaching program, a survey of constituency done by DMLC in 1978, and literature on teacher assessment. This input was important in designing a valid questionnaire.

The committee then compiled a list of all educational ministry program graduates for the years 1994, 1995, and 1996 who were still teaching in a WELS

Note: Throughout this report are written comments taken from the surveys. The comments were in response to these openended questions: "Are there congregational responsibilities which this teacher finds particularly difficult?" "What particular blessing has this teacher brought to the congregation or classroom?" "Do you have any other observations or comments about the recent graduate which relate to his or her preparation for the ministry?"

elementary or secondary school. In mid-March 1997 a letter was sent by the Vice-president for Studies in Educational Ministry to the principals of the schools in which these teachers were serving. The letter informed the principals that they would be receiving a questionnaire from the college. A packet was sent to the principals in early April containing three questionnaires



He hit the ground running here, there is a lot of ground to cover on a day-to-day basis. Teacher–Principal–meetings–Father–etc. I sure hope he knows how much we need and appreciate him.

[layperson]



for each new (graduates of 1994, 95, 96) teacher who was in the school. One questionnaire was to be completed by the principal, one by the pastor, and one by a layperson selected by the principal. In addition to demographic information (on the principal's questionnaire), the survey asked the recipient to consider certain responsibilities, attitudes, and activities associated with the teaching ministry and to rate the new teacher on how well he or she met these responsibilities at the beginning of his or her service and how that teacher is currently meeting his or her responsibilities.

The forms received by the pastor, the

layperson, and the principal were identical except that the principal's form also included factual questions about the teacher and a rating of the amount of mentoring needed by the teacher. There were also three open-ended questions for all respondents.

The database of WELS teachers was used to compile a list of the 1994 graduates of Dr. Martin Luther College and the 1995 and 1996 graduates of the educational ministry program of Martin Luther College. This compilation showed that 78% of the graduates of the years 1994-96 were still teaching in April 1997. The college received completed questionnaires (at least one) describing 79% of those currently teaching or 62% of the graduates of those years.

Each teacher could have three questionnaires returned. If the teacher was in an elementary school, the principal received three forms. One he completed, one he gave to the pastor, and one to a knowledgeable layperson. If the teacher was in a high school, the principal also received three questionnaires: one he completed, one he gave to the chairperson of the department in which the new teacher taught, and one he gave to a knowledgeable lay person.

The college believes the return rate (79%) for a survey such as this was excellent. Returns came in through June, often with a note apologizing for the delay. A number of respondents wrote of their appreciation that the college sought their opinions regarding the graduates of the college. Those who returned the survey apparently took it

seriously and accepted the purpose for which the college sent it out. This was attested to by the many written responses, some up to a page in length.

Although the committee felt the laypersons might have been the least familiar with the teacher's ministry, this apparently was not the case. The return rate for the laity was the smallest, but those who did return the form often gave their circumstance (parent of a child in the room, school board member, teacher aid) to attest to their background and knowledge in completing the survey.

Because of the high response rate and these indications that the questionnaires were completed conscientiously, the college believes the results describe accurately the views of the constituency of the college to the questions asked in the survey.

Demographics

The principal, either elementary or secondary, provided the following information: years of service at the school, age, grade level currently teaching, number of grades, number of students in classrooms, whether housing was furnished, the annual salary (excluding benefits), marital status, number and ages of children, whether the congregation/association provided money for continuing education, whether the teacher has a 12-month call, and the number of additional responsibilities a teacher has.

The results of the survey indicated that male teachers in comparison to females have more responsibilities (e.g., choir director, coaching, VBS) and that

elementary school teachers overall have more of these responsibilities than secondary school teachers. The large number of students per teacher in high school reflects departmentalized teaching and multiple sections. Our gradu-

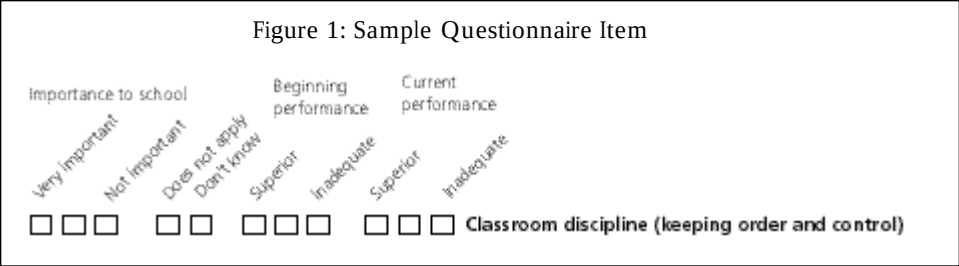


They are both (husband and wife) excellent role models individually for the children and as a couple they are a great example of a Christ-centered, loving, caring couple. He has encouraged and seems to have succeeded in retaining a large number of students to return for seventh grade. The students seem to be revitalized and focused in his classroom and outside of it. He is doing an excellent job this year. We pray that he continues to grow in his skills.

[layperson]



ates are distributed across grades with the majority in grades kindergarten through six, not a surprising observation. Housing (rather than a housing allowance) appears to be provided for recent graduates in about half the cases and the proportion providing housing is comparable by gender and level of teaching. Nearly all (90%) teachers have 12-month calls. It seems likely, particu-



larly in high schools, that those who do not are serving in some temporary assignment capacity such as a tutor or resident assistant in a preparatory school.

Slightly less than one out of three Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP) graduates is currently teaching in a high school. Physical education and English graduates of STEP are particularly unlikely to be in high schools. Overall, half the teachers in our survey who are now in high schools are graduates of the four-year elementary program.

The major portion of the questionnaire consisted of 39 statements which could be rated in four different ways (see illustration above).

Classroom performance

The first section contained nine statements regarding the teacher's skills in teaching and classroom management.

Of the three groups the pastors were most likely to say they were unfamiliar with the classroom capabilities of the beginning teacher. Their "don't know" rates ranged from 11% to 48% on the items in this section.

The survey asked the respondents to rate how important it was for a teacher in their school to have a particular skill

or characteristic. Each item was rated on a three-point scale of 1 (very important), 2, and 3 (not important).

All but two of the items in this section were rated "very important." For all three groups of respondents classroom management (lesson plans, record keeping), classroom discipline (keeping order and control), telling the Bible story, teaching catechism lessons, making applications in religion lessons, teaching language arts, and teaching reading were viewed as very important skills for teachers.

The two skills on teaching physical education either with an emphasis on physical development and skill teaching or with a focus on organized sports were rated in the middle (between "very important" and "not important") by all three groups. It appears the constituency generally does not see a difference between the two types of physical education programs, nor did the constituency strongly value one over the other.



If I could, I would clone her.
[principal]



		Ratings of Beginning Teachers		
	Item	Import	Begin	Curr
Classroom	1. Classroom management (lesson plans, record keeping)	1.2	1.9	1.6
	2. Classroom discipline (keeping order and control)	1.1	2.0	1.7
	3. Telling the Bible story in a religion class	1.1	1.7	1.5
	4. Teaching catechism lessons	1.2	1.8	1.6
	5. Making applications in religion lessons	1.1	1.8	1.6
	6. Teaching language arts (other than reading)	1.3	1.9	1.7
	7. Teaching reading	1.2	1.8	1.7
	8. Physical education instruction with a focus on physical development and skill teaching	1.8	1.8	1.7
	9. Physical education instruction with a focus on organized sports	2.0	1.8	1.7
Family	1. Spouse's attitude toward the ministry	1.2	1.4	1.4
	2. The teacher's family as a model of family life	1.2	1.5	1.5
	3. Relating to parents	1.1	1.9	1.7
Technology	4. Communicating with parents	1.1	1.9	1.7
	1. The teacher's personal skill in word processing.	1.9	1.9	1.8
	2. The teacher's personal skill in internet access.	2.3	2.2	2.0
	3. The teacher's personal skill in database work.	2.4	2.2	2.1
	4. The teacher's personal skill in spreadsheet use.	2.4	2.2	2.1
	5. The teacher's skill in using computers in instruction.	1.8	2.2	2.1
	6. The teacher's understanding of the impact of technology on education.	1.7	2.0	1.9
	1. Knowledge of the Bible	1.1	1.8	1.7
	2. Use of law and gospel	1.0	1.8	1.7
Personal	3. An understanding of the ministry as a service to others	1.1	1.7	1.6
	4. Use of the means of grace (church attendance, communion)	1.0	1.3	1.2
	5. A joyful attitude toward the ministry	1.1	1.6	1.5
	6. Attitude toward full-time service	1.2	1.6	1.5
	7. Understanding of the confessional teachings of the church	1.2	1.6	1.6
	8. Integration into congregational life	1.3	1.8	1.6
	9. Personal decorum	1.4	1.6	1.5
	10. Personal grooming	1.5	1.5	1.5
	11. Oral communication skills	1.3	1.7	1.6
	12. Written communication skills (including mechanics of written communication)	1.4	1.8	1.7
	13. Interpersonal skills (outgoing, takes initiative in meeting people, parent-teacher consultations)	1.3	1.8	1.7
	14. Understanding of the relationship of the school to the congregation	1.3	1.8	1.6
	15. Conflict resolution skills (resolves disagreements with parents, staff, students)	1.2	2.0	1.8
	16. Fulfills responsibilities	1.1	1.6	1.5
	17. Piano keyboard skills	1.9	2.0	1.9
	18. Penmanship	1.9	1.7	1.7
	19. Time management	1.4	1.9	1.8
	20. Ability to relate to persons of a different culture	1.7	1.8	1.7
	Importance 1=very important; 3= not important			
	Performance (beginning/current) 1=superior; 3=inadequate			

The respondents were to assess the classroom skills of the teacher both when he or she began teaching and currently. The beginning teacher had from one to three years of experience at the time of this survey. The differences in response rates on the beginning and current assessment were not great, although some respondents were not able to rate beginning performance.



*Has difficulty communicating
with parents and other adults,
maintaining order in the
classroom and fulfilling basic
responsibilities.*

[pastor]



The survey again used a three-point scale from 1 (superior) to 3 (inadequate) with an undefined middle.

In general, the principals rated beginning teachers lower, followed by the pastors and the laypersons. The differences among the three groups of respondents were, however, small.

The constituency had the greatest concerns for beginning teachers in their ability to maintain discipline and their ability to teach language arts (other than reading). The respondents were most satisfied with the current ability of recent graduates to tell a Bible story and to make an application in religion classes. The differences among the various classroom skills were small,

however. The general pattern was that rankings across all items were higher for current performance than for beginning performance.

In the area of discipline, women were rated lower than men by all three groups of respondents. This gender difference was independent of grade level. Overall, one out of five female beginning teachers and one out of six of male beginning teachers were rated inadequate on classroom discipline by their principals. On the other side, one out of five male teachers and one out of seven women teachers were rated superior on classroom discipline. Nearly all teachers are better now at classroom discipline than they were as beginners. Only a small fraction of the men and women are currently assessed as inadequate, while one-third of the men and one-fourth of the women are judged superior.

The beginning teacher's skill in maintaining discipline improved considerably with experience. Their skill in teaching language arts other than reading (the second lowest ranked item) did not show the same amount of change. The improvement change was no more than one-tenth on the three-point scale and the current skill of teachers in this area, while improved, was the lowest ranked current skill. There is also a considerable gender effect with men receiving more "inadequate" and fewer "superior" ratings than women across all grade levels.

The item ranked highest as a beginning and current teaching skill is the ability to tell a Bible story in a religion

class. This rating may be the traditional “religious halo effect” which surveys such as this show on any item dealing with religion. But our graduates should receive their due: They can tell a Bible story and they can apply the lesson to the lives of children.

Family life and relating to families

This section contained four items, two relating to the teacher’s own family and two assessing the teacher’s ability to relate to and communicate with other families.

A substantial proportion of beginning teachers were or are single. Thus items one and two (the spouse’s attitude toward the ministry, and the teacher’s family as a model of family life) in this section received a large number of “does not apply” responses. Regardless of whether the beginning teacher was single, all three groups of respondents (principals, pastors, laypersons) saw the four items as important in their congregation.

There were no changes in the average ratings for beginning to current performance on the items dealing with the spouse’s attitude or the teacher’s family as a model. Principals, pastors, and laypersons were in agreement that the beginning ratings and current ratings did not change. It is possible that changes in these two items are not evident over one to three years of this study. In addition, the ratings for these two items are quite high and thus increased ratings may be unlikely.

The assessment for beginning teachers on their ability to relate to and com-

municate with parents (the third and fourth items) are some of the lowest on this survey, both as a beginning as well as a current ability. Principals again tended to rate new teachers lower on these items than did pastors or laypersons. The ratings were different by gen-



*He's the most Christian man I've
ever met. He truly loves the
work and the children.*

[layperson]



der but it was actually a marital status difference. If the teacher (male or female) were married, his or her rating, both at the beginning of the person’s ministry and currently, was substantially higher than the single teacher.

Two explanations are possible. First, when new teachers get married, their family life becomes a better model for the congregation and these married persons also improve their skills of relating to and communicating with parents. Experience and marriage dramatically increase a teacher’s likelihood that his or her ratings will move from inadequate to superior. A second explanation is that these differences are really perceptions on the part of the respondents. In this scenario, the respondents assumed a better ability to relate to and communicate with parents on the part of married teachers. Thus, assumptions determined the rankings.

Technology ratings

The college included a section on technology at the encouragement of a number of persons who reviewed the draft of the survey. The six items dealt with specific applications of the computer (word processing, internet access, database, spreadsheet), the use of computers in instruction, and the general understanding of the impact of technology on education.

The items in this section received a relatively high number of “don’t know” responses or “does not apply.” Even the principals, the most knowledgeable of the three groups of respondents, often indicated that they were unfamiliar with the beginning teacher’s ability to use computer technology. On some of the items, one-third of the principals did not know and better than half of the pastors and laypersons also said they did not know. A smaller, but still significant, proportion of respondents said the technology items did not apply to their school or this particular classroom. This could indicate that either the classroom or the school did not have the technology, thus a teacher’s skill was judged not relevant to the situation.

The pastors, principals, and laypersons tended to be in agreement in their ratings on the importance of a particular computer skill and in their assessment of the beginning and current performance of our graduates. They saw as most important a teacher’s skill in using computers in instruction and the teacher’s understanding of the impact of technology on education. Yet, even the

highest rating (impact of technology on education) indicates that a large proportion of respondents ranked the importance of this knowledge in the middle (neither “very important” nor “not important”). The specific skills (internet, database, spreadsheet)



Both he and his wife have brought a high level of enthusiasm to the school and church. Their energy and encouragement have been a source of motivation for the children and parents.

[layperson]



received lower importance ratings with averages tending toward “not important” on the three-point scale. Incidentally, male graduates generally received higher assessments on all items than did female graduates.

Our graduates are judged as “middling” in their current performance in all of the sampled areas of technology and tending toward inadequate in their beginning performance in internet access, database work, spreadsheet use, and using computers in instruction. But even in this perceived “inadequacy” in beginning performance, it is hard to conclude that our constituency sees this as a defect given their rather lower estimate of the importance of these skills.

The survey results do not indicate

that there is a compelling demand on the part of the constituency (at least those asked to respond to this survey) for substantial additional computer skills in educational ministry graduates. Nor does it appear there is general dissatisfaction with the skills recent gradu-



People skills cannot be taught in the classroom, and no more academic time should be sacrificed to programs like Student Teaching and EFE. My advice would be that the College should encourage the students to get out of their rooms and away from their computers during free time. Encourage them to be people and not just instructors.

[pastor]



ates have. Certainly the constituency may be wrong about the need for technological competence of graduates. It could also be that the demand for technologically competent teachers has not caught up with the supply. It is also possible that elementary schools are not as technologically outfitted as some may believe.

Personal knowledge and skills

In the final set of rating items the respondents were asked to rate the new

teacher's personal knowledge and skills. This was a smorgasbord including biblical knowledge, personal grooming, and piano keyboard skills. Many of the items in this set received a high response rate because the items were applicable to the teacher, classroom, and school; and the respondents knew the graduates well enough to assess them on these characteristics.

The only two items which were judged as "not applicable" by more than two percent of the respondents were piano keyboard skills and the ability to relate to persons of a different culture. The principal was much less likely to claim he had not observed the skills. In some areas (personal grooming, a joyful attitude toward the ministry, personal decorum, fulfills responsibilities) all groups assessing the graduates believed these characteristics applied to their situation and they had observed the graduates for these characteristics.

Not only were the characteristics in this section observed and applicable, all but two had ratings in the "very important" category.

Four items were rated less than "very important": personal grooming, ability to relate to persons of a different culture, penmanship, and piano keyboard skills. The reader should keep in mind, however, that these items were not rated as unimportant; they were, in fact rated toward the important end of the scale, but less important than the others in the list. The three groups of respondents tended to be in substantial agreement in these importance ratings.

Principals and laypersons were more in agreement while pastors tended to rate some items (personal grooming, personal decorum, integration into congregation, interpersonal skills) higher, and some items (written communication skills) lower in importance.

When all the items in this section are ranked by the performance assessment (beginning and current), some patterns are evident. The item receiving the highest assessment (use of the means of grace) has the beginning and current evaluation in first and second place. That would suggest that the respondents saw the graduates' use of the means of grace very satisfactorily both when they began their ministry and currently. Personal grooming, a joyful attitude toward the ministry, personal decorum, and attitudes toward full-time service are other personal characteristics in which beginning and current performance are in the upper third of the ranking. There appears not to be a substantial change in these characteristics during the first years of a teacher's ministry.

In the middle third of this performance ranking are current or beginning observations on the graduates' knowledge of the Bible, their understanding of the ministry as a service to others, their understanding of the confessional teachings of the church, their ability to meet their responsibilities, their penmanship, their oral and written communication skills, and their ability to integrate themselves into congregational life. In the lower third are such characteristics as understanding

the relationship of the school to congregation, time management, ability to relate to persons of another culture, use of Law and gospel, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, and piano keyboard skills. Improvement changes were shown in a few areas:



For this I interviewed her class and got the following responses: (answering the question: "What do you like most about your teacher?")

1. "She's nice" (3x)
2. "She teaches classes really good."
3. "She's smart."
4. "She makes us do a lot of work."
5. "She gives us fun stuff."
6. "She yells at Jake."
7. "She does a lot of art stuff with us."

[pastor]



integration into congregational life, interpersonal skills, an understanding of the ministry as service, meeting responsibilities, and understanding the relationship of school to congregation.

There were a few consistent gender differences in the ratings in this section. Men tended to be rated higher, both in beginning and in current ser-

vice, in their use of Law and gospel, in their understanding of the ministry as a service to others, in their use of the means of grace, the joyful attitude toward ministry that they portray, in their attitude toward the full-time feature of the ministry, in their integration into the life of the congregation, and in their conflict resolution skills. Women received higher ratings in their piano keyboard skills, in their penmanship, and in time management. We do not have a good answer as to why men receive (slightly) higher ratings in the items dealing specifically with the ministry. Pastors and laypersons particularly rated men consistently higher.

Mentoring

The final item on the principal's questionnaire asked him about the extent to which the beginning teacher needed mentoring or supervision during the first six months. The scale ranged from "very much" to "none." The three parts to this item were the extent to which this teacher needed mentoring, the extent to which he (the principal) provided it, and the extent to which someone else provided the mentoring.

The principal, not surprisingly, provided more mentoring than other persons. Only one out of six of the beginning teachers need less than "some" mentoring and one out of three needed more than "some." Principals saw primary grade teachers as needing more mentoring than intermediate or upper grade teachers. This perception was not strongly related to gender, however,

because male and female beginning teachers were rated comparably in their need for mentoring.

Not surprising the degree to which a principal perceived the teacher needing mentoring was related to the ratings the teacher received in the assessment portion of the survey. The teacher's ratings on the classroom performance group, the family life and relating to



She is an excellent teacher and a better disciplinarian than she thinks she is. That is a tremendous blessing in itself. She is our most important organist. That, too, is a blessing. She treats people, parents included with respect even when there is a little problem or disagreement. She is wonderfully consistent and even-handed in the classroom.

[pastor]



families group, and the personal knowledge and skill group correlated moderately with the principal's rating of that teacher's need for mentoring; the lower the performance assessment the greater the perceived need for mentoring. The ratings in the technology group were unrelated to a perceived need for mentoring.

A satisfaction index

The survey was based on the assumption that the persons who were asked to rate graduates responded thoughtfully to the two key aspects of each item: the importance of the skill or knowledge in the particular school and classroom and



Probably could use some work on classroom discipline. He lets a little too much go on and then is easily frustrated. Also, sometimes is too rigid in dealing with other faculty members concerning school issues.
[department chair]



how well the graduate demonstrated that skill or knowledge. If a respondent understood an item to be very important in the school or classroom, he or she would also want superior performance; anything less would produce a feeling of dissatisfaction. The reverse was also assumed: a respondent who judged an item not important would accept a less-than-superior performance by a beginning teacher. There are logical flaws in this reasoning, but it does have the advantage of reducing the data to a simple “Are you satisfied with the graduates?”

An analysis was made on each of the 39 items and a percentage of respondents who were “dissatisfied” according to the above definition was calculated.

The 39 items on the survey were then ranked. When the data was boiled down, the constituents seemed to be saying this:

“We believe MLC teacher graduates could be better in organizing and managing their classrooms and in keeping order and control with the students. They are doing well in telling the Bible story and making applications in religion lessons, but because these are such important subjects, we think they could do an even better job. We also think they need to teach catechism lessons, reading lessons, and language arts lessons better.

“The graduates of our college, particularly some, seem to have difficulty relating to and communicating with parents.

“We believe they could have a better knowledge of the Bible and we wish they could better apply the Law and gospel in their ministry. We would also encourage the graduates of MLC to understand better the ministry as a service to others. We feel particularly concerned about these items because they are so important in the ministry.

“Finally, we believe the graduates of our college need to be more adept in their ability to resolve disagreements with parents, staff, and students. On the other hand, we are generally satisfied with the graduates in teaching physical education, regardless of a physical development or an organized sports focus. We feel the spouses of

our teachers have a good attitude toward the ministry.

"We are satisfied with the specific computer skills of our graduates, partly because we don't see these skills as important as other things the graduates need to know.

"We believe the graduates make use of the means of grace in our congregation. We believe their personal decorum and grooming are satisfactory. And we are satisfied with their piano keyboard skills, and, frankly, their penmanship is good enough for us also."

The reader and the college, of course, are free to disagree with what the constituency believes to be important and their assessment of graduates in terms of what the respondents believe to be important. But the results of the survey suggest the summary above.

High school responses

The database for beginning high school teachers was one-tenth the size of the elementary school teacher database. There were also a number of questions which were characterized as "not applicable" to high school teachers. These included the classroom performance skills in telling a Bible story, teaching catechism lessons, making applications in religion lessons, teaching language arts other than reading, teaching reading, and physical education instruction with either a skill or organized sports focus. In the family life group, the spouses' attitude toward the ministry and the teacher's family as a model also were judged as not apply-

ing by the majority of the respondents, probably because two out of three of the beginning high school instructors were unmarried. In the technology group, half or more of the respondents



In general, I have seen single, female teachers struggle with active boys. I am not sure what you can do to better prepare the teacher; maybe, just a little more recognition of the unique challenges that active boys present.

[layperson]



did not know the degree of skill of the beginning teacher in word processing, internet access, database work, spreadsheet use, or using computers in instruction. Perhaps the technology skills of high school teachers are less likely to be observed and assessed either because high school teachers are less visible to their colleagues—at least when they use a computer—or beginning high school teachers don't use computers much.

In the section on personal knowledge and skills the following were judged as "not applicable" or "do not know" by a majority of the respondents: understanding the relationship of the school to the congregation, piano keyboard skills, penmanship, and integration in congregational life.

Classroom management and discipline were rated as very important skills for high school teachers. Teacher performance ratings at the beginning of their ministry were slightly above the midpoint and currently the ratings are closer to “superior.” The two skills of relating to and communicating with families were rated by the respondents as “very important.”

Some of the specific skills in the technology section had relatively high ratings for importance (word processing, use of computers in teaching, understanding the impact of technology). Others (internet, word processing, database, spreadsheet) were rated in the middle or lower. However, as noted above, more than half the respondents did not rate new secondary school teachers on the technology items because the respondents either did not know the teacher’s skill or they believed the skill did not apply to the teacher or the school.

The four items which were specific to understanding and applying Scripture were rated by the respondents as very important for a teacher’s ministry. In two of these areas, Bible knowledge and the use of Law and gospel, the principals, laypersons, and department chairs assess graduates slightly above the middle of the scale. Given the importance of these items, the constituency felt the graduates could be better. On the other two items, personal use of the means of grace and understanding the confessional teachings of the church, the constituency seemed more satisfied. Although they also

ranked these two as very important, they gave higher assessments to graduates in these practices and knowledge.

The service nature of the ministry gave mixed results. The constituency



I happened to see this teacher in town this evening crossing the street with his wife. I thought, if my son, who was just accepted in MLC’s teacher track, is as well prepared and excited about teaching and spreading God’s word as this teacher is, I could not possibly be happier.

[layperson]



felt graduates could be better in oral and written communication, their interpersonal skills could be improved, as well as their attitude toward the service nature of the ministry. Graduates’ ability in conflict resolution was ranked quite low, particularly in comparison to the high importance given to this skill by the respondents. Time management, fulfilling responsibilities, and an understanding of the full-time service received better ratings. The respondents were satisfied with graduates’ ability to relate to persons of a different culture, and with their personal decorum and grooming.

The item which received the highest rating in importance was a joyful atti-

tude toward the ministry. Graduates received a very good assessment on this item. It would appear that the constituency in high schools wants and needs a graduate who in his or her attitude and actions shows excitement and enthusiasm to the high school students. It also appears the constituency believes they are getting, for the most part, such a graduate.

About a third of our graduates needed more than "some" mentoring when they entered high school teaching, half needed some, and the remainder needed less. Whatever mentoring was needed was generally provided by someone other than the principal, perhaps the department chair.

Summary

Most of the assessments in this survey fell in the middle, neither very high nor very low. The reader could conclude that average best characterizes graduates of the teacher program of MLC.

Averages, however, do not describe individuals. Many individual graduates were rated in the middle. The college would not dispute that, with or without this assessment. The graduates of the Studies in Educational Ministry are not intended to be finished products. They are beginners, equipped with the basic skills on which to improve and become better teachers. In fact, this assessment shows that improvement. The current performance of our graduates, that is, their assessment after one, two, or three years of teaching, is consistently better than when they began. The middle is both a practical and appropriate

point from which to grow.

An average also tends to ignore the ends of the scale. It is clear from the assessments and the written comments



There is only one thing and I do not quite know how to express it. She is so willing to do whatever is asked of her, even in an area where she has never worked before that I fear a little that she could be taken advantage of. This certainly is not a criticism. Nor do I have an easy answer as to how to train a student to have that enthusiastic love for the ministry and yet help them deal with (requests that may be unreasonable).

[pastor]



that there are recent graduates who are truly incredible teachers, teachers so good that they may have even surprised the observers. It is hard to give a number but perhaps about 20% are rated consistently at the top by the constituency. These teachers bring to their ministry a joy and a zeal which comes in peculiar measure from those who are young and talented. Their God-given abilities have revitalized schools and classrooms and have given heart to discouraged veteran teachers. They apparently are so good that the college is at a loss to say what the college did, if anything.

An average also hides a smaller number at the other end. There appear to be a relatively small number of graduates whose qualifications for the ministry are questionable. They may be in a situation where their positive qualities



In this individual I see what I fear has become a trend with some of our graduates in the last several years—they want to be teachers and no more. There is little or no understanding of the concept of full-time ministry. Perhaps this is attributed in part to his spouse who seems to care less about involvement in the congregation.

[pastor]



are not evident, yet the comments of the constituency suggest attitudes and skills which are wanting, whatever the circumstances. Accepting the assessment of the constituency on these few, a case could be made that they were not qualified for the teaching ministry when they left this institution. In some cases it appears that the teacher lacked a particular skill, such as discipline, but the written comments also indicate that some display an unfortunate attitude toward those whom they serve.

On the other hand, our analysis and the written responses on the returned

forms raise questions about comments by some observers of beginning teachers that MLC teacher graduates are not prepared for their ministry. First, the generally positive assessments given them by persons who work with them do not support the belief that a large number of teachers are in trouble from day one. The small number who do receive unfavorable assessments receive them not because they are naive or unacquainted with the real world. When they do get into trouble, it is because they can't communicate with parents or because they have an arrogant attitude toward the congregation. As one pastor noted, our graduates don't need more courses, they need to get out and meet people.

Martin Luther College obtained a wealth of data on its teacher education graduates from this constituency survey. The data in the survey are being used in the current self-study the college is undertaking. The college sincerely appreciates the work of those who contributed to the design of the survey and to those who took the time to conscientiously complete the survey. You talked and the college listened. Now, under God's guidance and blessing the college will seek to carry out better the purpose of its educational ministry program to prepare qualified graduates for the elementary and secondary schools of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

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Teachers are from Mars, Parents are from Venus

Ramona Czer

DEAR TEACHERS,

Sometimes it feels like we are from different planets, doesn't it? If I call you to share something that's bothering my daughter, right away you assume I want a solution, that I want to make you change your policies or teaching methods. You mention my daughter isn't "working up to her potential," and right away I feel criticized for raising a lazy child.

Communication, that vital and agonizingly difficult set of skills, seems to be at the heart of our feeling "alienated" from each other so often. So what do we do about it? Shrug our shoulders and say, "Teachers and parents are always going to have different perspectives—it's a fact of life"? Or do we try to analyze those differences and work at understanding and listening, really listening, to each other better?

Awhile ago my husband Larry and I had the challenge and fun of giving a workshop together for the first time—on the daunting topic of "Communication in Marriage." When first given the assignment, we hung up the phone,

stared at each other and wailed, "What have we done?" We wondered what we knew about communication in marriage, other than that we liked each other? Sure, we both taught communication courses, but did that qualify us? After all, maybe in marriage, in love, you throw out all the books. Doesn't a marriage just click or else it doesn't?

I don't think so. It's tempting to be romantic, believing that some people stay married and committed to each other because the planets were in sync when they met, or that their love was deep and timeless, or even that they were Christians. Granted, having a common focus on Christ and his redemption because we're failed human beings who can't love him or anyone else without the Holy Spirit working in us does strengthen marriages significantly—it has to. However, Christians as well as star-crossed sweethearts whose love once seemed perfect still get divorced, still need counseling, still seem to have marriages that limp along rather than soar through the heavens, so that can't be the whole answer, any of it.

Maybe it's as simple as this: ego. In marriage, in any relationship that requires communication, egos get in the way. Until we grow in sanctification,

until God works in us the subjugation of our own will under his, we fight against losing our rights. We want what's coming to us, to be heard, to have ourselves understood. During every squabble we get defensive and stubborn, thinking, "If she was the right kind of person, she'd know what I mean, what I'm feeling." I—I—I we think because that's what the world teaches us we better do or we'll lose out, come in second place, be trampled on and victimized.

God's ways of turning the other cheek, of listening and waiting, of asking but not demanding seem old-fashioned and naive to our common sense minds. So when I call one of you with a concern, I'm so full of my own perception of my child's hurt or fear or frustration, that I have trouble listening or asking or waiting. I tend to bulldoze into the situation and give fully of my knowledge. Meanwhile, you're stunned into defensiveness, and most times, when you can get a breath in, say something like, "So what do want me to do?" Nine times out of ten this response frustrates me. I don't want you to do anything. I just want you to listen. Let me share for a few minutes and then try to understand my viewpoint.



The problem in part may be that our coping needs are different. In Dr. John Gray's thought-provoking book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* which Larry and I read in preparation for our workshop, we learned that one of the differences between men and women that leads to conflict is this:

"While Martians tend to pull away and silently think about what's bothering them, Venusians feel an instinctive need to talk about what's bothering them" (11).

That's me, a Venusian to a tee. And that's how I interact with you too, partly because I'm a woman, but also, I suspect, because

I'm a parent. My children are so important to me—genetically, emotionally, spiritually, and physically connected to me—that it's hard for me to back off, to consider the needs of the rest of your students and the pacing you need to get through your day and your year. I long to pour out everything I know about these wonderful beings God has entrusted to our care. And I'm sure you'll want my perspective. Unfortunately, that doesn't always mean I'm equally as willing to listen to yours. Ego, plain and simple, gets in the

way. I want my needs met before I can begin to consider yours.

You, on the other hand, especially if you're male and Gray's idea is accurate, may react to my confrontation by being from Mars, by clamming up or wanting to escape. You may need to ponder my points alone, perhaps to come up with a solution since males tend to be solution-oriented. But I imagine even female teachers react to confrontation by drawing away. After all, when our competency or sensitivity is being called into question, it's only natural to feel hounded and criticized.

The answer? Prayer seems like a good idea to me. Repentant, ego-relinquishing prayer, where we plead for patience and guidance from God before all conversations we initiate. Another good idea may be learning to trust the other party as a blood-bought, fellow traveler on the road to heaven. If I promise not to assume you're incompetent or out to "get" my child, perhaps you could promise to assume I have information you need. If I promise to ask questions, not just tell you what I think, perhaps you could promise not to give too many pat answers.

Most problems appear to be like a series of complex issues and philosophies clattering off of each other, hard and separate like a box of color crayons. But are they? Most of them involve ways of getting to goals, not the goals themselves. For example, I'm positive some of our goals are almost identical. You want my child to mature spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physi-

cally, and you want our school to have a good reputation, to follow God's precepts, and to reach out to unbelievers with the gospel, right? So do I! Maybe if we thought of our different perspectives as water color paints, blending and merging into each other at the edges, we might be less likely to assume negative things about each other or to require pat answers right away. We might be willing to experiment and explore the medium.

This mysterious and stimulating task of learning to communicate well will be unending, I know. Just as marriages change as children come, jobs alter, someone gets sick or finally well, our relationships will need to keep changing as our children grow up. Or sometimes you'll change, taking on more responsibilities, getting married, earning a degree, having a child, or losing a parent. We'll both need to keep sensitive to the new person being revealed behind each comment, to the ego crying out to be heard and understood. It's hard work, but we're not alone. With God's help, we can learn to see each other humbly from his perspective, as brothers and sisters first and foremost.

A Not-So-Alien Parent

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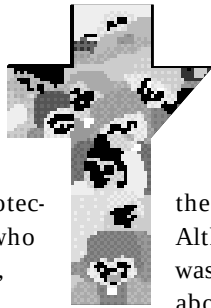
The Story of Jesus: Its Impact on My Life and My Classroom

Virginia A. Van Stelle

LIFE WAS GOOD FOR ME, a young girl of nine. I had an older brother who was my protector and best friend and parents who loved and cared for me. After all, my Dad had uprooted the entire family of four from the soil of pre-Civil War generations to begin a new and uncertain life in San Diego. This was done all for me out of love, because I was a severe asthmatic. My doctor thought I would breathe much easier in a Pacific seashore climate. As it turned out, he was right.

At age 13, my Dad delighted the entire family with the news of a two week summer trip to New York City. For a middle class family in the fifties, who had never been north of the famed Mason-Dixon Line, this was to be an adventure beyond our wildest dreams. And “wild” it was. The last person I would have expected to meet in the world-famous Madison Square Garden, among thousands of people, was Jesus. But meet him, I did!

Shortly after we had arrived in the Big Apple, my mother read that Billy



Graham was speaking at the Garden. Mother, as a child, had received a rich heritage in the Southern Baptist Church. Although our family's church going was near to never, I had learned about Jesus at my mother's knee.

Our infrequent church involvement gave me still more knowledge, even to the point of my baptism at the age of seven. So when mother insisted we go see the famed evangelist, I really had no idea what I was in for. I wasn't even sure what an evangelist was.

Our seats were high and far in the rear of the gigantic auditorium. Billy Graham appeared as a small speck behind a huge flower-laden podium. I recall a sea of people seated much closer than I was. This was in those technologically primitive times before circuit boards and large screen TVs. But the visual was not important that night. The world famous Billy Graham was not important that night. I did not need to see, I needed to hear. And what I heard changed the very essence of my being. God, through the awesome power of his Word convicted me

of my sin. That night I came to the bitter realization that I was, and had been hopelessly and eternally lost. Confrontation with my sin was the one element that had been missing or overlooked in my early religious training.

As I sat in my seat, surrounded by thousands, I felt as if the words spoken from that distant podium were aimed at only one person: me. I was the single target, fatally pierced with what I later came to know as the two edged sword. I cried bitter tears of repentance, unashamed that others might be watching. But just as the relentless, unstoppable high tide of the sea engulfs the shoreline and destroys all in its watery hands, the gentle ebbing tide of the gospel message refreshed and renewed my spirit. Now the cycle of tides was complete, the connection of Law and gospel had been made. God in his mercy had confirmed in me that night what he had planned before creation.

Now, at age 56, I can see how God has steered my course in fair and foul weather. There have been many times I have loosened my grip on him, even let go of him, but he has always held on to me. He has caused me to grow in wisdom and in knowledge of him. He has blessed me beyond belief and like Moses has tested me while holding up my right arm.

My Lord Jesus has not impacted my life; he IS my life.

The past 14 years in a

Lutheran preschool have been a testimony to the goodness of God. I believe there is no more privileged person than I, because God has entrusted me with his tiny, tender lambs. That trust is not merely for their care, but most importantly for each and every little soul.

God has privileged me to pass on the story of Jesus in Word and in example so that children and their families may come to faith and be strengthened by the Spirit working through the Word.

I am continually amazed at the workings of God. Young children who struggle with numbers and letters and cannot even tie their own shoes are given the power to fully grasp the concept of personal sin, repentance, and forgiveness through the blood sacrifice of Jesus. They are enabled to understand many of the attributes of a Holy God and the incarnation of the eternal Jesus, the resurrection, and eternal life. They are even lead to the knowledge of the oneness of God in the trinity.

There have been so many victories in Christ over the past 14 years. Many, I will not know about in this lifetime, but others God allows me to see. One of my most blessed memories I have is of a little Chinese girl whose parents had a Buddhist background. She spoke little English, and was placed in preschool

for the very purpose of improving her language skills. She did improve quite rapidly. She had lis-

"See what love the Father has given us,



that we should be called children of God."

1 John 3:1

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tened to Bible lessons all year without comment. In the spring of the year, I was presenting a series on the miracles of Jesus. At the conclusion of one of these lessons, this dear little girl raised her hand and began speaking to me in broken English delicately mended by a lovely Chinese accent. "Teacher, before I came to this school I never knew I have sin. Now I know I do, and Jesus took it away."

A lifetime has passed since that wonderful night at Madison Square Garden. The details of the memory are fading. The figure behind the podium is not as clearly defined, my parents are gone, and my brother and I are standing at the edge of old age, but the miracle God worked in me that night will remain precisely vivid for eternity. The children God sends to me gather under

his Word not at a huge stadium, but at a small carpet. They too will not remember me and the bond we share for a year or two. In the course of the lives of many of these children, it will be the Word, and only the Word that will remain clearly defined in their hearts. It will be for them as it was for me; a Spirit-imparted faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of a loving and mighty Savior that gives us life.

Praise be to God!

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