EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A LANDMARK STUDY
Effective Christian Education: A Landmark Study

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Reflections

Jesus Christ has instructed Christians to be the salt of the earth. Few people question that the world is in dire need of help. As we live early in a new decade, it is appropriate to plan for the next ten years, especially since this decade leads into the twenty-first century.

In setting an agenda for effective Christian education for the 1990's, a major research project by Search Institute for six Protestant denominations has much to offer. Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations attempted to discover the effectiveness of Christian education in the six church bodies.

Farewell...
The Editorial Committee pays tribute to Dr. Reinke who recently retired as President of Concordia College–Seward. Since his election in 1986, Dr. Reinke led the college in advocating excellence in Christian education and fostering the faith development of students, faculty, and staff. Ralph, your contributions to ISSUES have been many and significant.

...and Welcome
Members of the Editorial Committee welcome Orville C. Walz as President of Concordia College–Seward. After serving as President of Concordia College–Edmonton for nine years and as a faculty member of Concordia College–Seward for twelve years, Dr. Walz brings many gifts and a lifetime commitment to effective Christian education in congregations and schools at all levels. Orv, we look forward to your leadership and contributions to ISSUES!

Orville C. Walz, President
Restructuring Christian Education

It seems appropriate that an institution of the Synod that has so this goal the preparation of students for future ministry as teachers, deacons and pastors would be interested in what is going on in Christian education. Therefore, the theme of this edition of ISSUES is to examine effective Christian education for the 1990s and beyond.

Parishes express concern that members seem to lack commitment to the congregation and the Gospel. Young adults drift away, and pastors are frustrated with confirmation instruction. Why is it that we, a church body that has from its beginning made education a major thrust of its mission, have experienced these difficulties? The challenge seems to lie in our approach to, or methods of, Christian education, an education that ought to help develop and equip congregational commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and which helps engender discipleship.

As we examine Scriptures, it is evident that spiritual education took place first and foremost in the home. In the Old Testament, fathers were charged with teaching their children God’s law and His commandments. Paul, in his writing to Timothy, gives thanks that as a child Timothy learned the Scriptures from his grandmother and mother. Moving from an individual to a congregational facet, the Bereans were held up as those persons who searched the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul taught was true. Went a great adult education program that was.

Perhaps the Berean experience holds the key for effective Christian education. Adults heavily into the Scriptures can pass on their enthusiasm, knowledge and witness to their children and other adults. We call that modeling. In doing that, we begin to gain evidence of an integrated faith. An integrated faith is one that shows a personal relationship with the Lord and a relationship with our fellow human beings. It is a faith that emphasizes both the vertical relationship to our heavenly Father and the horizontal relationship with our fellow human beings. As a result, our faith becomes alive in the process. Our faith is something we live out, not merely an intellectual knowledge of God. We become disciples of Jesus Christ, and others become disciples as well, as they live out their faith in Him. That is the great commission of our Savior, to make disciples and to teach all people about Him.

To gather insight into what is occurring in parishes with respect to Christian education, the Synod Institute of Minnesota, Minneapolis, has completed a study of six major Protestant denominations. The results of that extensive survey provide churches of those denominations and institutions (such as this college) with valuable data that identify factors important in effective Christian education.

Unfortunately, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod was not one of these six Protestant denominations. Nevertheless, the information can provide insights and direction as individual congregations and denominations look to restructure Christian education programs.

Ray Hoebschman
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Effective Christian Education: Faith Development Considerations

For centuries, the church has described faith as fixed. The scriptures and church leaders have taught us that faith is the right confidence of God to the proponent’s answer and also grow the faith to realize the offer as that the person becomes reconciled to God through faith in Christ.

Today, social scientists describe people as traveling through stages of development in learning ability (Piaget), moral development (Kohlberg), identity (Erikson), careers (Super), and families (Levinson). Various faith researchers and thinkers (including Synod Institute) take these developmental psychology models and relate or integrate them with scriptural concepts and themes. Faith development becomes the church’s catch word for the decade.

Yet, many efforts to relate or integrate faith with developmental psychology fall short of not defining the object of faith, the elements of faith, and the goal of faith. Here is where Scripture speaks.

Scripture defines the object of faith as the Gospel, the grace of God, Christ Jesus, or God who raised Jesus from the dead. Those give faith its fixed character and all mean that God’s remit sin for the sake of Christ’s ultimate atonement. Those who trust in Christ, both in the story and the outcome of His work, are the church as a novel.

Bezaeus 11:1 denotes the elements of faith with two words: Hypostasis and all play. Hypostasis means that which stands under, a foundation. It is a legal term for the property ownership (title-deeds) in the archive. Holy Spirit–energized faith in Jesus is the title-deed of the salvation hoped for. This suggests a cognitive function of belief in certain truths about God recorded in a document. Presumably, this cognitive knowledge grows and develops, and in this sense faith grows and develops.

Ellis stands in opposition to hypostasis and is often translated as evidence, or conviction without what is not seen. This suggests an effective function: certainty and trust in God from the heart. Trust may grow in depth of its certainty, becoming more consistent of God’s love in the face of more trouble. In simple terms, we talk about faith as both head and heart with emphasis on the heart as prior and as a saving faith.

Scripture defines the goal of faith as conformity to the likeness of His Son” (Romans 8:29). Just as humanity was first created in God’s image and likeness, so now the goal of faith is re-creation in the image and likeness of God in Christ. Here is the sanctification paradox. By God’s grace through faith, Christians are in Christ, new creations with a freed, alien righteousness and life. Yet Christ needs to be formed in their thoughts, values, and actions (Galatians 4:19) by renewing their mindsets (Romans 12:2), and by putting off the self and putting on the new self (Ephesians 4:22-24). These actions are process and growth in the head and the heart. May future faith researchers incorporate these Scriptural themes with their insights into how people develop.

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Own It, Live It, Do It!

What does the Synod Institute study say to you about your own faith-life, the style of ministry of your congregation, or the focus and direction of your church?

There are many implications in this major report for all of us, at many different levels of our ministry. And, I would suggest that this study does not only tell us what we do as denominations, but also points to ways that individuals of the Synod of our ministry can be more sensitive and aware of our own faith-life within The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

Five major ingredients of effective congregations surfaced in this study:

1. Climate of Warmth
2. Sense of Family
3. Upholding Worship
4. Service Orientation
5. Life of the Mind

I would propose that these are also five major ingredients for a Lutheran school, a Lutheran home, and the life-style of an individual person of God. Let us see how they apply.

1. Climate of Warmth
   How is the love and joy of the Lord expressed through every day lives? How do we portray the Christ in us? How is the friendliness and forgiveness of our Lord lived out in our relationships with the people around us?

2. Sense of Family
   You and I need each other. No person is an island, we are all connected by the water of baptism! We need each other—in our homes, church, classmates, congregations, church-body. We are family as the Lord allows us to live and work and serve together.

3. Upholding Worship
   I would suggest that this ingredient of an effective congregation is also a strong ingredient for our individual daily lives. The Spirit builds us up in the faith through personal and group study and devotion, through prayer and the sharing of the Word and Sacrament. Worship in life: life is worship! And I am glad.

4. Service Orientation
   This is a strong dimension of our living out our faith and hope in the Lord. This becomes our life-style, our sense of ministry, as we care for people around us. We do not leave this to the corporate church, or to the "other" person; we are in it as travel for persons to Christ. And it only begins with a bumper sticker announcing that "Lutheran Schools Care A Lot!"

5. Life of the Mind
   I like this one. It means that people of God "think!" We do not leave the thinking to the Bible class or schoolroom, but we live all of life as the arena for learning and studying. Doxö becomes the lab, we are called, not to know the answers, but to help others ask the right questions. We are seen as God’s creative creatures, created by a Creator who creates us in an image to explore, to doubt, and to discover!

It is appropriate to personalize such a massive, intense research project? It is practical to explore the individual connections between the study and our personal lives? You bet it is! For such a study is not individualized; it will remain merely a large mass of data, charts, graphs, and "formulas" that pertains to everyone, and, thus, to no one. Blessings and joy, as we continue to live out our "effective" life of hope, forgiveness, and caring, in the name of Jesus.

Richard Bimler, Executive Director
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In *Dynamics of Planned Change* (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1955), Ronald Lippitt tells about the puzzle of efficiency experts as they watched an artillery team load and fire. Their aim was to analyze all motions in order to speed up the process. What puzzled them was one motion of one of the team just as the artillery was about to fire. The artilleryman closed both hands into a fist, one hand above the other, arms rigid, for a number of seconds. The motion made no sense. When asked, the artillery team had no rational explanation of the motion, but explained that they were doing it because that was the way they were trained.

Desperate, the efficiency experts consulted with retired artillery veterans. At last, one grizzled veteran, as he watched motion pictures of an artillery team in action, solved the puzzle: "Why, they're holding the horse!" he exclaimed.

Horses had pulled the cannon for many years. But the training to keep them from bolting at the sound of the cannon went on as always, even though it no longer made sense.

The mural is clear, also, for us who want to be efficient and effective in our Christian education endeavors: We need to think about what we are doing. We need to change when necessary, but also hold to those principles which make for effectiveness.

First of all (perhaps most of all) we need to remind ourselves: what is it we are doing. It is bad enough to make unnecessary motions if your task is to fire a cannon. It is infinitely worse if you do a splendid job, with no wasted motion, only to discover that your real task all along was not to fire artillery, but to fly an airplane.

In this article, then, we focus primarily on what—in Biblical perspective—Christian education is. As we do so, we will inevitably also touch on some important "horses."

A Changeless Christ for a Changing World

In a cliche is true: Christ Himself is the unchanging Center of our educational ministry. And nothing less than the world, all people, is the target audience: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son..." Indeed, the world is constantly changing. Yet in one sense it remains the same as it was when Christ died and when our first parents were driven from their first home in Eden. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NIV) (Romans 3:23). By nature blind (1 Corinthians 2:14), dead (Ephesians 2:1), and enemies of God (Romans 8:7), all humans need the reconciliation with God and one another which Christ has accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood" (Romans 3:25-26).

The saving act is God's, who "through Christ reconciled us to Himself..." But note: He gave us (His church) the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). The task is not optional. We who call Christ Lord are bound to speak, to make known, to teach the message of reconciliation. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The Gospel (Good News) of God's forgiving love in Jesus is thus the central concern of the church's educational life and work. As St. Paul reminds us, it is where the power is: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16).

And for Growing Christians

The power of the Gospel is intended, however, not only for those who, without faith in Christ, are without hope and lost in the world (Ephesians 2:12), but also for those who through faith have become part of God's family, the church. Every Christian faces, day by day, the gruesome threesome: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. "With might of ours we cannot do. Soon were our efforts effect..." Every Christian, no less, therefore, continuing nourishment in Christ Himself. "But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected..."

Moreover, new born Christians (John 3:5,6) "long for the pure spiritual milk" (1 Peter 2:2) to grow in their faith and life with God. As members one of another in the body of Christ, we need to hear and speak to one another the Word of Christ. The goal is maturity, "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown about by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:14-16).

In the words of the Denver (1969) convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: "Christian education understood as the communication of God's edifying Word, is essential to the life of the church and is the primary process and fundamental activity of the church in mission and the basic means for church renewal."

The Objective

Here is the way the Synod's Board of Parish Education (predecessor to the present Board for Parish Services) summarized the overall goal of a Christian education program: "that, through the Word and Spirit of God, people of all ages may know God, especially His seeking and forgiving love in Christ, may respond in faith and grow up into Christian maturity;...and that, seeing themselves as the reconciled children of God and individual members of Christ's body, the church may live happily in peace with God, themselves, and their fellow human beings;...and that they may express their joy in worship of God and in loving service to others;...and that in the love of God they may value all of God's creative work in His world and church and witness openly to Christ as the Saviour of all people, participating actively in God's mission to the church and the world; and...that they live in the Christian hope."

Growing in Relationships

Note that the objective may be organized in terms of relationships between and among:

- God
- the individual
- follow-believers (the Church)
- the creature world (created)

Relationships are at the heart of God's design of the universe. And of us. And of His redemption of the universe. And of our life with Him.

Indeed, it is the unique nature of our Christian faith that worship the one true God—the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three persons, in one and in relationship to one another. That is what the familiar three-in-one symbol of the Trinity tries to visualize.
The diagram attempts to visualize the central doctrine of Christ's faithfulness to God and the central doctrine underlying all educational ministry in the church. By this doctrine of justification (that God forgives us freely, by His grace in Christ, through faith)," writes Luther, "the church stands or falls. It is the chief—the fundamental—doctrine of Christianity. In my heart there reigns, and shall ever reign, this one article, namely, that faith in my dear Lord Jesus Christ, which is the sole beginning, middle, and end of all spiritual and godly thoughts which I might have at any one time, day or night."

Luther's words echo the confession of Paul: "...not having a righteousness of my own, based on Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know Him..." (Philippians 3:9).

Being a Christian means that I stake my life, define my being, in terms of God's love and forgiveness for me, whom He chose before the creation of the world... and adopted as His child "through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Similarly, Christian instruction and a Christian curriculum mean that we center our instruction and our living together in the classroom on the message of God's forgiving love in Christ. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Romans 1:16).

The diagram attempts to picture it: God's love—Christ in the Gospel—is central. Our teaching must be Christ-centered to build the relationship of faith and life with God. "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

My God and I: Ongoing Life
The act of God in Christ to redeem humanity was a once-and-for-all-time event. A person's faith in Christ has a beginning—compared in the Scriptures to birth (John 3:3-5). But once begun, that faith needs to be nurtured. Newborn babies need the "pure spiritual milk" in order that they may grow (1 Peter 2:3) in faith and life. It is for this reason that Christians feed on the Word and the Sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion. (Also Baptism, which is death and resurrection, has an ongoing significance, for "it signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth to arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever"—The Small Catechism.)

As Luther's explanation of the significance of baptizing with water emphasizes, every Christian faces an ongoing struggle between his/her "new man" and the Old Adam ("old flesh"). The dimensions of that struggle are outlined by St. Paul in Romans 7:23-24 and Galatians 5:19-24. We are at the same time "perfectly righteous" (because of Jesus' forgiveness) and yet sinners still, we are not "already perfect" before God "press on." The implications of that struggle are profound for Christian teaching. For example, any teaching which beseeches the learner to "be good"—without first surfacing the learner's sin in order to drive the learner to rely on God's Gospel power—is doomed to lead the learner away from God or to self-righteousness.

Thus, we lovingly confront sin in one another. We do not excuse sin; indeed we let the law do its proper work to expose sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7), to make sin "more sinful," in order that we might be driven again and again to cling to the forgiveness we have in Christ. Because we have not "already been made perfect" we feed on God's Word and Sacraments, God's ongoing nurturing of the new life in Christ. And we respond to God in worship and prayer.

Note the distinctive accent, which separates Christ from the self-fulfillment or self-development of humanist psychologists on the one hand, and the "redeem society" emphasis of modern-day social reconstructivists. The goal is not to "save society" through new social orders, nor to improve the individual through powers that are within. Rather, from outside—from God—people infected with spiritual sin are rescued from society, the "world," which is in "the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Thus rescued, the individual Christian as a functioning member of a redeemed society, the church, serves as a leaven in the world.

Fellow Christians edify or build each other up as they love one another and as they hear and speak God's Word to one another. Note that twin accent in 1 Corinthians 13, the inspired description of Christian love in action, followed by chapter 14's description of speaking the Word to the brother and sister in Christ. "I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:18). Or Colossians: "And above all these put on love... Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom..." (Colossians 3:14-16).

Christian education, therefore, is a matter of living the faith through loving and forgiving in the Christian classroom, including activities not only for learning the data and reciting it to the teacher, but also for speaking the Word to one another in meaningful life situations. The goal is to build a warm and supportive community in which fellow Christians may be encouraged even to "confess your faults to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

"Members One of Another"
1 John 1:3 accepts the second relationship integral to our Christian faith—fellowship with one another. That is an accent we may miss in that often-quoted text in Ephesians: "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and builds itself up in love." God not only saved me; but in saving me He calls me into a relationship with others—His church, the "body of Christ." Being saved means that I belong to His body; means that we fellowship members of that body "upbuild one another in love." As Jesus told Peter, "When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32).

"...Even So Send 1 You"
As indicated above, "the body of Christ" (the Church) functions in this world as did its Lord during the years of His earthly ministry. Christ's people are called into a relationship also with those who are still separated from Him. "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18).

Effective Christian education takes seriously the Great Commission of our Lord, providing not only specific units on evangelism, but also accenting in every lesson the good news of the Gospel to save all people through the Gospel message spoken by His people (2 Corinthians 5:20,21). The lessons deal with both aspects of our relationship to others: our call to love people with God's own kind of self-sacrificing love (agape) and to speak to them the message (kerygma) of God's forgiveness. "Effective" Christian education is necessary for people who have never heard the message; or who have been incompletely and ineffectually. "(God's Holy Spirit does His work of conversion through the means of grace—Word and sacraments.)"
the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

As God's redeemed people we continue to be responsible stewards of God's creation. We believe that God has made me and all creatures...that He has given me...clothing and shoes, meat and drink,...and all my goods,..."Part of our duty to "thank You, Jesus, for all You have given me" is that we use His gifts wisely, dedicating to His service the time, the talents, and the treasure He gives us. We care for and thus care for His creation.

With this relationship, our diagram is complete.

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**Seven Focuses**

To summarize: After stating the comprehensive objective of Christian education we have attempted to visualize (in the above diagram) and further to spell out that objective in terms of the relationships involved in Christian life and doctrine and education.

Another way to conceptualize any distinctively Christian program of education and/or curriculum is in terms of the major focuses or themes which are present and recur on every grade or department level. They may be used as a convenient yardstick to measure the adequacy of any overall Christian education program or any set of curricular materials. The seven themes are: Life and Salvation, God's Love and Care, Word and Sacraments, Worship and Prayer, God's Family on Earth, Loving and Helping Others, and Taking Care of God's World.

The seven focuses are, of course, simply a list of the major themes that are inherent in the relationships diagram.

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**What is Distinctive in a Lutheran/Biblical Approach?**

Check out the description in just about any catalog advertising religion curriculum materials. Chances are you will see the curriculum described in terms of those three magic phrases: Christ-centered, Bible-based, life-related. These are, indeed, summary descriptions that must Christian educators, regardless of denomination, find desirable.

What is a distinctively Lutheran/Biblical understanding of these three accents? The diagram on the next page attempts to visualize such an understanding by indicating equal and opposite distortions of each.

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**Christ-Centered**

Privileged and obvious is the first principle: As we have already emphasized, effective Christian teaching needs, by definition, to be "Christ-centered." The good news of God's redeeming love in Christ needs to be in the center of all instruction in the faith. Justification by grace, through faith, is the central doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Ephesians 2 summarizes it well: "By grace...through faith...it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast..." Why the hammering away at "not of works?" Because of the incredible ease at which we can fall into cress and subtle moralism. It is imbedded deep in our very bones, this idea that somehow, some way what we do has still got to be at least a little bit involved in our standing with God. Look at what some of the research reveals.

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A Study of Generations (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) reported on a comprehensive two-year study of 5,000 Lutherans. In 1981, Scale 15 of The Generations study was again answered by a representative sample of Lutherans in a new study (Profiles of Lutherans, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982). The way Lutherans answered the questions should be cause for concern to everyone engaged in Christian education.

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**Agree or Disagree?**

- Salvation depends on being sincere in whatever you believe.
- The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living.
- God is satisfied if a person lives the best life he can.
- If I say I believe in God and act right, I will get to heaven.
- Although there are many religions in the world, most of them lead to the same God.

Some 40 percent of the Lutherans in both studies did agree with the above statements which were included in a scale called "Salvation by Works." Note that all the concepts reflect a belief in salvation not by faith in Christ alone, but by our own good works. Now comes the Effective Christian Education study which reports that 87 percent of "mainline Christian" adults (including ELCA Lutherans) affirm the statement: "I believe I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved" (Effective Christian Education: Summary Report, Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990, page 69).

Such a persistent finding, of course, is serious—albeit serious. It reveals that a sizable proportion of Lutherans deny, or at least do not understand, the central teaching of our Christian faith: "That a man is not justified (saved; made right with God) by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:16, 17). Such "self-trust" can easily spill over into mis-teaching. We teach salvation by works or otherwise confuse Law and Gospel when, for example, we:

- present prayer or our own "wrestling with God" rather than faith in Christ as the means to lay hold of forgiveness; "if you want to be truly forgiven, you need to pray hard for God's forgiveness" (See Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, Thesis 9);
- turn the Gospel into a teaching of repentance: "After all that Jesus did for you, you ought to be ashamed to set this other work!" (Thesis 13);
- try by means of the means of the Law rather than by the admonitions of the Gospel, to urge the regenerate to do good: "You've just got to try harder to obey the teacher." (Thesis 23).
Cheap Grace

Seeking to escape the hane of moralism, we can fall prey to the devil's equal and opposite distortion of the Gospel, what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." It is the question Paul poses after he has laid out in such splendid fashion the marvel of God's grace, and His free forgiveness for the sinner: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Romans 6:1.)

Paul’s emphatic “By no means!” underscores the function of the Gospel as a liberating force in the new life of the Christian. The same Gospel which brought to pass our new relationship with God (our justification) is the power which enables us to grow in our life with Him (sanctification). Instead of “You’re saved, now try harder to be good” (moralism) or “You’re saved, so now sin it up” (cheap grace), the Gospel provides the winsome invitation of “God’s desire is that you grow close to God in Christ Jesus... offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life”... (Romans 6:11,13.)

The same Ephesians 2 text which takes such pains to rule out works as the basis for our standing with God, concludes by pointing out that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works...” “Christ-centered,” thus, in the Lutheran/Biblical view, means steering clear of the shoals of both moralism (“faith” plus works) and cheap grace ("faith" minus works), and establishes our very life as well as our teaching on Christianity as the Christian Way to salvation; but Christ as the pattern and power of the new life.

Bible-Based

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31; see also Luke 24:31). Christ is the center of Scripture. The Scriptures portray Christ and also serve as the blueprint and guide for the life in Christ. They are “able to instruction for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16).

As Lutherans we affirm what the Bible says about itself; that is not an end in itself, but a means of grace, pointing us to Christ and the new life in Him.

Yet, it is so easy to fall into the pit of making the Bible an end in itself. This is the concern for the meaning of Bible facts (“lectio of the names of the 12 disciples.” “What time did Jesus die on Good Friday?”) without going beyond the facts to Bible meanings (“What does it mean to be a disciple?” “When Jesus died, it was for your sake...”) the result is Biblicism, knowledge simply for the sake of knowledge. Instead of a means of grace, leading to Christ and to life (John 20:31), the Bible becomes an end in itself.

The opposite error, of course, is to dismiss the Scripture as sole source and norm for doctrine and life by adding to its authority all sorts of extraneousness: “Sure, I accept the Bible, but...” There is tradition or “my experience” or considerations of differing sources behind the text, or... All these additions, of course, serve to weaken or destroy the authority of Scripture and inevitably also erode or destroy the Gospel.

Life-Directed

Christian education which is truly Christ-centered and based on the Scriptures will inevitably also be life-directed. Communication will be genuine and real. The teacher as well as the student will be freed up by the Gospel to “confess your faults to one another and pray for one another; that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

The kind of classroom discussion we have all experienced (perhaps even fostered and led), in which everyone talks about a hypothetical “Christian” in phony, pious ways, can probably be traced back directly to humanism and/or Biblicism in the teaching/learning encounter: (See diagram.) We have all experienced, too, exciting discussions of “real life” concerns, after which we have asked ourselves, “But what did that have to do with our Christian faith?” Those “life” applications, if not connected to Christ or Word, are not really faith-strengthening even though they may have been otherwise interesting or entertaining. This kind of “life-directed” teaching/learning encounter probably relates to “cheap grace” and “Bible and” (see diagram).

Effective Christian education, centered in Christ Himself, includes Bible content which is not simply sterile knowledge to be learned as an end in itself. Nor does it function as a mere reference in an arbitrary treatment of some social or moral problem and experience. Rather, Bible content is directed purposefully toward its desired outcome in the life of the learner.

Education can be effective (interesting, exiting, fostering “moral maturity”) without being Christian.

Education can be Christian (full of Bible content, yet deepening to the spirit) without being effective.

Lord, give us Your Spirit for effective Christian education.

Parts of this article are adapted from the Board for Parish Services bulletin: Principles of Christian Education for the Local Parish.

Description and Implications of a National Study on Christian Education

The findings from a major three-and-one-half-year research project conducted by Search Institute for six Protestant denominations were first published in March of this year. Since that time, educators and other interested people have been studying the project results, seeking to relate them to their experience and vision for the future.

Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Eklí

Each of the six denominations is now in the process of using project results to introduce constructive change. The intent of this article is to inform The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod about this significant research, trusting that it has applicability not only to the LCMS, but to other denominations as well.

Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations was undertaken to learn what it is in congregational life and, indeed, in life experience that nurtures a faith that is life-transforming.

Christian education was an important focus of the study, due to its potential to make a major contribution to the faith growth of adults and youth. There has been mounting concern that education in our churches has deteriorated, its importance diminished. In addition, the malaise of the past few years among Protestant denominations, evidenced by an inactivity in congregational life, an exodus of members, and a lessening of denominational and congregational loyalty, called for a new exploration of the factors and new consideration of the role of Christian education in the mission of a congregation.

So it was that the six denominations—Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church—joined with Search Institute to study these issues. All of these denominations, except the Southern Baptist Convention, are often called “mainline” denominations. Funding for the project was provided by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. and the participating denominations.

After extensive work on a conceptual design for the study, 150 congregations within each of the six denominations were randomly selected to participate. Sampling was stratified by size of congregation (under 200, 200-499, 500-999, 1,000 and larger) to ensure representative distribution on this key factor. Within each congregation, in-depth surveys were administered to...

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The health and vitality of Protestant congregations is on the line. Unless we face the issues uncovered in this research, many congregations risk continued ministry disinterest and inactivity, member drop-out, or member switching to more effective congregations. Congregations that nurture a life-encompassing faith reap the benefit of lay involvement, membership growth, and congregational loyalty. Mature faith is contagious. The prospect of people with that kind of integrated life brings great benefit to the mission of the church. Therefore, we are urging our efforts to revitalize congregational life.

A study of Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations (ECHE) by pastors, teachers, DCE's, boards of Christian education, church councils, those involved in special ministries such as aging, campus ministry, and church camping, district and Synod leaders, church college and university administration, and seminary personnel. The two years of the study included a trip to the Synod of Missouri, South Dakota, and Minnesota. The study included a wide range of questions, surveys, research projects, and educational plans. ECHE was the most significant research project investigating congregational life in recent years.

Since the sample did not include members of the LCMS, citing implications for congregations of this Synod needs to be done with care. However, support for members of the Synod to consider possible applications of the LCMS and the other Lutheran bodies. Our purpose is to highlight possible contributions of this research project to the educational ministries of the church, giving particular attention to the attention of teaching, the power of Christian education, and an educational agenda for congregations.

Marvin Bergman is a member of the Theology Division of Concordia College—Seward

The Aim of Teaching

Though the aim of congregational life and teaching can be conceptualized in different ways, the premise of the study that the meaning of congregational life is to nurture the faith of youth and adults, is affirmed by both Biblical and theological perspectives. Paul, in each epistle, directed attention to the faith of the believers. On several occasions, he gave thanks for faith which was growing more and more (Colossians 1:4; II Thessalonians 1:3). He sent Timothy to Thessalonica for the purpose of strengthening and encouraging faith (I Thessalonians 3:2). He instructed Titus to teach older men to be sound in faith (2:2).

The same emphasis was made at various times by Martin Luther in discussing the aim of teaching and the faith. On occasion, he exhorted that when we teach, we are to teach faith. Of course, no one can give faith to another person. Faith is solely a gift of God's grace implanted by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. However, after observing that Paul in Romans first taught faith, Luther pointed out that teaching and preaching are to teach faith and the Word of God against human law and superstition. When faith collapses, love grows cold, God's Word is neglected, and sin controls. When faith ceases to be an individual to Jesus Christ, it is then that spiritual sight and knowledge of the truth follow. He added that when faith is recognized as consisting of sheer trust in God's grace, it is not surprising that...
children are better informed in faith than adults, for they believe very simply and without any question in a gracious God. A faith maturity perspective as the aim of congregational life and teaching provides a corrective for both practitioners and theorists. This perspective asserts that teaching and learning involve much more than memorizing Bible passages, knowing "right answers," restating ethical truths, explaining Biblical concepts, and describing a time-line of Biblical events. In a faith maturity perspective, such goals serve a larger purpose, that of growing in faith.

The faith maturity perspective of ECE suggests that growth is more than advancing through developmental stages, such as Fowler's faith development paradigm or Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives. While such models can help in identifying facets of faith, such as levels of faith seeking understanding and processing information, the faith maturity perspective of ECE provides a more comprehensive view of faith than hierarchical models of development.

That the faith of youth and adults can be assessed in an empirical survey may be surprising. The inability to assess faith as trust was recognized by the researchers in their development of "The Mature Faith Index" which focuses on two aspects: 1. indicators of a mature Christian faith, such as acceptance of both the divinity and humanity of Jesus; 2. responses by individuals as to how true such faith is for them. The first level scale ("never true") is always true. Focusing on indicators of faith and self-report is a significant step in assessing faith maturity.

One finding related to the faith maturity of youth and adults reported by ECE that may disturb or even shock is the large difference in the study who have difficulty accepting salvation as a gift of God's grace rather than being earned by good works. The finding that 60 percent of the adults and 47 percent of the youth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) agreed with the statement, "I believe I must obey God's rules and commandments in order to be saved," reminds one of an earlier study that asked a similar question of an LCMS sample. In that study, 44 percent of the members of the LCMS agreed with the statement. The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living. With justification by grace through faith being the article of faith upon which the church stands or falls, a good works orientation expressed by a significant number of members is a clarion call to examine both the content and process of the church's communicative character of the one Gospel.

A study of the faith maturity of adults and youth would enable one to learn more about two dimensions of faith that are generally neglected in research: the intrapersonal, having a deep, personal relationship with a loving God, and the horizontal (translating this personal relationship into acts of love, mercy, and justice). One could discover the extent to which members of congregations reflect a faith with a strong horizontal but weak vertical dimension, for example. One could identify the level of interest in reaching out to others beyond the congregation, especially varied ethnic groups, as well as the level of joy in worship. If responses reflecting these two dimensions of faith of members of the LCMS were similar to the responses of the Lutheran sample of ECE, think of the critical doubts that could be directed to the following behaviors.

### ADULT AND YOUTH BEHAVIORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>% Adults</th>
<th>% Youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Never or rarely encouraged someone to believe in Jesus Christ</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do not engage in daily prayer</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do not read the Bible when alone</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Never denuded time helping poor, hungry, sick or those unable to help themselves</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An investigation of the faith maturity of youth and adults can reinforce the suggestion that the most prob- able correlate of hours in church is a general health belief. An emergency to attend to the basics of congregational life also can be stimulated by the findings of the ECE study which identified the percentages of various groups which expressed an integrated faith (a faith that reflects both vertical and horizontal dimensions).

### INTTEGRATED FAITH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastors</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Education Coordinators (lay supervisors of CE)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Teachers</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of these and other findings, the study noted a pattern in which faith is only partially experienced or lived out, with the faith of many being "on hold," restricted, and even dormant. One implication is that a major concern for the church is to find means of igniting and nurturing a more viable and vigorous faith among its members. As the study suggested, a likely factor accounting for this need is a large number of adults and youth who evidence difficulty in accepting salvation as a gift rather than something earned.

A special challenge identified in the study is the small number of men who evidenced an integrated faith. In the Protestant sample, 13 percent of the male population, ages 20-39, and 15 percent of the same population, ages 40-59, expressed an integrated faith. The bright spots in the study were the numbers of women and older people who reflected an integrated faith. Forty percent of the women, ages 60 or older, revealed an integrated faith, as did 49 percent of the women, age 60 or older, and 35 percent of the men of the same age group. Whether such faith maturity is due to developmental or generational differences is not clear and deserves further investigation. What is clear in the ECE study is the presence of groups in the church with significant faith to share in the pursuit of justice. The main emphasis of the Gospel is on God's rules for right living. With justification by grace through faith being the article of faith upon which the church stands or falls, a good works orientation expressed by a significant number of members is a clarion call to examine both the content and process of the church's communicative character of the one Gospel.

A study of the faith maturity of youth also can help us to respond more adequately to the crises facing young people today seen in a sample of behaviors reported by Lutheran youth in the ECE study.

### AT-RISK BEHAVIORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Who Reported</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Alcohol use: 6 or more times in the past 12 months</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Binge drinking: had 5 or more drinks in a row</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Marijuana used marijuana once or more in the past 12 months</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Suicide: thought about committing suicide once or more in the past 12 months</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sexual intercourse: have had sexual intercourse once or more during lifetime</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the 1960's, evidence presented by researchers and casual observations have pointed to the need for direct, explicit moral instruction by families and congregations. Perhaps a study of the moral values and behaviors of our own constituency would heighten the urgency of providing moral instruction among adults and youth. In a previous national study, 70 percent of the 10,487 parents included in the study indicated that they are "very" or "quite" interested in programs that would equip them for the task of instilling moral values in their children.

The Power of Christian Education

Four findings of the ECE study which underscore the power of Christian education experiences in the family and congregation deserve special attention.

1. Among adults, the two strongest factors that relate to faith maturity are lifetime involvement in church education and lifetime church involvement.
2. Among adults, the two factors that relate strongest to faith maturity are lifetime involvement in Christian education and the degree of spiritual commitment to Christian education.
3. The greater the quality of Christian education, the more members reported growth in faith and loyalty to one's denomination.
4. The way to teach Christian education is done matters as much as, if not more than, any other area of congregational life.

When the study attempts to identify other factors important in the teaching of Christian education, the results are mixed. The study finds itself in a servant role where on one hand is equipping to engage in meaningful forms of Christian ministry. The unique role of teaching in a congregation that is a key change agent is given a direct hearing on every facet of church ministry. The ECE study also reminds us of the impact of informal teaching and learning experiences in congregations. Interacting with unstructured informal gatherings, participating in service projects, engaging in worship, being involved in witness and evangelism, giving and receiving care, belonging to small groups in a congregation, and living as a family are powerful learning experiences.

In other words, the story of that elementary school teacher who in some small way was engaged in the church's ministry of teaching and learning. The story is not a linear one, it is not teleological. The study finds itself in a servant role where it is equipping to engage in meaningful forms of Christian ministry. The unique role of teaching in a congregation that is a key change agent is given a direct hearing on every facet of church ministry. The ECE study also reminds us of the impact of informal teaching and learning experiences in congregations. Interacting with unstructured informal gatherings, participating in service projects, engaging in worship, being involved in witness and evangelism, giving and receiving care, belonging to small groups in a congregation, and living as a family are powerful learning experiences.
That teaching was taken seriously by the laity is seen in the suggestion that every church, whether an impres- 
spectated beggar, prosperous merchant, mother, father, 
or grandparent, saw one’s self as a teacher in particular 
contexts. What one had experienced as a Christian 
needed to be taught.

A historical perspective also reveals that the Lu- 
theran Church, though it continued to focus on 
teaching as a way of communicating the Word to 
children and adults. The founders of the LCMS 
identified education as one of the most significant 
shapers of faith. In helping individuals to develop 
competencies as pastors and educators, the LCMS 
has placed a high value upon seminars, colleges, 
and universities as learning communities. Theological, 
historical, psychological, and educational perspectives of 
teaching provide the foundation for interpreting the 
finding of the ECE study that effective Christian 
education is the most powerful single influence 
congregations have on maturity of faith. 

This finding can motivate congregational leaders to 
ask:

1. How many baptized children are involved in a 
comprehensive program of Christian educa-
tion? How can this number be increased?

2. How many families are being equipped to 
function as skilled nurturers and teachers of 
faith? How can we better equip families in this 
role?

3. How many youth who have confessed faith 
in the role of companion continue to be in-
olved in Christian education? How can we 
help young people grow in faith?

4. How many parents in congregations are 
visibly involved in study, teaching, and learn-
ing? What will motivate adults to seize opportu-
nities for service?

5. To what extent are the curricula of profes-
sional church workers providing a solid founda-
tion in the theory and practice of teachings 
learning? How can ministers of the Word be 
better equipped as teachers?

6. How much time, energy, and resources are 
invested by congregations in Christian educa-
tion experiences for all age groups? How can we 
help more members to see the relationship be-
tween this investment and their growth?

7. To what extent is the role of Christian 
education in a congregation and its interrela-
tionship to all other ministries of the church 
being interpreted to and by members? How can 
membrers be helped to develop a vision based on 
Matthew 28:18-20?

An Agenda for Congregations

Individual and congregational study of the ECE re-
port can serve as the basis for the development of 
educational ministry. For example, attention could be 
given to eight factors associated with the effectiveness 
seen in Christian education in the faith maturity of youth 
and adults. 

1. Teachers who reflect a high level of cur-
vity in faith as well as a clear understanding of 
educational theory and practice.

2. Pastors whose commitment to Christian 
education is seen in investing significant hours in 
the Christian education programs of both 
adults and youth and is based on a clear under-
tanding of educational theory and practice.

3. A high level of involvement of both adults 
and youth in the Christian education programs 
of a congregation.

4. A clear mission statement identifying the 
chief aim of Christian education and its interre-
lationship with other ministries of the church, 

5. Identification of the educational content of 
a congregation’s educational program that 
emphasizes in any one or more of the follow-
ing:
   a. Biblical knowledge and understanding;
   b. values and moral decision-making;
   c. a multicultural awareness and commit-
tment;
   d. a global awareness and understanding of 
significant issues;
   e. education about human sexuality;
   f. the use/abuse of chemicals (alcohol and 
other drugs);
   g. involvement in service and responsibility 
for poverty and hunger;
   h. core theological concepts and doctrines;
   i. being a friend, making friends, and show-
ing concern for others.

6. Helping youth and adults to “live in the 
Word” is a priority. The top interests of 
adults in the ECE study center in their 
spiritual lives and in learning more about the Bible.

7. A high level of parent involvement in youth 
ministry planning and decision-making.

8. A grasp of the educational process that 
focuses on:
   a. relating one’s faith to daily decisions and 
economic, social, and political issues;
   b. believing in spiritual insight (related Word 
and world);
   c. the development of a sense of community in 
which learners help each other grow 
in faith and life.

9. The faith journey of each individual which 
includes a lifelong perspective of aging.

10. Intergenerational contact and experi-
ence that encourages generation to 
serve and learn from one another;

11. An encouragement of individual thinking 
and questioning in a climate of faith.

12. A recognition that small congregations 
guided by skilled leaders can educate as effec-
tively as large congregations.

The ECE study readily can provide congre-
gations with a series of questions about effective 
education for all age groups:

1. What is a solid core of faith and adult 
who can help in faith and cams a special gift

2. What is the major theoretical frame-
work for education and learning in these 
congregations?

3. What are the major questions these 
congregations consider in their educational 
process?

4. What are the major beliefs about education 
these congregations hold?

5. What are the major educational practices 
these congregations employ?

6. What are the major educational goals 
these congregations seek to achieve?

7. What are the major educational challenges 
these congregations face?

8. What are the major educational successes 
these congregations achieve?

9. What are the major educational issues 
these congregations need to address?

10. What are the major educational programs 
these congregations implement?

11. What are the major educational resources 
these congregations use?

12. What are the major educational policies 
these congregations adopt?
Notes

For example, a study which found important differences between Minnesota and Oregon with respect to the use of educational technology found that the number of students using educational technology was significantly lower in Oregon than in Minnesota.


FIVE CRIES OF YOUTH by Merton P. Stromen.

MUCH food for thought! These are the first words that come to mind after reading this revised edition about high school youth. The author is a noted psychologist and researcher with a wealth of experience in the field of adolescent development. This book provides valuable insights into the lives of today's youth and offers practical advice for parents and educators.

Are you ready to consider some new ways of looking at your classroom or teaching methods? This book offers practical strategies for improving student engagement and motivation. It also provides strategies for creating a safe and supportive learning environment.

This book is highly recommended for educators, parents, and anyone interested in understanding the challenges facing today's youth.
for other denominations. In 1989–1990, Search Institute repeated the study for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, expanding it to include investigation of the role of families and church-related schools in promoting faith maturity and loyalty. Adventist leaders are now in the process of using the study findings to build greater effectiveness in all three sectors: family, congregation, and school. It is interesting to note that the congregational factors promoting faith maturity are the same in the Adventist Church as in the mainline denominations. This Adventist project, which flies under the banner of *Valuegenesis*, is particularly applicable to The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod due to the significant energy invested in the development and maintenance of a private school system.

In sum, the findings from *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations* provide new understandings of the beliefs, attitudes, and interests of a large, nationally representative sample of adults and adolescents. Attitudes toward, and evaluations and descriptions of their congregational and other life experience give additional new insights on what matters in promoting faith maturity. And the need to take Christian education seriously is thereby documented.

These new learnings can begin a revitalization of congregations throughout the country, regardless of denomination, for they can give focus to successful reform.

Search Institute has developed several resources that help describe and interpret the results of the study. In addition to the two major reports issued in March (Project Summary and Individual Denominational Reports), three self-study guides are available. The first two—adult and youth—are based on the 38-statement index of faith maturity developed for the research project. They provide a way for groups of adults or youth to respond to the statements (each of which is related to the eight core dimensions of faith), assess that response in terms of the study findings, reflect on the eight dimensions of a maturing faith that the statements represent, and discuss implications for their own lives. The third self-study guide is a checklist for use by Christian education leaders in the congregation. It names and describes the characteristics of an effective program and guides the users through an assessment of these factors within the particular congregational setting. A four-part video series discussing and interpreting project findings is also available. It is designed to be used in adult education forums, church council retreats, and education committee planning processes.

Project reports and other resources described in this article are available from Search Institute, 122 West Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404. (1-800-888-7828).