

# reflections



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The year is 1959. Dwight Eisenhower is president of the United States of America. Alaska and Hawaii are admitted as the 49th and 50th states. Fidel Castro assumes power in Cuba. A first class postage stamp sells for \$.04. Unemployment is 6.8 percent. The Los Angeles Dodgers win the World Series. Cecil B. De Mille and Frank Lloyd Wright die. The Barbie Doll is invented, and Frank Sinatra wins his first Grammy award.

Lost on most lists that chronicle the events of 1959 is the birth of the Director of Christian Education (DCE) ministry in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. This edition of *Issues in Christian Education* celebrates fifty years of the DCE ministry. In it we recount the dynamic history of the DCE ministry, note the contributions DCEs have made and continue to make within and beyond our church body, detail the challenges and opportunities facing DCEs, and articulate the past, present and future vision and purpose of DCE ministry.

Through this edition, Concordia University, Nebraska, one of the first universities of the LCMS to prepare and equip DCEs, pauses to praise God for the 1,700 DCEs who have been certified in this ministry. We celebrate the 630 DCEs actively serving LCMS congregations today. We thank God for the visionary, faith-filled servants who birthed and pioneered the Director of Christian Education ministry. And we seek to encourage those who continue to lead the preparation of candidates for this crucial role today.

Some years ago Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, founder of Crossways International, observed that “the church teaches children and plays with adults while Jesus taught adults and played with children.” Dr. Wendt was suggesting that we would do better to follow the pattern of Jesus. However, I wonder if we might do better by doing “both/and” rather than “either/or.” I thank God for DCEs in the LCMS who do both, and do both extremely well. The role and ministry of the director of Christian education in the life of the parish and its people are even more important, critical and necessary today than fifty years ago.

May the Lord of the church continue to raise up women and men who have a passion for equipping, teaching, leading and serving those of every age the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as DCEs in our congregations and communities!

Happy 50th Anniversary, Director of Christian Education ministry!

Brian L. Friedrich, President

## The Value in Giving “C’s”

Teachers give grades. We choose the curriculum, deliver the instruction, and mentor our learners through the process. We give them practice, anticipate trouble spots, and vary our techniques. We assess progress with verbal and written quizzes. Ultimately, we give them a test to see if they’ve really learned what we taught. Then we score the test and give our learners a grade on a report card.

This fiftieth anniversary of the launching of the DCE program is a good time to present a report card to the hundreds of individuals in Christian education ministries who have impacted the church. The ultimate goal of our ministry is that the children, youth and adults with whom we minister will know Jesus. That goal will be reached in eternity.

Yet there is a human element in the DCE teaching ministry. DCEs are teachers. My observations of dozens of DCEs bring me to the conclusion that DCEs have given many “C’s” to their learners. While getting all “C’s” on a report card might seem just average, be advised that the twelve “C’s” on this half-century report card reveal excellence of the hundreds of professional church workers who have served.

This report card is not addressed to the learners, but to the Directors of Christian Education and teachers of the faith who have served our Lutheran congregations and schools over the decades.

- I. You set high expectations for yourself. You carry out what you promise to do. You are fair in your judgments and decisions. You have established patterns others can count on.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Consistency**.
2. You take time to listen to others. You ask about a family member you know has been sick. You pause to pray with individuals for their unique situation. You plan servant events to give first-hand experiences.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Compassion**.

3. You tell your learners how proud you are of their accomplishments. You demonstrate your faith in what you say and do. You cheer on volunteers to serve faithfully and effectively. You give a pat on the back to those who need encouragement.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Confidence**.
4. You say “Please” and “Thank you” as a normal part of your communication. You apologize when you’ve made a mistake. You refer to other people with titles of respect. You never make derogatory comments about adults, teens, or children.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Courtesy**.
5. You keep helping others, even those who don’t seem to want your help. You take on tasks that no one else is willing to do. You go one-on-one with a challenging situation. You propose valuable changes, even when change is not well received.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Courage**.
6. You work and plan with adults, teens, and children. You team with someone else to do a task neither of you could do alone. You volunteer to help above and beyond the call of duty. You do your part so everyone benefits.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Cooperation**.
7. You smile a lot, even when your smile is the only sunshine around. You are pleasant with kids, volunteers and fellow church workers. You find joy in the journey of life, displaying a positive outlook. You accept all people as redeemed children of God.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Contentment**.

8. You challenge others to solve problems that have no easy solution. You give them opportunities to find out things for themselves. You guide kids, teens, or adults to resources so they discover a new concept. You tell them the personal thrill you get from learning something new.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Curiosity**.
9. You present a situation and brainstorm possible solutions. You allow alternate ways for your learners to show what they’ve learned. You vary your teaching techniques to keep the environment invigorated. You surprise them with novel ideas and personal ingenuity.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Creativity**.
10. You don’t back down from good, although unpopular, decisions. You allow your learners to fail without calling them failures. You tell your own stories of personal failures as well as successes. You carry through with appropriate promises and threats.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned **Consequences**.
11. You are well prepared for every class and every event. You struggle with, but manage, the balance between family and ministry. You honor your call as a Teacher of the Faith. You show up anyway, even if one of your wings is in a cast.  
“C” what you’ve done?  
You’ve taught them **Commitment**.
12. You tell your learners what Jesus means in your life. You are a student of the Scriptures and consistent in personal daily devotions. You forgive those who hurt you, as Christ has forgiven you. You pray with and for your learners and their families.  
“C” what they’ve learned?  
They’ve learned what it means to be a **Christian**.

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## The I.R.S. of DCE Ministry

It was the summer before my junior year in high school when I knew I wanted to become a Director of Christian Education. Yet, I had never known or even met a single DCE until the DCE Program Director passed my parents and me as we were touring a Concordia campus. He smiled. He stopped to visit with us. He called me by name. He laughed. We laughed. I was hooked.

Throughout my years in college, my DCE Program Director became a mentor figure for me. He made fun of my use of acronyms in college papers (he ought to love this reflection!). He pronounced my last name as if he were a cartoon character. He came up with a crazy idea for the DCE program to buy sweatshirts that imitated FBI apparel. He told funny stories about life in the parish, and he used random quotes in class that could probably sell books some day.

I quickly learned from both DCE professors and students alike that God has given His people many different gifts. One such gift God gives is a strong ability in the field of I.R.S., that is, **Intentional Relationship Stuff**. Maybe "stuff" seems too juvenile a word for a Christian education publication such as this. I disagree. DCEs have been gifted by God to help expand His kingdom, and many of them are pretty amazing at I.R.S. DCEs help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom because they are called to be intentional. Directors of Christian Education are called to direct one or more specific educational ministries of a congregation or in other settings such as a camp. I am convinced that DCEs are most effective when they *intentionally* involve others in whatever ministries they are leading. DCEs do not and should not fly solo. Instead, they are called to direct others. Directors

of Christian Education must be intentional about finding the "others" they are called to direct. Sometimes, congregations have programs and systems in place that provide a seamless transition to a DCE's leadership. In other situations, DCEs are the catalyst for creating and building such programs and systems to help a congregation move forward in mission. Directing Christian education involves intentional leadership focused on others.

DCEs help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom because they are called to foster relationships. I would be remiss to say that DCEs are more relational than pastors, teachers, or any other person serving in a church-work profession. Certainly, any church worker must foster relationships to carry out the Great Commission of our Savior. However, DCE ministry is unique in that DCEs are often called to help lead and direct multiple different ministries. Multiple ministries means multiple people, many of whom do not necessarily know what the role of the DCE is supposed to be in their church.

A DCE does not have the same type of immediate credibility that a pastor or teacher receives. Instead, a DCE's effectiveness and leadership credibility are formed through his/her ability to form authentic relationships. People may continue to worship in pews and listen to a pastor preach God's Word even if they do not have a relationship with that pastor. Students usually continue attending class with a teacher, even if that same teacher has not worked at building any kind of caring relationship for such students. In my experience, people will not choose to be directed (at least not for very long) by a

DCE with whom they do not have (or sense they will have) much of a relationship. For DCEs, intentional relationships fit together like steak and potatoes.

DCEs help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom because they are called to "stuff." I could probably list at least ten "stuffs" that any of a variety of Directors of Christian Education regularly lead within their specific ministry settings. Whatever "stuff" a DCE does, the effectiveness of one's directing is more significantly impacted by his or her intentional relationships than the actual program area itself. Read that sentence again. Soak it in.

I remember some of what my DCE Program Director taught me at college. I remember more about how he welcomed me to campus as a 16-year-old. I remember more about how he trusted me with a leadership opportunity within the DCE program. I remember more about his care and concern for my friendships and involvement in campus activities. I remember more about his hug when I came back for the mid-year gathering during my internship year.

May God richly bless your growth in I.R.S. as you help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom, whether you are a DCE or not.

*"My purpose is that they (Intentional) may be encouraged in heart and united in love (Relationship), so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Stuff)"* (Colossians 2:2-3).

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## “Christian education is a gift of a life. Eternal life!”

*Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*  
(Psalm 119:105)

The ministry of the director of Christian education is a wonderful supporting role that is mission-critical to the church. As noted in Dr. Mark Blanke’s article in this edition, the role of quality Christian education is essential not only for the individual but for the health and vitality of the Christian community. The Synod in 1959 understood the importance of education and the need to place an emphasis on building up the people of God through intentional educational programs in the local parish. Since this time, the DCE profession has developed its true niche within the structure and work of the Synod.

One of the most challenging efforts in shaping the profession of the DCE has been the process of helping parishes and the ranks of clergy to truly understand what it is that a DCE does and can do to enhance the educational life of a congregation. In the early days of the ministry, the role and function of the DCE was that of a generalist helping the pastor in any and all areas of ministry within the congregation. While the intent of the position was to focus primarily on the educational efforts for the church, DCEs often found themselves assuming many roles, including, at times, preaching. This often has brought about confusion in the role of the DCE and has distorted the identity of the DCE position and its relationship to the pastoral office.

Over the years, members of the profession have had much discussion and study in the formation of a formal definition that would clearly identify the position and function of the director of Christian education. A number of efforts to define the DCE can be found in the literature. In 1981, a formal definition was published by The Board for Parish Services of the LCMS (Griffin, 1981):

A director of Christian education is a professionally trained educator called by a congregation to plan, organize, coordinate, administer and promote the congregation’s ministry of Christian education. As a member of the congregation’s team of called ministers, the director works in close cooperation with the pastor particularly in the congregation’s educational ministry. The work of the director of Christian education is in the ministry of God’s people to build one another in the Christian faith and life. (Cf., Eph. 4:7-16). (Griffin, 1981, p.2).

While this definition was utilized by the program directors as a discussion piece in preparing DCE students, Keyne (1995) points out that it was not widely accepted as an official definition. “Only two of those interviewed in her research used this as the ‘official’ definition of DCE” (p. 186). A group comprised of the current and former program directors, synodical leadership and national DCE leadership (DCE Summit) met in 1995 to revise the previous definition so that it would better reflect the current understanding of DCE ministry.

Drawing from feedback gleaned from districts and field DCEs, along with research done by the DCE program directors, the group revised the definition in 1999 and included a mission statement and important values for DCEs. The definition reads: “A Director of Christian Education is a synodically certified, called and commissioned lifespan educational leader prepared for team ministry in a congregational setting” (LEA, 2000 p. 1). The mission statement is: “Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Director of Christian Education plans, administers, and assesses ministry that nurtures and equips people as the body of Christ for

spiritual maturity, service, and witness in home, job, congregation, community and the world” (p. 1). Important values for DCEs are: “Exhibit Christian character; Display a spiritually maturing faith; Relate well with people of all ages; Express a passion for teaching and learning; Possess a servant heart; Manage personal and professional life effectively; Seek to work in team relationships; Strive for excellence; Operate in a self-directed manner” (p.1).

This definition stands as the official definition of the DCE and is used in all formal publications and training institutions of the church. While the DCE still may find that one’s work in a team ministry involves helping in other roles that are assumed by the pastor or other commissioned workers, the DCE finds identity and purpose in the educational roles of the church. DCEs are trained to facilitate the educational agencies of the church, and when utilized in this focused capacity, they can best serve the church and the profession.

Our Synod is blessed with six training schools that prepare quality folks for the ministry of serving as directors of Christian education. There are currently more than 300 students preparing to serve our church body as DCEs. The preparation of these students is strong, firmly grounded in Lutheran theology and sound educational methodology that utilizes current approaches in meeting the needs of congregations to effectively communicate the Gospel.

The profession has come a long way in fifty plus years and is more ready than ever to face the challenges of our culture. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...” (Luke 10:2) There is clearly a need for quality Christian education in our congregations, and the DCE profession is prepared to meet these needs.

I challenge you, the reader, to be active in making a difference for the kingdom by being an advocate for Christian education, even if only by raising the question, "What are we doing in our local parish to enhance Christian education in our congregation?" Be active in evaluating the educational needs of your parish and ask: "Are adults active in Bible study and educational activities? Is your children's ministry preparing biblically literate young people? Are the youth of your congregation actively involved in the Word? Is the congregation providing training for parents to be partners in the faith formation of their children?"

Don't be afraid to challenge the youth in your congregation to consider a career in being a DCE. If you see the values and characteristics mentioned earlier in a youth, ask him or her to see if this might be an option in serving our Lord and Savior. Consider the service of a DCE as your congregation considers future staffing.

Directors of Christian education have found their niche! Christian education is a gift of a life. Eternal life! *Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* (Psalm 119:105)

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