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MISSIONAL EDUCATION
Missional Education Starts with Mission, and Mission Starts with the Heart of God

To get to the heart of missional education, one must start at the very heart of God! And the heart of missional education is the heart of the Gospel!

God was, through the sacrifice of His innocent, holy Son, Jesus, completely and freely forgiving the sins of mankind and reconciling the world to Himself. "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). And now, we who are reconciled through faith alone, are "appointed by Christ" to be His ambassadors of reconciliation. God, speaking through Paul, told the Corinthian Christians and He tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are, therefore, Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:17-20a).

Jesus Himself said that the purpose of His incarnation and earthly ministry, His purpose for coming into our world, was to seek and to save the lost. "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). It is purely, then, by His grace, that He calls us into that same mission of seeking the lost that He might save them. Isn’t that what He means when He calls us to be salt and light? "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).

Lutheran Christians are particularly fortunate—"well situated"—to utilize the resources and the opportunities for sharing the Gospel which are afforded to us throughout the whole system of Lutheran education from the earliest ages to our senior saints, and with everyone in between.

LCMS congregations operate the largest Protestant parochial school system in America. A recent report for the 2009-2010 school year showed that the LCMS has 2,444 total schools with an enrollment of 255,176 students in grades pre-school through 12th grade. The average Lutheran elementary school has 114 students and the average high school, 187 students. And in some of these schools, more than half the students are either unchurched or are not members of a Lutheran congregation.

Bill Cochran, Executive Director of LCMS Schools writes: "Lutheran schools celebrate their unique ministry to children and the families they serve. We have an opportunity to share the message with the community in which our schools are located … that Lutheran schools are Christ-centered, academically strong, and respectfully operated!"

Robert Newton, the LCMS California-Nevada-Hawaii (CNH) District President, recently said in his presidential report to the 2009 CNH district convention, "One of the last bridges remaining between our church and the unchurched in the post-church era is the education of children. Here is where our Lutheran schools, pre-schools and early childhood education centers continue to serve as critical mission posts in our communities."

In many of his private conversations and certainly in most of his public presentations, Terry Schmidt, Associate Director for
School Ministry, often boldly proclaims that "Lutheran schools are on the front edge of missions in North America! Care and compassion are the hallmarks of Lutheran schools. Christian service is where we are different from the public school. Lutheran schools are caring for and serving children first. They are family-centered and are intentionally reaching out into their communities with the love of God!"

Lutheran Missional Education, then, is all-encompassing and to be effective must involve every aspect of the Church’s education system, including: pre-schools and day cares, elementary day schools, junior highs, senior highs, and the colleges, universities and seminaries of the Church.

Each day in our Lutheran schools around the country and throughout the world, the Good News of Jesus, the living and the reigning Savior, must be shared in word and in action. Each day in our Lutheran schools, educators, pastors, secretaries and other leaders all have the tremendous opportunity to share the precious Gospel with children and their families. We celebrate the joy of being in Lutheran education and the blessings of being able to worship, talk about, and be a witness for our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Just how is this done among us? Rachel Klitzing, Executive Director of School Ministries for the Pacific Southwest District of the LCMS, wrote an article in March 2006 of the former New Harvest publication of the Center for U.S. Missions, listing ways that Lutheran schools in mission reach out to families who do not yet have a living faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Among suggested “touch points” of the Gospel are opportunities for:

- Teachers to teach children songs about Jesus, prayers, and Bible stories. Children repeat these at home. Questions about our faith are welcomed and encouraged!
- The pastor to meet with new non-Lutheran and unchurched parents at the beginning of each school year and talk about what Lutheran Christians believe and teach in making a Gospel presentation.
- All staff members to be intentional in witnessing to newly enrolled families, letting them know that the staff views their role as being partners with the parents in nourishing their children’s faith.
- Students to be involved in regular worship services as readers, instrumentalists, ushers, greeters, parking lot attendants, and singers. This gets parents through the doors of the church on a regular basis.
- Follow-up with families. On the school enrollment application, there is a place that indicates if parents would like to be contacted by one of the pastors. Many indicate that they would. Follow-up by the pastors is prompt and timely.

Lutheran schools, and our Lutheran school educators, are challenged every day to provide the highest quality of education, thus assisting and preparing children for success in this world and eternity. They strive to make every program an excellent program in order to draw people to the cross through us, because what we provide adds value to their lives, their families and their eternal welfare!

In another issue of New Harvest (March 2005), Paul Mueller, a former LCMS missionary in Africa, wrote, “Lutheran schools can be Christian missionary outposts which teach students to share Christ and which reach into the community not only to find more students, but to find unchurched families too! … A school will not intentionally reach out to the lost unless it sees its primary job as missionary. Without this passion, the school will simply serve its own.”

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that only synodically trained teachers serving in a parochial school setting are able to be involved in missional education. In addition to these dedicated servants of Christ, there are countless numbers of committed Lutheran Christians who are educators within the public school arena. While certain limitations are set on what, how and where they can share their Christian faith, these dedicated disciples of Christ nevertheless have the opportunity to put their faith into
practice through their Christian example, and as opportunity affords, in response to questions from their students, share the living Word of God, Jesus, with the students who know, respect and trust these teachers.

In addition to full-time professional educators within or outside the system of Lutheran education, missional education suggests and necessarily encompasses virtually every aspect of parish life and ministry. In other words, missional education is a part of everything we are and everything we do. It includes: worship and preaching; stewardship and outreach; music ministries and athletics; Sunday school, mid-week school and Vacation Bible School; men's and women's group ministries; youth and adult educational small-group opportunities in homes, the church and throughout the community.

**Being Missional Is Not Simply a Matter of Something We Do; Rather, It Is a Matter of Something We Are (or, Something We Strive to Become)**

Mission education and "being missional" encompasses more than accomplishing a few occasional mission-related activities. As helpful and well-meaning as they may seem to be, an occasional mission trip or activity, a gathering or an offering to "help someone somewhere" as a part of "doing mission work" are not necessarily being missional. Rather, being missional means "thinking 'mission' at every level." Being missional means asking, "How does mission touch everything we do and with which we are involved? How is mission a part of every aspect of our congregational life? How can everyone involved in church and school activities begin to see all their work and efforts through 'mission eyes'?

It's easy for us to see as "missional" those activities which directly involve proclamation of the Gospel, and yet at the same time, there are also hundreds of other supportive activities which, while they may not directly involve sharing the Gospel, contribute
significantly to accomplishing our mission and providing an atmosphere conducive to sharing the Gospel. These are all of the efforts and activities which provide resources, equipment, facilities and support for those who are directly involved in spreading the Good News.

In other words, missional education causes us to see that doing dishes and cleaning up after a meal where unchurched visitors from the neighborhood were invited into the church, setting up and taking down chairs, providing a ride, babysitting for the unwed, unchurched mother who is taking adult instruction classes at the church, for example, can all play an intentional role in the mission of sharing Christ. Some of the work is done “on the front lines,” and other support functions happen “in the background,” with each one playing an important part in the mission of the church, proclaiming Christ.

Our use of church and school facilities, the fellowship activities in which we engage and the people we invite, various types of community involvement, providing a Christian presence and witness in parades and at county and state fairs, interacting with teachers and students by volunteering in public schools, and meeting and working with police, fire fighters, and other public servants are all ways in which the servants of Christ might, with missional hearts, intentionally and effectively engage their community and world, seeking the uncommitted and unreached for the Kingdom of God.

These activities could be a part of being missional. Missional education seeks to empower, convince, encourage, inspire and equip men and women, boys and girls, grandpas and grandmas in our churches and schools to be a part of Christ’s mission to the world.

Missional education is not an easy task! Being missional isn’t always easy! But God blesses us in this task to which He sends us and His whole Church on earth. His Holy Spirit is at work through His Word, and we’ll know that missional education is happening, and that, as a church body, we’re “getting it” when: we find out that school-aged children are telling other neighborhood children about Jesus and are inviting them to Vacation Bible School; we hear our college and university students sharing their faith with others in their dormitories and classrooms; young adults are bringing hope in Christ to their friends; adult believers are prepared and are giving “an answer to everyone who asks [them] to give the reason for the hope that [they] have …” and as they do so “with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience” (1 Peter 3:15-16a).

**Missional Education for Lutherans Involves Disciples Making Disciples**

It certainly is our goal as Lutheran Christians to share our faith whenever and however God gives us the opportunity to do so. We pray for “eyes to see and ears to hear” so that we will be aware of the “divine appointments” God gives us every day to bear witness to His love through the sacrificial life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. God provides “open doors of witness opportunity” for us every day, and our goal is to go through those open doors!

As educators, as parents, as professional church workers, as individual believers in Christ, and as congregations, schools and districts, we seek to share the love of God in Christ with our own children and with everyone with whom we come into contact. By the power of His Word, through our witness, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the hearers to create faith.

At the same time, our vision ought not to culminate with the hope of making only one or two disciples here, and maybe one over there. Instead, our Spirit-inspired goal ought to be to share the faith so that God will make disciples who make disciples, who make disciples, who make … We desire to be a part of mission multiplication, an explosion of mission here and everywhere!

Teachers, and all Christians for that matter, need to learn the basic skills for confidently sharing their faith with both children as well as adults. And, as has been
said, it doesn’t end there. We not only teach the faith, but we also teach how to share the faith which has been received. Missional education is a matter of disciples making disciples!

The Changing Face of Missional Education

How have things changed? We live in an entirely different world than a generation ago. Support, motivation, expectations, our competitors have all changed.

The Gospel and its message of eternal salvation through faith in the sacrificial work of Christ, however, never changes. Nevertheless, the ways in which we seek to effectively share the timeless Word of God must and do adapt to the culture, setting and the needs of our hearers. God, I believe, allows the various forms of media, the Internet, YouTube, the use of video and DVD technologies, iPhones, Twitter, Facebook, blogging, the use of brand new technologies "yet to be seen" as ways in which the Gospel can be spread to "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language ..." (Revelation 7:9a).

Change is hard! John Maxwell stated, "If we are growing, we’re always going to be out of our comfort zone." But, perhaps, an even better way for us to think of it is to follow the suggestion of Gene Bunkowske who holds the Fiechtner Endowed Chair of Christian Outreach at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota. Bunkowske advocates the idea of "expanding our comfort zones," that is, learning, growing and becoming more comfortable with what’s "new" for us. In this context, it involves being willing to try new things and to do whatever it takes (within the bounds of the Law and the Gospel, of course) to share our faith in Jesus Christ with those who do not know and live for Christ as their Lord and Savior.

You Are Not Alone in this Task of Missional Education

Excellent partnerships exist, and many useful resources are available to assist and equip individuals, church workers, schools, congregations and districts in the Gospel task of missional education. Among others, some of the best might include the Synod’s Ablaze! Web site (www.lcms.org/ablaze), LCMS World Mission (www.lcmsworldmission.org or 800-433-3954), The 72—Partners on the Road (the former "harvesters") (www.lcmsworldmission.org/The 72 or 800-433-3954), The Center for US Missions (www.centerforusmissions.org), Lutheran Hour Ministries (www.lhm.org or 800-944-3450) and Concordia Publishing House (www.cph.org or 800-325-3040).

May God help us to give "an answer to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have” … and as we do so, may we do it "with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience" (1 Peter 3:15-16a). To that end may God bless us in this most important task of the Church!