

DECEMBER 2020

SCHOOL MINISTRY

Mailing



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
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School Ministry



DECEMBER 2020

SCHOOL MINISTRY MAILING

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Alight

FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND EDUCATORS



“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (LUKE 2:11).

***Merry Christmas* from your LCMS School Ministry staff!**

ALIGHT // VOL. 17, NO. 4 // DECEMBER 2020

A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Author: Dr. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of LCMS School Ministry Designer: Chrissy Thomas

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Computer File



Keeping Boundaries

Boundary (n.): “something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent.”¹

Have you hit your limit yet this year? There are an infinite number of possible responses to that question depending on your role in Lutheran education. Regardless of your role or location, I would venture to guess that you have indeed hit your limit on at least one thing this year. While there are certain events and issues that are outside of our control, to be honest, we often find ourselves at our limits as a result of poor boundary keeping. Now, before you start arguing about not being able to set boundaries as an educator, I want you to stop and think about that statement and ask yourself one question: what *different* boundaries have you set as a result of the changes in your school?

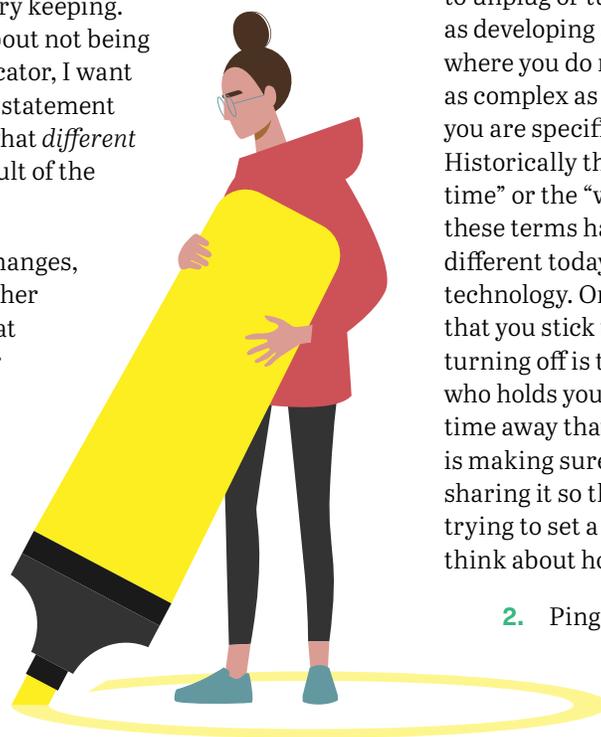
This school year, with all of its changes, is certainly different than any other year in recent memory. What that means is that you as an educator need to support yourself differently with different boundaries and limits than you may have had in the past. Remote learning, new technology and communication with parents and students all contribute to adding more to the plate of a teacher, and you need to take a step back and re-evaluate the

boundaries (technology and otherwise) you have set for yourself this year.

All of that said, it is difficult to think through boundaries when you are in the midst of an experience and even at your limit. To help, here are a few ideas and thoughts to get you started thinking about re-evaluating and keeping your boundaries this school year, and even setting a few new ones in the realm of technology.

1. First things first: be sure to set aside time to unplug or turn off. This could be as simple as developing a plan for a single weekend day where you do not work or answer emails, or as complex as a daily schedule of times where you are specifically doing something else. Historically this may have been called “family time” or the “work/life balance,” and while these terms have the same idea, it looks a little different today with our accessibility due to technology. One of the best ways to make sure that you stick to whatever plan you have for turning off is to have an accountability partner who holds you accountable for taking the time away that you planned. Another key step is making sure to write down your plan and sharing it so that others are aware that you are trying to set a boundary. This will help them think about how they view your time as well.

2. Ping! Ding! Beep! If you are anything like me, your phone gives off countless notifications throughout



¹ “Boundary,” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, last modified November 13, 2020, accessed November 17, 2020, Merriam-Webster, [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/boundary](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/boundary).

the day. Regardless of the time of day, something is always happening, or someone is trying to get in touch with you. While these notifications are often extremely beneficial, other times they are distracting and do not give you the ability to take a break or mentally distance yourself from issues that you left at your desk. Thus, if possible, try turning off email notifications or any other communication tools after a certain time in the day or on the weekend (those little bubble numbers count too!). I understand that for some people, such as administrators or pastors, this may not be possible, but there are certainly steps you can take to mitigate the avalanche of notifications that we receive every day.

3. If possible, develop a schedule of specific office hours for parent communication and messaging. While this may seem impersonal and limiting, it is no different than someone who works in an office on an hourly schedule or a business which has specific hours open for customers. If you are available at all times, you will be contacted at all times — it is as simple as that. Thus, it is essential to set and effectively communicate times where you are available for parent (or other) communication and establish a routine.
4. One of the most challenging boundaries to develop and keep in today's digital environment deals with setting limits on social media. One minute you are posting an update and then three hours later you are watching a cat ride a vacuum. Boundaries on time are important, but also boundaries on whom to interact with and how to interact as an educator are key. There could be volumes written on this, and everyone is in a different place when it comes to social media, but it is safe to say that everyone needs to constantly be aware of the personal boundaries they have set, and stick with them.
5. Remember, other teachers, students and parents are watching. This statement is not meant to induce even more stress! Instead, it is meant to help you realize that others will see your boundaries and limits from your actions. If you

send out a parent email at 11 p.m. on a school night, be prepared to receive emails from parents at all hours of the night as well. However, if no communication is sent over the weekend, and only emergency responses are sent, other individuals will eventually realize that you are setting and keeping boundaries and will adjust their behavior accordingly.

6. It is essential that you re-evaluate your boundaries and limits periodically to see if there is something that you are consistently getting to your limit on. Figure it out and set a new boundary or put a new action in place to help, learn to say “no” to something, or ask for help in figuring it out. Constantly being at your limit on something is not healthy, and re-evaluating will help you set better boundaries from what you have learned in the past.

After reading through all of these ideas and thoughts, you may be overwhelmed and say, “all of this is not possible!” It is important to remember that this will not be an overnight transition. It is important to work on one boundary at a time and not try to completely change everything all at once. Pick one area and make it better, then move on to another boundary or limit which you may be reaching and work on that. It will not always work or be perfect, but pretty soon you may find that you are sticking to your boundaries even better than before, despite all of the changes and the new technology.

Remember, at the start of this year's *Computer File* articles I issued a challenge. When each month's article is published, I want you to read through it, find something pertinent to you and your specific situation, and then post about it on social media to start a constructive discussion with your peers. As educators we well know that learning only takes place after the internalization of topics and having our thoughts and ideas challenged (or being forced to defend them). Thus, it is essential that we ourselves reflect on, internalize, express our thoughts and have constructive discourse on how the topic will impact our ministry both today and in the future.



Early Childhood Devotions

FOR CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 7



SENT TO SERVE **MATTHEW 20:28**

FOCUS: Freed to Serve. Galatians 5:13

Jesus, Infant King (Luke 2:1–20)

Before You Teach

Chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus, Mary said, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (LUKE 1:38). That unequivocal acceptance of the Lord’s word sent Mary and Joseph to unexpected places, beginning with Bethlehem and its lowly stable. We — children and adults alike — are also chosen by God for Kingdom service. Let us infuse our teaching with the willingness to do whatever and to go wherever the Spirit leads.

Welcome/Greeting

Greet each child upon entry: **Good morning child of God!** Adhere to the daily schedule as much as possible. Young children need routine! Security is found in knowing what comes next.

Gathering

YOU WILL NEED: An Advent wreath; battery-operated candles (available online or at a local church supply store): three royal blue, one pink and one white Christ Candle for the wreath center. Each week during Advent, light the appropriate candles while singing the corresponding verse of “Light One Candle” (LOSP, P. 78). Light the white center candle on the day of your celebration of Jesus’ birthday.

Tell the Story

Signal children to repeat bolded words and corresponding actions after you. Practice.

The ruler of Joseph and Mary’s country ordered everyone to travel to the place where they were born to sign their names (register) in a book. So Joseph and Mary traveled all the way to the far away town of Bethlehem. They did not have cars or buses, or trains or planes, so they walked. There were many, many travelers in Bethlehem who needed a place to stay for the night. **KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK** (*knocking action*), Mary and Joseph knocked on the door of an inn. **“NO ROOM, NO ROOM** (*shake index finger*)!” the innkeeper said. So, Mary and Joseph searched for another place to stay. **KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK** on the door of an inn. **“NO ROOM! NO ROOM!”** the innkeeper said. Soon Mary and Joseph discovered that there was **“NO ROOM! NO**



ROOM!” for them anywhere in the whole town. Finally, Mary and Joseph were told of a stable, a place where animals were kept. That night in that stable something very special happened. Jesus, God’s Son, our Savior, was born! Mary wrapped Baby Jesus in cloth and laid Him in a manger. There were shepherds watching their sheep in a field nearby. Suddenly angels appeared in the sky singing, *(speak loudly)* **“GLORY TO GOD! GLORY TO GOD! GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!”** *(Speak softly)* **“Peace to His people on earth.”** Repeat bold words with children.

Pray

Children repeat each sentence after you.

**Father God, in heav’n above,
Thank You for Your gift of love.
With the angels, we do sing,
Praises for our Savior King! Amen.**

Remember the Story

BIBLE WORDS TO REMEMBER

PRE-K & K: “Unto you is born ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (LUKE 2:11).

GRADES 1 & 2: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (LUKE 2:11).

Activities

CREATE: Stable Scene. *You will need: Brown, yellow, tan and white construction paper, 8-by-10 background paper.* For each child precut two brown rectangles of equal size (stable side walls) and one narrow rectangle (flat stable roof), a white oval (Baby Jesus’ body) and a tan circle (head). Provide precut yellow strips (the length of the manger) for children to fringe (straw). Guide children to assemble and glue shapes on background paper to create the stable and Baby Jesus in a manger.

DO: (Finger to lips) **Shhh. Shhh.** *(Whisper)* **A little baby is asleep. Quietly His name we speak. “Jesus” is His name.**



(Finger to lips) **Shhh. Shhh.** *(Whisper)* **A little baby is asleep. God did for us His promise keep.** *(Loudly)* **“JESUS” IS HIS NAME! SHHHhhhh.** *Sound fades quietly away.*

SING: “In a Little Stable” (LOSP, P. 81), “Away in a Manger” (LOSP, P. 82).

CAMP SERVE: “Own to Read.” Invite the community to participate in gifting children in impoverished communities with NEW books. Research shows book ownership to be equally as important as being read to in nurturing a child’s love for the printed word.

Sending

YOU WILL NEED: An angel figure.

Gather in the “Sending Circle.” Pray, inviting children to add prayer thoughts as the angel figure is passed and received. Children may quietly pass without speaking. Dismiss, saying to each, Jesus was born for YOU!

Live the Story

Strive to keep the “noise” of holiday anticipation and preparations to a minimum. Stick to your daily routine, doing less rather than more. Keep the birth of Jesus, our Savior, at the forefront! May you be richly blessed throughout your preparation and your celebration!



Family Matters

A CHRIST-CENTERED RESOURCE FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS



SENT TO SERVE

Sent to Bring Light

Let's face it: most of us are afraid of the dark in one way or another.

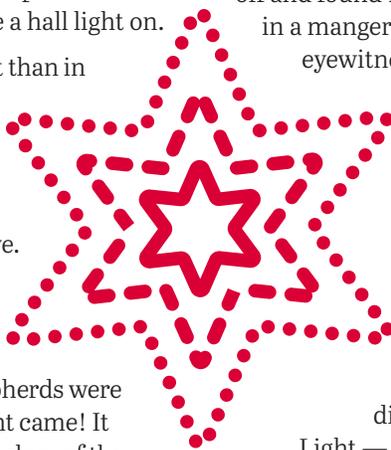
As adults, we may no longer be afraid of what's under the bed or in the closet, but there might be moments when we are alone, stuck on the side of road, on a dark night when we become scared. We might not even like walking to our car after working or shopping late at night.

We know our children have various fears about the dark. They don't want to go into their dark rooms — even if they can turn on the light. They don't want to sleep in a dark room, so we find them a night light or leave a hall light on.

Most of us are more comfortable in the light than in the dark.

One thing we look forward to at Christmas is all the lights. Lights on the tree, lights on houses, lights in public places! It certainly brightens things up and makes us feel festive. We enjoy seeing things lit up in a new and different way during the Christmas season as it brings us a sense of awe and joy.

On a dark hill outside of Bethlehem, as shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks at night, light came! It came in the physical form of an angel as the glory of the Lord shone on that hill. The shepherds' reaction to this sudden interruption in the night was fear. Light also came in the form of the message the angel told them, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (LUKE 2:11). The light continued to shine as suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God saying, "Glory to God in the highest" (LUKE 2:14).



This experience and message of light motivated these shepherds to go to Bethlehem — that very night. They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the Baby who was lying in a manger. There at the manger, they were the first eyewitnesses to this Light in human form — the Light that would enlighten the world with grace and truth and love.

After witnessing this light at the manger, these shepherds shared the light, as they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child — and all who heard this message were amazed.

At Christmas we are amazed by light.

While Christmas brings many great displays of light, it brings the one and only Light — Jesus, who was sent into the world to dispel the darkness of sin, death and the evil one. Jesus is the Light that guides people and nations. He is the Light that can brighten even the darkest of days.

As parents, we are quick to light the way for our child in a dark room. May we always point them to Christ the Eternal Light, this Christmas season and in all the seasons of their lives.

FUN FAMILY ACTIVITY //

Gather the family together in a comfortable setting, with no electronic distractions, preferably around a table (or other hard surface) to enjoy the family activity outlined below.

PROJECT TITLE: CELEBRATING THE LIGHT

PURPOSE

To engage family members in a fun activity that allows them to express themselves artistically as they plan to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

OPENER

Ask the following questions in your family setting to get a conversation going.

- Have you ever been afraid of the dark? If so, when?
- What are some of your favorite kinds of lights in our home? In the community?
- What are some of your favorite kinds of Christmas lights? Why?

BIBLICAL INSPIRATION:

In your family, have adults or older children take turns reading the “Christmas Story” from the Bible in Luke 2:1–20, and then discuss the following questions.

- Why do you think the shepherds were afraid?
- What helped them to not be afraid?
- How does Jesus help us to not be afraid?

FUN FAMILY ACTIVITY: Christmas Placemats

DIRECTIONS:

1. Find a suitable place in your home where family members have the space to spread out to do this project.
2. Obtain a piece of plain white paper that is at least 11” x 17” in size for each member of the family.
3. Locate markers and colored pencils of various colors and sizes.
4. Ask each family member to draw a different scene from the first Christmas on a large piece of paper. Options include: **Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem; Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus at the manger; the shepherds in the field when the angel appeared to them; the shepherds visiting the manger;** etc. Make sure that each person signs their drawing on the back and writes the date on it as well.



5. Obtain several rolls of clear contact paper/self-adhesive laminate in a size large enough to cover the pictures drawn by each family member.
6. Cut the contact paper/laminate to the size of the pictures and then cover each picture on both sides to create laminated placemats for use this Christmas season and for years to come!
7. If there are enough supplies, family members might want to make a second placemat with other Christmas symbols: wreath, Christmas tree, candles, presents, etc.

CLOSING PRAYER

At the close of the family session, have an adult or older sibling say the following prayer, phrase by phrase, with everyone repeating the words.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for Jesus, who is the Light of the world. Help us to walk in the light of Christ every day. Let us all reflect the light and love of Jesus every day. Bless us once again, this Christmas season, with the light of Christ! In the name of Jesus. Amen.



A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY



Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS



Inclusion Strategies: Promoting Classroom Inclusion Among Students

The circle-of-friends strategy outlined last month is a great way for students with disabilities to build friendships and become fully included. However, it is likely that other students in the classroom also need to build understanding of those with disabilities and how they can be a good friend to students who may be viewed as different.

The responsibility for working on friendships should not fall solely on the shoulders of the student with a disability. It is important to have some strategies and ideas for educating other students and helping them focus on the similarities, not just the differences, among their peers.

One thing to keep in mind while working toward inclusion is the way that we refer to students with disabilities. This can trickle down to how other students in the school perceive each other. It might seem convenient to say “Susie, you know, the one with autism” so that other teachers or administrators know which student is being discussed. However, language like that, even used in private conversations, further separates these students from others in our classrooms and schools. There is a graphic online in which a woman approaches a man in a wheelchair and asks him if he prefers to be called “handicapped,” or “disabled,” or “physically challenged.” The man’s response is “Joe would be fine.” For a truly inclusive school and classroom that celebrates how each individual is fearfully and wonderfully made by God, the most appropriate label for a student is her or her name.



In the book *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* by Barbara Newman (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2012), the author suggested using the visual of a key to help students identify their similarities. Teachers begin by talking to students about how God designed a special set of keys for each of us, and, just like a big key ring, the keys on everyone’s key ring are different and unique. Each key unlocks a different door. For younger students, teachers could bring in different keyrings or show pictures and look for similarities and differences in the keys on the ring. Continue the conversation with how God made each key to unlock a specific part of our brain, but since everyone’s keys are different, individual parts of the brain get unlocked at distinct times. However, this is all part of God’s plan and design to give us individual gifts!



Teachers can have keys printed out or a large key image displayed for the class, and then talk to the class about what keys God has already given them as teachers to unlock parts of their brains (examples such as walking, talking, listening, reading, making friends, teaching, being a parent, etc.). Write these words or use pictures to put on the keys displayed for the class, and then have students identify keys God has already given them to unlock parts of their brains. They could write these on individual keys printed for each student. Teachers can next identify some keys that God has not put on their key rings yet and discuss areas that God still has to unlock in their brains. Talk to the students about some of the keys God might put on their key rings this school year as they learn new skills. Use the keys students have identified to talk about how some students already have keys for some parts of their brain, while others are waiting on those keys or areas to be unlocked. These discussions help students see that while their brains are different, they all have some things in common. Tying this back to God's unique design for each of us reinforces the idea that He has created each of us with intention and purpose and does not want everyone to be the same.

For older students, the image of a brain could be used rather than the keys. Students can identify skills that they already have in their brains, such as attention, writing skills, physical abilities, etc. They can also think of words to surround the brain that represent skills they do not have yet. Have them compare these skills with classmates and realize that there are similarities and differences among all students, not just those with disabilities. If

parents and the student have given permission for a student's specific situation to be discussed, the teacher could discuss how "Johnny" has the key for the part of his brain that reads well, but he is waiting for God to give him the key for being able to pay attention during class because he has ADHD.

Inclusive activities should be used in an ongoing way with all students so that they can see how God gave us many similarities in addition to the sometimes-obvious differences. Helping students identify their similarities to each other builds an inclusive environment where all students value each other as equals, created for a purpose by our heavenly Father.



For more ideas on helping kids understand and include students with disabilities in Christian settings, check out *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* by Barbara Newman (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2012). Also reach out to Lutheran Special Education Ministries at lsem@luthsped.org or visit our website at luthsped.org and let us know how we can support your ministry in your inclusive efforts!

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A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Writer: Dr. Kara Bratton Designer: Frank Kohn

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Parent Pages

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



Raising a Perfect Family in a Pinterest Fail World



"It's okay." "You are enough." "Don't listen to the critics." These words are on common social media memes designed to relieve the anxiety that comes from expectations we put on ourselves as parents. Here is my personal favorite: "If parenthood came with a GPS, it would mostly just say: RECALCULATING."

It is not so much that we want to raise perfect children; instead, it is the fear of not ticking off all the crucial parenting boxes. What will happen to my child if I don't make sure he has every item, every experience, every accomplishment needed to be a successful adult? Our rational brains say our children will be just fine, but our worries keep asking, "What if I'm not enough?"

There is so much law in parenting. We use law with our children. We set standards and teach our children how to behave. We apply consequences when the rules

are not met and rewards when they are. The law is an essential tool for raising happy, healthy children.

Because we use law so often in our parenting, it is natural to turn that law on ourselves. If our children are behaving well, we label ourselves good parents. If things fall apart — especially in a public setting — we are sure we are failures. The truth lies somewhere between those two extremes. We are doing our best, and when our best isn't enough, we follow up with our children. We keep at the task. We love them. We pray over them. We tuck them into bed, kiss them on the forehead and try again the next day.

Parenting is often about law, but where do we find the grace? We find grace in God's plan for families. God designed us to be moldable rather than set in stone. In other words, we are clay, not granite. The mistakes we make, and the things we neglect, do not need to result in permanent harm. The Creator knows His children well. He has a plan to handle failure.

When we focus only on the law, we will collapse under the pressure of parenting. We may find the only way we can live with ourselves is to push the blame onto others. Teachers, the school or church, other children in the class ... anyone is to blame for our child's behavior — anyone but the child or the parent. This action is not standing up for our children. It denies the real reason for the conflict. This is what happens when we live under the law and ignore God's offer of grace. The consequence is the need for more blame because the fundamental issue remains. It often becomes a never-ending cycle with sinners living in a sinful world. This situation is not what we want for our families.

There is a freedom in accepting we are unable to parent on our own. There is joy in accepting forgiveness for parenting mistakes and in knowing God is working in the lives of our family members to bring about His good. We do not need to rejoice in failure; we can rejoice in the learning that failure brings. With God's help, we can apply that new learning.

Take the changes brought about by the pandemic, for example. The perfect parent plan would not have chosen a sudden shift to remote learning, isolation from family members or the list of recommended safety practices. Yet, God can bring good out of each situation. Children have the opportunity to practice self-directed learning, to discover new ways to reach out to loved ones and to develop a sense of resilience from adjusting to frustrating and uncomfortable regulations. As parents, we have a unique opportunity to nurture trust.

God's gifts to us include His Word and Sacraments. In these gifts, we find both His will and His forgiveness. Along with the guidance of Scripture, God blesses us with wise people who can provide a listening ear, words of encouragement and advice. Look to your pastor, DCE,

school administrators and teachers, all of whom want to see you and your family thrive in God's love.

We may be comforted by social media memes that assure us that we are enough, but that assurance is brief. Reality keeps knocking at the door and, sooner or later, we no longer believe "it's OK." The comforting truth is that our parenting GPS will only lead us to a parenting fail. We are not enough — but our joy is in knowing that God is enough.

“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (EPH. 3:17-19).

“ There is joy in accepting forgiveness for parenting mistakes and in knowing God is working in the lives of our family members ...



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Writer: Dr. Kim Marxhausen Designer: Lisa Moeller

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Professionally Speaking



Sent to Serve – With Excellence

“Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way.”

– Booker T. Washington¹

“Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence.”

– Vince Lombardi²

“The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential ... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence.”

– Confucius³



To be the best. To strive for excellence. Excellence in sports. Excellence in institutions of all kinds. Excellence as an individual. One might say striving for excellence is, well, American. The American way is to work hard, to show grit and determination and to excel.

In Lutheran schools, we use resources like National Lutheran School Accreditation to plan for improvement, to seek best practices and to work toward excellence. Most school purpose statements reference sharing Christ and also commit to excellence.

So what do we do with Paul when, in 1 Thessalonians 4, he encourages the church in Thessalonica to “aspire to live quietly” (v. 11). (Cue the shock face emoticon.) Some

translations use the phrase “a tranquil life.” It sure sounds like hard work and focused attention may be out of line with Paul.

Consider Jesus’s words to His disciples who asked to sit on the Savior’s right and left in His heavenly reign. His response chided them and said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (MARK 10:43-45).

In support of this quiet life is our Lord Himself. Born in a manger. Triumphant entry on a donkey. Arrested, crucified and buried. Instead of a puffed-up message of “Look at me,” He healed the sick and washed His disciples’ feet. It sure doesn’t capture the American version of excellence.

Go back to 1 Thessalonians and Paul gives us the context for his direction. “You yourselves have been taught by

¹ “Booker T. Washington Quotes,” *Quotes.net*, accessed November 19, 2020, quotes.net/quote/49692.

² “Vince Lombardi Quotes,” *BrainyQuote.com*, accessed November 19, 2020, brainyquote.com/quotes/vince_lombardi_385070.

³ “Confucius Quotes,” *BrainyQuote.com*, accessed November 19, 2020, brainyquote.com/quotes/confucius_119275.

God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia” (4:9-10).

What does striving toward excellence look like? In Christian life it’s about love: love of neighbor in honoring and respecting authorities, leading a sexually pure life, taking care of your neighbor’s and your property, keeping your neighbor’s good name, serving your neighbor. There’s no support for making a name for yourself, reaping the benefits of working hard, gaining more property (especially at the expense of a neighbor), proving yourself over someone else’s point of view or calling out the wrongs of your neighbor.

As usual, God has a much different way of looking at life and defining excellence. Should we teach hard work? Should we teach skills and encourage them to be done well? ABSOLUTELY! The nuance is to do all to the glory of God and in love of our neighbor.

So how does this look in the curriculum of the school? As far as the written curriculum, we must be very aware! For years, Lutheran schools have been satisfied with teaching from a national, secular, standardized textbook. Decades ago, it became clear that textbook companies aimed their product at large, influential states knowing that the rest of the nation would follow. You can be sure Lutheran schools were not considered in the process.

Today, it’s imperative that each teacher, each school, “owns” the written curriculum. It’s obvious that, as an LCMS school, we have to make the needed adjustments to teach science according to a biblical worldview as opposed to widely accepted evolution-based views. But this is imperative for history as well since textbooks fall prey to a variety of special interest biases. Kudos to the

LCMS Indiana District that worked with a large team of teachers, a core curriculum team and two strong commissioned teachers in writing a uniquely Lutheran map-based K – 8 school social studies curriculum.

Let’s also be careful of our schools’ hidden curriculum. Does that curriculum show a most excellent way? As a written curriculum has its three Rs (we in Lutheran schools have four when we add religion), hidden curriculum also has its own Rs. Rules and routines speak loudly of what is valued in our school. How do those Rs reflect love for our neighbor? If we reflect on classroom



Today, it’s imperative that each teacher, each school, “owns” the written curriculum.

rules, homework rules and (dare I mention) COVID-19 rules, do they reflect love for colleagues, classmates, parents and the community? Consideration of how educational goals are supported by communicated values is essential as excellence is sought.

We live in a challenging world. Let’s work on excellence, not conforming to a worldly view, but with eyes of faith.

Professionally Speaking // DECEMBER 2020

A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Writer: Mark Muehl Designer: Erica Schwan

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Rattles & Prattles

A RESOURCE FOR CAREGIVERS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS



Freed and Chosen to Serve “THROUGH LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER” (GAL. 5:13).



December Theme: God chose people long ago to serve.

Bible Story: God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus, the Savior (LUKE 1:26-38; 2:1-7).

What it teaches us: God gave Angel Gabriel, Mary, Joseph and Jesus special tasks. God chooses us to serve Him too.

Prepare to teach

› **Read** the story in the references and, if possible, a study Bible.

› **Think:** Our Scripture readings show how God chose people to serve. Gabriel, the angel, was chosen to tell Mary that God chose her. Mary is chosen to serve as the mother of the promised Savior. Jesus was chosen to save all people from sin, death and the power of the evil one. Joseph is chosen to be the earthly father of Jesus to love and care for Him.

› **Pray:** Dear God, You chose people long ago to serve You and others. We know You chose us to serve You and others. Help us show our love for Jesus in all we say and do. Amen.

WORSHIP TIME AND BIBLE STORY PRESENTATION

You will also need:

- **Little Ones Sing Praise** (LOSP), copyright © 1989 Concordia Publishing House (CPH), St. Louis, Mo.
- **Picture of Jesus** (find one doing an internet search)
- **Pictures:** find pictures: Angel Gabriel, Mary, Joseph, manger, adult Jesus.

Gather for Worship

Sing (use melody “Mulberry Bush”): **Boys and girls, come sit with me ... Boys and girls, come sit with me, right here on the floor.**

Invocation: Sing (using melody from above): **We gather here in God’s name...Father, Son and Spirit, too.**

Opening Song

Show picture of Jesus. **Jesus loves each of us. We learn about Jesus’ love in the Bible.** Sing “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know” (LOSP, p. 42).

Bible Story

Use pictures suggested above with tree cookies or glove puppet; sing the song to the tune of “Ten Little Indians.”

- Show Gabriel: **God said, “Gabriel, go tell Mary (repeat twice) ... You’ll-be the mother of My Son.”**

- Add Mary: **Gabriel went and talked to Mary (repeat twice) ... “Your Son will be the Savior.”**
- Replace Mary with Joseph: **Gabriel told Joseph care for Mary (repeat twice) ... and the Baby Jesus.**
- Show Mary, Joseph and the manger: **Jesus born on Christmas Day (repeat twice) ... in a little stable.**
- Show adult Jesus: **Jesus came to be our Savior (repeat twice) ... He died and came alive.**

What the Story Teaches: God sent Jesus to take away all our wrong choices. Now God chooses us. Listen to this song; it tells us what we can do.

Song to Sing: “God Chose You and God Chose Me” (LOSP, P. 107).

Time to Pray

Thank You, God, for Jesus, Your very own Son. Thank You, God, for sending Him to serve and save everyone. Amen.

Closing/Benediction

(Use “Mulberry Bush” tune.) **Now it’s time to say goodbye ... Now it’s time to say goodbye. Remember God loves — and cares — for you.**



CURRICULAR MATERIALS //

IDEA STARTERS for integrating the Bible story and theme into STREAMS (curriculum)

S Science and Nutrition

- > **Science:** Place small replicas of farm animals in the sensory table filled with hay. Invite children to feel and find them. Mimic and identify sounds.
- > **Nutrition:** Serve animal crackers with milk. You might share milk comes from cows. Remember to wash hands and pray before eating

T Technology

- > Invite the children to play with a toy that makes animal sounds or show a YouTube video of farm animals and the sounds they make.

R Reading and Language Arts

- > **Books to Read:** board book: *Christmas in the Manger* by Buck/Bond (HarperFestival, 1998)
- > **Action Poem:** Mary and Joseph traveled one day to Bethlehem far away. They were tired at the end of the day; they needed a place to eat and to stay. They knocked and knocked upon each door. But, everyone said, “No room for more.” They found a place where animals stay; there they made a bed of hay. Very early on Christmas morn, Jesus our Lord and Savior was born. {Words from a poem by Donna Bobb [Marti Beuschlein, Judy Williams, Pam Nummela and Michele Pickel, *Faith Alive: Teacher’s Guide for 2’s and 3’s* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 126.]} Chant, begin softly and get louder: **Jesus is born. Jesus is born. Jesus is born. Hooray.** Repeat, getting softer. {Adapted from chant by Michele Pickel [*Together with Jesus: A Curriculum for Parents and Their Two-Year-Olds* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), 18].}



E Engineering

- > Invite the children to make a place for Baby Jesus (e.g., cave or stable). Note: Early Christian tradition says Jesus was born in a cave.

A Arts (art, music and physical education)

- > **Art:** Dip small straw “brooms” in yellow tempera to paint hay. Optional: Add a duplicated picture of Baby Jesus.
- > **Music:** “In a Little Stable” (*LOSP*, P. 81). Sing verse one as written. Change second verse to: “Mary fed her baby, Joseph watched with care, For this Babe was Jesus, Lying, smiling there.”

- > **Large Motor:** Pretend “walking to Bethlehem.” Make an age-appropriate obstacle course/road (e.g., balance beam to walk over, folded blanket/hill to walk around, etc.).

M Mathematics

- > Count the figures used in telling the story. How many big people? Babies? Angels?

S Social Studies

- > God gives Mary Baby Jesus to care for. Take care of babies in the housekeeping area.

CONNECT WITH PARENTS in your newsletter

Encourage parents to purchase an age-appropriate manger set to use to retell the story of Jesus’ birth.



School Shepherd

TIPS AND SUPPORT FOR PASTORS OF CONGREGATIONS WITH SCHOOLS



THEME | SENT TO SERVE

Sent to Serve Compassionately



“Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages ... healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”

(MATT. 9:35-36).

The Compassion of the Good Shepherd

Jesus was sent to serve compassionately. Jesus’ compassion was demonstrated in His “healing every disease and every affliction,” feeding the hungry, raising the dead, conversing with the rejected and interacting with children. Jesus demonstrated compassion from the cross as He arranged care for His mother and His disciple John.

Jesus spoke compassion to those who ridiculed Him and nailed Him to the cross as He pleaded, “Father, forgive them” (LUKE 23:34). In His death, Jesus reached out to provide healing for the harassed and helpless in their sinful nature.

Jesus’ compassion was more than a human attribute. Victoriously risen from the dead, the compassion of Jesus continued as He greeted the grieving Mary Magdalene, listened to the confused disciples walking to Emmaus and restored and commissioned a repentant Peter.

Lutheran schools share the saving compassion of Jesus and His continuing compassionate Word. Jesus speaks to the “harassed and helpless” child, parent, teacher, custodian and shepherd of the Lutheran school.

The Compassion of the School Shepherd

Even as the disciples were sent as Jesus’ instruments of compassion to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (MATT. 10:8), school shepherds are sent to serve those who need the compassionate message and presence of Jesus.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (LUKE 10) describes the needy “neighbor” (v. 29) lying on the side of the road. Jesus describes the response of the Samaritan: “When he saw him, he had compassion” (v. 33). The compassion is then demonstrated in immediate medical attention and arrangements for care and compensation.

The pastor preaches and teaches of Jesus’ compassion as he leads the Divine service and school chapel services. In the daily duties of the office of the ministry,

compassion is spoken and shared with the hospital patient, nursing home resident, burdened parishioner, needy family, homeless visitor and a host of other interactions.

The dynamics of a Lutheran school provide many opportunities for the compassionate Word and compassionate presence of Jesus. The kindergarten student enters the building with a slow shuffle and sad eyes. The pastor greets the student and welcomes him into the safety and friendship of the school building. The teacher shares her family burden at the morning faculty devotions. The pastor includes the burden in the staff prayers and continues the follow-up at the end of the school day, “Let us know if there is anything else we can do for you.” The parents of the eighth-grade student stop in to share their concern about this daughter who has seemed depressed and has exhibited other behaviors which may indicate mental health concerns. The pastor listens compassionately and assists them in finding resources for the health of their daughter and to support them in the family journey.

“Harassed and helpless” are in every setting in our sinful world. The Lutheran school, with its many interactions and connections with children and families, brings many opportunities for the school shepherd and staff to be the compassionate presence of Jesus.

Sent to Serve Compassionately in Lutheran School

There are “harassed and helpless” children in a Lutheran school. Lutheran schools must be physically and emotionally safe for all children. Pastor, principal and board will make sure that school policies and procedure provide safety in all situations. Fortunately the mental health of children is receiving increased attention. Pastor, principal and teachers should be aware of signs of distress and cries for help and have access to appropriate Christian counseling and other assistance.

There are “harassed and helpless” families in a Lutheran school. Their specific needs and situations will depend greatly on the school ministry context and community. Is your Lutheran school located in an impoverished community? Are there single-parent families? Are



Jesus. Thou are all compassion, pure, unbounded love Thou art; Visit us with Thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.”

(LSB 700:1)

families distracted by peer or community pressure to live a certain lifestyle or encourage the over-participation of children? The church and school may be a center for economic assistance, parenting classes and other programs.

Lutheran schools are located in communities of “harassed and helpless” neighbors. The Lutheran school can bring the compassion of Jesus to the local community. Children might bring food donations for the local food pantry. The school gymnasium or playground may be the site for community interactions to bring down racial, economic or other barriers.

The school shepherd’s ministry is broad. He cannot be school counselor or community organizer. He does see those who are “sheep without a shepherd” (MATT. 9:36), and he leads them to the Good Shepherd who was sent to serve and to give His life for the flock.



Sharing our Compassionate Thoughts

- ◆ When have you experienced the compassion of a Christian friend or ministry partner?
- ◆ How is the message of Jesus’ compassion shared and lived in your Lutheran school?
- ◆ What opportunities are there to be a more compassionate Lutheran school to all children, families and the community?



Time Out for Directors

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TIPS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER ADMINISTRATORS



Serving Christ (and Others) at Christmas



December is a busy month! Decorating your home and classroom; baking treats for a variety of different people and purchasing gifts for family members, friends and students likely take up much of your time. In addition to the regular work you do in a Lutheran school, preparing for and celebrating Christmas can almost feel like another full-time job.

Hopefully, Christmas is a special holiday for you, and you do all of the Christmas tasks because you enjoy them. While you know that Christmas is all about Christ's birth, it can be hard to keep this fact as the main focus in your heart during this time of year. It's easy to practice for your school Christmas program and share with your students the importance of the Christmas story; however, the stress that comes from family gatherings, work parties and secular pressure to purchase items can be overwhelming for some.

The best way to ensure you keep Jesus Christ in each of your Christmas celebrations is to make sure He is present in your life each day. You may have heard the phrase, "keep Christ in Christmas," but what does this really mean? It means more than simply keeping the letters C-h-r-i-s-t in the word Christmas; it means showing the character, spirit and love of Christ that is within you each day through your words and actions.

Young children are often in awe of their teachers. You hold a special spirit and share that gift when you talk to children. Your students look up to you, whether you are a teacher or an administrator, or both! Many parents share how often children say at home, "well, my teacher said ..."! Children say these things because they love and respect you. Children believe in what you say. When you share the love of Christ in many different ways, you are showing children His love, grace and mercy. You are sent to serve; you are sent to serve Christ in a Lutheran school ministry setting.

As you go about your typical school (and home) Christmas festivities, ponder incorporating the following ideas that will help keep Christ as the focal point in your life this Christmas season:

Give a Gift to God

What could God possibly need or want? Actually, nothing. However offering a sacrifice can be something very meaningful. Fasting can be an act of spiritual growth for some. Perhaps your gift may be to forgive someone that you have needed to forgive for a long time. Or, perhaps you can give the gift of time and commit to spending additional time in devotion and prayer each day. What can you give as an act of service to Christ?

Read the Christmas Story

Yes, you have likely read a variety of Christmas storybooks to your students, and you have heard the real Christmas story many times during your life.

However, when is the last time you actually opened Scripture and read the story from God's Word? Set aside a special time to read through the Christmas story in Luke. Take this idea further and read together with your family or with colleagues at your school.

Take a Deep Look at a Favorite

Nativity Scene

Nativity scenes are fun to set up, and children love playing with them at school (and home). Spend some quiet time taking a deep look at your favorite nativity scene. Think about Mary and Joseph and what they were thinking when they traveled to Jerusalem. Think about the moments when the shepherds first saw Baby Jesus. What was that night like? Enjoy some tea and spend time in prayer. Thank God for the gift of Jesus and that those who were chosen to serve did so with full faith and trust in Him.



meaning of servant-giving. Why give gift to others? For some, selecting gifts, wrapping them and presenting them to others is special; for others, it's a chore. Sometimes the most meaningful gifts are given unexpectedly. If you know someone who is struggling, financially or personally, consider giving that person a gift that they need at the moment — all anonymously. God sent Jesus not only so He would receive glory, but also because of His great love for all.

The list of possible ideas to keep Christ as the center of Christmas could continue; what other ideas can you develop and implement? Consider using this *Time*

Out for Directors as a devotion at one of your December faculty meetings. As a leader in your Lutheran school, you set the tone for service, both within and outside of your ministry setting. Be sure to let your faculty and staff know the importance of service during the Christmas season — and throughout the year. Remind them that because of what Christ has done for them, they are given the special opportunity to serve others and give back.

Incorporate Acts of Service

It is popular to offer gifts to those who are less fortunate during the holiday season. If you choose to contribute goods or make a donation to an organization or person in need, do so with a mindset of service to Christ. Look for ways to include action in your service rather than only a financial gift. Which organizations in your community need volunteers? Which people in your church or school community need someone to visit with them and lend a listening ear? How can you bridge service to your congregation by representing your school in special volunteer opportunities? If your congregation is organizing an opportunity to engage in service, talk with your students about what it means to serve someone else and how they can become involved. Talk about how acts of service show glory, thanks and praise to God.

Give Unexpectedly

The holidays are certainly a time for giving, but do not let the thought of giving gifts for fun overshadow the

Scripture Verses about Serving Others:

“In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (ACTS 20:35).



“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (MATT. 5:16).

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do” (HEB. 6:10).

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (PHIL. 2:4).

“Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you” (1 SAM. 12:24).