

# FOLLOW JESUS IN THE WORLD:



TO PROTECT GOD'S CREATION



TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER



TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS



TO BE DISCIPLES



TO BE PEOPLE OF PEACE

**2010-2011 DEVOTION GUIDE**  
FOR ELCA SCHOOLS AND EARLY  
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTERS



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.





**AUGUST 1, 2010 – TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: LUKE 12:13-21**

Whether you serve in a school with a traditional or year-round calendar, tomorrow morning—Monday—will provide another opportunity to prepare to work with young people later in the month or to actually do so. What will you teach your students, and how?

In “The Parable of the Rich Fool,” Jesus offers a life-changing lesson for all ages: Life is precious and short. It is meant to be enjoyed and shared in God’s forever love—not wasted in the greedy pursuit of temporary wealth.

You can teach this lesson by telling this parable and citing Jesus as the storyteller.

Perhaps even more powerfully, you could also offer yourself as a living object lesson by continuing to take the time to get to know and love your students. The young people will experience God’s love firsthand through you. Meanwhile, God will have made you “rich toward God” (v. 21). God’s love therefore becomes a joy-filled gift for the children and for you.

God’s richest blessings to you in your ministry to God’s children!

**Questions for the Week:**

What opportunities can you find this week to open yourself to God enriching your life and your students’ lives? How does it change your perspective on life to be made “rich toward God”?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Gracious God, thank you for enriching my life to the point of eternity through the children and young people that you have entrusted to my care. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by freelance writer Pastor Karl Biermann, St. Mark’s Lutheran Church; Cuero, Texas.*

The ELCA Vocation and Education program unit wishes to thank all of those who took time from their busy schedules to provide devotions for the 2010 – 2011 ELCA Devotion Guide for early childhood education centers, elementary schools, junior and senior high schools. Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

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THANK YOU

**JULY 31, 2011 – SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 145:15-16**

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*The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.*

I did not appreciate doing memory work five days a week when I was in Lutheran elementary school. Every night, even Sundays, my brother, sister and I would memorize our “piece” as we called it. But the psalm verse above was an exception. It was not only appreciated, it was comforting. You see, it was the regular table prayer at Grandpa Becker’s house, so without realizing it, my grandpa (and God) had prepared me for this memory assignment.

Today, half-a-lifetime later, I not only appreciate the memory work from the Lutheran school days, but as I attempt to “follow Jesus in the world,” I see the wisdom and power in having children of God memorize scripture. In these days that can hold uncertainty, worry, doubts and (you can fill in the blank with your own concerns) periodically the verses I memorized more than forty years ago come to mind at the most opportune times. God indeed does open God’s hand and satisfies all of our desires. How comforting to trust in God’s word for everything important and know that those needs will be supplied at the proper time.

**Questions for the Week:**

What are the core elements of our school day that truly help our students and their families “follow Jesus in the world”? How might we make certain that our parents understand the importance of the core elements? Is there a way to help our school parents reinforce these lessons at home?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Pray that God would help our faculty, staff and parents discern the best way to use parts of the school day to help the children follow Jesus in the world.

*This devotion was contributed by Brian Becker, vice president for Ministry Programs, Wheat Ridge Ministries, Itasca, Illinois. Brian says he has “Lutheran schools in his DNA having attended Lutheran schools from K-8, taught in Lutheran schools, and both of his children attended Lutheran schools JK-12th grade.*

**AUGUST 8 – ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: HEBREWS 11:1**

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*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

For educators the early part of August is time to begin focusing on the coming school year. During the early summer the remnants of the past year are tied up and put in on the shelf with the artifacts of other years. The middle of the summer is a time of recreation and renewal; part of the process is to think neither of the past nor the future. August awakens expectations, concerns and uncertainties. What will the year bring in terms of each of the students? What challenges will they bring to the school and classroom? How will I balance my family life with the demands of quality education? How will I maintain my health amid stresses and compressed time?

In the book of Hebrews the writer faced such uncertainties, as grace replaced all of the rules and rituals that the people of Israel had used for centuries. The sight of the blood of sacrifice, the texture of the fur and feathers of the animals, and the pungent smoke all were very visible and powerful reminders of their relationship with God. Now these new Christians faced a future without the assurance of solid tradition, replaced by a grace that could not be seen, touched or smelled.

Isn’t this just like an impending school year? It would be reassuring to have everything framed by hard and fast rules and regulations. Each student would be intelligent, highly motivated, with no health concerns and from a fully functional family. The budget would allow for all of the tools of the trade to be in place, and everyone would be on the same page in support of the goals and objectives of the program. Instead, each new year will be filled with more questions than answers and more possibilities than certainties.

What we do have is the gift of faith. Faith gives us the assurance that the Lord will walk with us as we work for things hoped for: that each student experience the love of Jesus in all aspects of the school; the conviction of things not seen: the growth and development of the spirit, body and intellect. Trust and enjoy the yet-to-come miracles of the coming school year.

**Question for the Week:**

Faith enables us to live in hope and conviction of the unseen. What are your hopes for the coming year?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Pray for a strong faith that will carry you into and through the coming school year and for wisdom to work through each challenge as the school year unfolds.

*This devotion was contributed by Hugh Kress, Waupaca, Wisconsin, who served Lutheran schools for 40 years as teacher and principal. He now serves as accreditation coordinator for the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association and director of the Centers of Wellness Project.*

**JULY 24, 2011 – SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 13:31-32**

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*...The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.*

Can you even picture such a thing? I think we have all tried to imagine what the kingdom of heaven must be like, trying to compare it to something we know. Jesus, like you, is a great teacher. He uses stories to tell us of God, of God's love and of God's kingdom. What a great picture Jesus painted for us to try to describe what the kingdom of heaven is like. A mustard seed. How exciting it must have been to hear these wondrous parables from the mouth of Jesus!

I am a mother of an 18-month-old and she already is a lover of stories. For many years I have collected children's books in hopes that one day I might have the opportunity to read them to my child. Every evening, without fail, she will run to the shelves where her books reside and carefully pick out a book or two for us to read to her. It is a gift to be given the opportunity to read, to tell and to share stories. Especially to children. Many of us live with the memories of stories told to us as children and carry those with us our whole lives. It is so important to tell stories to our children for them to carry on. They, like mustard seeds, start out as these tiny little beings that when given good love, care and nurturing will grow into mighty beings with capabilities to change the world. And, at the very least, continue to pass on the stories.

**Questions for the Week:**

Which of Jesus' parables is memorable for you? What have been some mustard seed moments in your life?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Pray for all teachers and educators. Pray for those who capture and share stories.

*This devotion was contributed by Andrea Young, assistant director for Ministry Leadership, Vocation and Education program unit of the ELCA, Chicago, Illinois.*

**JULY 17, 2011 – FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ISAIAH 44:6-8**

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The first and the last. How many times in a given day do we think about firsts and lasts. “First thing I do when I get home...” “Last thing before I leave today...” “What should we do first?” “Why am I always the last one to hear about things?” Very rarely do we think about all the things in the middle, which is probably why God emphasizes “I am the first and I am the last.”

Focusing on God as the first and the last allows us to stand on solid ground...on a rock. It allows us the freedom to share all of our concerns with God first and to turn to God last when all else has failed. It gives us the encouragement to know that God is with us from the first moment of the day to the last. It gives us a celebration partner from the first moment of joy until the last partygoer goes home.

And that rock gives us the security to “not fear, or be afraid.” This security allows us to fumble through everything between the first and the last. It gives us the ability to share with others our declaration of peace in God’s presence at all times. Ultimately it means we can think more fondly of the “firsts” and the “lasts” of our days.

**Questions for the Week:**

What does God as a “rock” mean for you? How do you use “firsts” and “lasts” in your daily life?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Ask for God’s presence to be known from your first waking moment to your last. Recognize all the ways in which God is a rock for you and those around you.

*This devotion was contributed by Pamela Evans, administrative assistant for Youth and Young Adult Ministries, ELCA Vocation and Education program unit. Prior to this call, she had the joy of living in a home of 11 at-risk boys ranging in age from 9 to 13 following her graduation from Wittenberg University.*

**AUGUST 15, 2010 – TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: HEBREWS 11:29-12:2**

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*Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.*

I once saw this printed on a marathon event t-shirt. How appropriate! Completing a marathon does indeed take incredible perseverance. One must be **diligent**. The training requires hours of dedication. One must be **patient**. A marathon is 26.2 miles, not a 100-meter sprint. One must be **committed**. The commitment must be strong enough to push through the fatigue and finish the race. This is the same perseverance that freed the Israelites from slavery and crumbled the walls of Jericho. We must practice this same perseverance as educators. This means being diligent in planning effective lessons, patient when students do not understand and committed to presenting the material in a way the students can comprehend. We became educators through perseverance and through it we will continue to guide future generations.

**Question for the Week:**

Think of a time you needed to practice perseverance. How did your faith in God help you persevere?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Pray for the diligence, patience and commitment to run with perseverance the race set before us.

*This devotion was contributed by Michelle King Rimer, director of the Solmaz Institute for Obesity at Lenoir Rhyne University, Hickory, North Carolina.*

**AUGUST 22, 2010 – THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ISAIAH 58: 9B-10**

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*If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.*

As teachers, we consider it our responsibility to teach children the truth of cause and effect and that there are consequences for our actions. This is evident in the rules we set up in our classrooms. It is also evident in our every day activities. If you play in the snow with your shoes on, then your feet will get wet; if you scream at your friends, then they won't want to play with you; if you put the toys away where they belong, then you will know where to find them next time; if you give your friend a hug, then it will help to make them happy.

This is what God is trying to tell us here, **IF** you stop making trouble for others, using cruel words, gossiping; **IF** you take care of the needs of others, those who are troubled, down-and-out, **THEN** the darkness of the night will become like day—you will glow, there will be joy in your life. This is an important lesson for all of us to learn and to remember. It is too easy to fall into the pattern of putting down others to lift ourselves up, but God is telling us that this is not how it works. Out of the mouth of a third grader at my school came this statement, “If you play with someone the other kids don't like, you make them feel better and that makes you feel better.” If she has learned that lesson at the age of 9, we should all know it and follow it at our age, whether it be 29, 49 or 69.

**Questions for the Week:**

Think of some ways you have been cruel this week through things you have said, gossiping, or not stepping up to help. How does that make you feel when you think on these things?

Think of some ways that you have stepped up to help someone else. How does that make you feel?

Think of a time when you have needed help or support and someone has been there for you. How does that make you feel?

What really turns your internal gloom into sunshine and how can you control that?

**JULY 10, 2011 – FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ISAIAH 55: 10-11**

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*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

Read again Isaiah's imagery of God's word falling like rain and snow on a parched earth. The moisture unleashes a string of results that are life-giving, life-stirring, and far reaching. This is the word that we are entrusted with and asked to proclaim when we follow Jesus.

When you first responded to the call to serve as an educator, did you imagine the extent to which you would influence young people? Did you trust the life-changing consequences of following Jesus and walking in the rain of God's word? Probably not, but neither did the disciples when they first dropped everything and followed Jesus only to discover that God would accomplish amazing things through them.

God's word of forgiveness, reconciliation, love, hope and justice rain—and snow—down on you every day, all day long. In turn, you sprinkle that same word onto your students. And they, in turn, follow your example and splash the world around them. Nothing we do as we follow Jesus is empty or meaningless. Have faith, God is accomplishing what needs to be done.

**Questions for the Week:**

In what ways have you witnessed God's word at work in your classroom? What students or school situations seem particularly parched and in need of a good soaking rain of God's word of forgiveness, reconciliation, love, hope and justice? As a follower of Jesus and a teacher, how will you help bring the rain?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Pray for a spirit of openness and eagerness to see God's presence and activity in your ministry, classroom, students, families and school. Pray for the faith and strength to follow Jesus in the world—in all aspects of your life.

*This devotion was contributed by Rod Boriack, Des Plaines, Illinois. Rod has served as a camp director in Northern California and as associate director for the ELCA Youth and Outdoor Ministry programs. He is currently doing freelance writing and resource development.*

**Question for the Week:**

How do you help children find ways to bring their troubles to the Lord?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Lord, help us to remember to come to you with all our worries and burdens. For you are our hope and salvation, and only through you can we come to know true happiness and peace. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Gina Autenrieth, Romeoville, Illinois – a mother giving thanks for teachers everywhere.*

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank you, God, for teaching me that there are consequences for my actions and that my depression and gloom can be turned to joy as I reach out to others with love and compassion. Help me to remember to think before I speak and to make my words positive and uplifting. Thank you LORD for always wanting my best and teaching me through your Word.

*This devotion was contributed by Barb Wigstadt, director of TLC Early Learning Center, a ministry of Transfiguration Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Minnesota.*

**AUGUST 29, 2010 – FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: LUKE 14:1**

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*On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.*

Do you notice when people are watching you, and do you take advantage of it?

On one occasion when he was a guest at a Sabbath meal, Jesus did both. After noticing that others at the meal were watching him closely, he took advantage of the moment to instruct both dinner guests and his host to let humility, courtesy and the needs of others guide their lives instead of self-interest. Even at everyday settings like a dinner party, both the hosts and the guests are to remember that “it is not all about them.” Both hosts and guests should use dinner parties as times for sharing, not as vehicles for promoting their social standing. Jesus knew that they were ready to listen because he saw how they watched him.

All things in life, including good teaching, require an alertness to one’s surroundings. Part of this is an awareness of how we are being watched—or not being watched—and a readiness to take advantage of the insights that can be derived from an attentiveness to the demeanor of those around us. We “take advantage of” these insights not to advance our self-interest, but to more meaningfully meet the needs of others by engaging them in a way that fits them well. Having such a working concern for others is none other than the work of love. And, after all, we Christians are called to be people who are known because of our love for one another, right?

**Questions for the Week:**

Did you ever have a delightful experience because someone noticed you? Have you missed opportunities to bring delight to students by failing to take advantage of how they were watching you?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Help me, O Lord, to notice my students as they notice me so that I might care for them better each day. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Mark Wilhelm, associate executive director for educational partnerships, Vocation and Education program unit, ELCA.*

**JULY 3, 2011 – THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 11:25-30**

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*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

As I read this text, I feel as if Jesus is talking directly to me. Right here. Right now. I have this opportunity in front of me to look at the future and really think about the direction I would have my career go. For some time now, I have felt weary, heavy-hearted and plain old tired. In the past year, I lost my older sister and my dad. My health hasn’t been the best and my mind is full of so much clutter. Then I read this text and realize that all I need to do is give everything over to Jesus.

My twelve-year-old daughter Rachel has also been dealing with these same losses and has experienced some difficulty focusing in school. Her teacher had allowed her to keep a favorite picture of her grandfather on her desk and while this has provided her with some comfort, it has also been a distraction. After a conversation with her teacher, we decided that the picture on the desk was not a good idea. Rachel’s teacher also told her about how he had dealt with the death of his own grandfather when he was small.

Rachel and I have always been able to share our feelings and have conversations about anything and this was another opportunity to share with her one of the ways I was handling things. There is a prayer I found many years ago; it hangs on the wall in my bedroom. When I shared it with my daughter, she told me she has read this prayer ever since she learned to read. I couldn’t believe it! She had actually been reading it. So I asked her if she ever used it as her own prayer. She said she hadn’t thought of it that way. And so, here was another opening for me to share my faith with my daughter.

When I am burdened and lost in deep despair  
I bundle all my troubles up and go to God in prayer.  
I tell him I am heartsick and lost and lonely too,  
That my mind is deeply burdened and I don’t know what to do.  
But I know he stilled the tempest, and calmed the angry sea,  
And I humbly ask if in his love he’ll do the same for me.  
And then I just keep quiet and think only thoughts of peace,  
And if I abide in stillness, my restless murmuring cease.

author unknown

**JUNE 26, 2011 – SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 10:40-42**

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*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of the little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you none of these will lose their reward.*

Have you ever worked outside on a hot, summer day and took a moment to drink a cup of cold water? The water not only sends a wave of refreshment throughout your body but it allows you to continue working until your task is complete. The same is true for the living water Jesus provides. When we are in the midst of an issue and we are spiritually parched the word of God will send refreshment throughout our body and allow us to continue to work until our task is complete. As educators God has given us the ability to provide living water for those we teach, a spiritual drink to the thirsty—and in return we will be rewarded.

**Questions for the Week:**

Do you recognize when you are spiritually parched? Do you recognize when someone else is in need of living water? Are you ready to provide that cold drink of water to whomever you meet?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Father God, thank you for giving me the gift of teaching others about the living water you provide. Help me to take the time to share this gift with whomever I may encounter this day. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Kris Martin, Director of the American Lutheran Church Christian Preschool, Rantoul, Illinois.*

**SEPTEMBER 5, 2010 – FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: DEUTERONOMY 30:15-20**

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*Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him...*

You have chosen another year to serve God by being a Lutheran educator. Together, we have the privilege of sharing God's love, faithfulness and forgiveness with the children in our classrooms and their families. By choosing this profession, we acknowledge that we may be God's hands and voice in what we do. Choosing to be a Christian creates opportunities for us to witness through our words, actions and attitudes.

One never knows when or how God will use us. It might be through the words we use when we tell the chapel story or during prayer time. We might find ourselves supporting the child who shares with you that his dad just lost his job or whose family is going through a divorce. The children may have opportunities to watch us thankfully accept God's gifts or gracefully handle challenges. Additionally, there are times outside the classroom to share our faith. How often do you run into a student's parents while shopping and during conversation the family shares a need or concern that you can pray for? Or between church services, a family may share their difficulty getting the family organized and out the door on Sunday morning and look to you for encouragement.

Reflect on your chosen profession. There are many opportunities to demonstrate the reason we are here. Do you feel God's love, hear God's voice, and feel God's hand on you as an educator? Call on God, stay in God's word, and trust God's leading for your life.

**Question for the Week:**

Where has God used you to share your faith inside and outside the classroom?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank you, God, for opening up opportunities in our teaching and our daily lives so that we may share your love, forgiveness and faithfulness with our students and their families. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Beth Coburn, director, Little Lamb Preschool, Christ Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, Indiana.*

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2010 – SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: LUKE 15:1-10**

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*Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.*

Devoted professionals in classrooms and early childhood centers understand more than most the sheer joy and satisfaction that come from helping a lost sheep return to the fold. Perhaps it's an eighth grader who is not quite getting a challenging concept in algebra, but with the right instruction from a persistent and loving teacher achieves the breakthrough. Or maybe it's a young child who can't quite grasp the notion of delaying gratification, but after months of reminders, examples, and imaginative interventions finally learns to postpone a pleasure for a more distant good. Or a high school student struggling with crippling self-doubt discovers her worth and purpose through the guidance of a loving counselor. Finding a lost sheep after a determined, patient and exhaustive search is a rewarding feat indeed.

But this week's readings are not just about finding; they are also about being found. And whether you're an educator or not, being found—or better, allowing yourself to be found—is often a challenge. We are sometimes more comfortable casting ourselves as the shepherd doing the saving than the sheep who needs salvation. Yet, sin, fault and falling short on our call to love others, including those in our charge, are realities that plague us with regularity. Sometimes we are the ones who need a patient and loving mentor. And praise God, we have such a mentor—a teacher and savior whose love is without end. We need to call on the Lord's patience, and succumb to the Lord's persistent pursuit of us. We need to allow ourselves to be found, so we might be better poised to find others.

**Questions for the Week:**

What particular student or child in your care is lost and in need of your loving intervention? In what way are you lost and in need of the Lord's loving intervention?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Pray for the Lord's wisdom in guiding your intervention with a lost sheep. And pray for the humility, honesty and surrender necessary to realize that you yourself are lost and need to be found, asking God for the healing grace of forgiveness and salvation.

*This devotion was contributed by Joe McTighe, executive director of CAPE, the Council for American Private Education.*

**JUNE 19, 2011 – FIRST SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST/HOLY TRINITY  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: 2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-13**

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How are we supposed to follow Jesus in the world? There are so many things that draw us away from the love of God—we have our technology that has us connected to everything and virtually nothing at the same time. Paul's words come to us from his age of great connection and virtually no technology. Yet, his words are still applicable to our lives.

As Paul departs he writes: “Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

“Put things in order” is an easy thing to say but a very hard action to follow through on. Perhaps we should think of creating order in our lives as a way to follow Jesus. It makes it a little easier to think of organizing the junk drawer or scheduling all your doctor's appointments or actually setting aside time to read the Bible when you know that you are creating space to agree with others and live in peace. It really is simple when you think of just putting aside or away one thing to more fully enter into the grace of Jesus and the love of God...what a beautiful way to be in communion!

**Questions for the Week:**

What are some easy ways for you to restore order to your life? How do you feel the grace of Jesus when your life is chaotic and how is it different when your life is filled with peace?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Ask God to grant you the strength to find order in a part of your life (big or small). Remember that grace and love surround you in all that you do.

*This devotion was contributed by Pamela Evans, administrative assistant for Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the ELCA Vocation and Education program unit. Prior to this call, she had the joy of living in a home of 11 at-risk boys ranging in age from 9 to 13 following her graduation from Wittenberg University.*

*teacher for over 33 years in Puerto Rico and the Chicago area, and is now retired from the classroom. She continues to be involved with children as a reading intervention tutor for students in a public school.*

**SEPTEMBER 19, 2010 – SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: 1 TIMOTHY 2:1**

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*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for everyone...*

We pray in the morning with thanksgiving and for guidance and protection throughout the new day. We pray at meals and devotions. Evening sees us reflecting upon the day, seeking forgiveness and a restful sleep, petitioning for concerns of family and friends. Well and good if we do these things but as workers with children we have a golden opportunity before us all day long. No, better an *obligation* before us all day long.

Serving in a school or center puts us where the action is—action multiplied by the number of children with whom we interact. That action may evoke joy, anger, sorrow, laughter, pain, need in a never-ending stream, moment to moment, child to child. What better opportunities to pray and where with more purpose? Don't delay until the drowsiness of sleep blurs those action images or allows them to fade from memory. This is the moment. The child's face is there in front of us.

Would Jesus wait until evening to remember the impressions of the day? No, he responded to need and celebration as they appeared before him. We know our own prayers need not be couched in formal words or spoken words or outlined petitions. Just a thought, or a phrase, mere seconds can convey the immediacy of the moment be it supplication, thanksgiving or intercession. Take that moment to bring before our Lord the visage of every child. Today and every day be for them their advocate, their prayer buddy, their prayer teacher.

**Questions for the Week:**

Do you take those opportunities to pray for your children in the moment of action or are you too caught up in dealing with what is happening? Could you better deal with what is happening if you resorted to prayer? Can you set a goal for a number of times each day you pray for specific children in your care?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Good and gracious God, grant me discernment, insight and understanding to recognize each day the needs of the individual children in my care that I may lift them up to you and place them into your loving care for both the needs they have demonstrated and the blessings they have received.

*This devotion was contributed by Alan Feddersen, former Lutheran schools principal, former director of the Lutheran Schools of Southern California and Hawaii, current board chair of Resurrection Lutheran Child Development Center, Oro Valley, Arizona.*

**JUNE 12, 2011 – DAY OF PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 104:33**

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*I will sing praise to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.*

For as long as I can remember, music and singing have always been a vital part of my life. I remember my mother singing or humming as we walked or as she worked. I, in turn, also conveyed that love of music by singing songs to my own children and grandchildren, and I hope that they will also continue in that tradition. In the classroom, I relied heavily on using songs to teach many concepts. Music has been a well-established teaching tool for generations.

Psalm 104 speaks of singing praise to God the Creator for the vast, bountiful and awe-inspiring creation through which we are provided for by grace. At times of anguish, difficulty or stress, I sing praises to God for having cared for me in the past, knowing and trusting that, by faith, I will be provided for yet again. We are God's children, and just as children place their trust and faith in us, we can rest assured in the knowledge that, come what may, God will always provide for us.

As educators, we are blessed with an enormous opportunity to convey God's love to our students, regardless of their age level. The joy of music is contagious, and music can be a tremendous resource to teach them of God's formidable creation, strength, provision, love and grace. Let's be mindful of the seeds we are sowing in our students through music and in singing God's praises, that those seeds will live on to inspire our pupils as they grow and mature in God's love.

**Questions for the Week:**

What are some of your own recollections of how music has inspired, comforted or provided joy in your life? What are some of those songs? In what ways can you be more sensitive to your individual student's needs for comfort or joy, and share with them God's love through song?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Creator God, thank you for your constant provision of joy, comfort, sustenance and inspiration through your gift of music. May we always remember to sing praises to you, and may we be mindful of all the ways, large and small, that we can utilize to inspire, comfort and bring joy to our students through music and song. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Ruth M. Vélez. Ruth was a bilingual*

**JUNE 5, 2011 – SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ACTS 1:6-9**

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*So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

It was written earlier in the book of Acts that when Jesus came back, he spent forty days with the apostles. Surely much was said in those forty days, and yet, this is only one of two dialogues from all those days documented in the Bible and passed along to us. How can this be? Were there no other conversations of importance during those forty days? Personal curiosity and frustration aside, this may indeed be Jesus’ final lesson to the apostles and to us: simply go tell the world about what you’ve seen. It’s not a new lesson. It is a repeated lesson.

Our curious human nature has led us to discover and learn an incredible amount to the point where we are overwhelmed with lesson plans all meant to help us compress a growing curriculum into an un-growing calendar. How to manage? Jesus the teacher would be undaunted. Sing it if you must (after all, what we sing we remember better than what we say), just make sure that the world knows about Jesus. Jesus is God’s gift to the world, and the only reason you and I know about him is because the apostles followed through.

**Questions for the Week:**

Does this mean that reading, writing and arithmetic are not important subjects to learn also? Of course not. But to what ends are these being taught if the story of Jesus is not also learned?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus and the determination of the apostles and many others who shared the story of Jesus with us. May ALL that we learn in school help us to love God and serve our neighbor.

*This devotion was contributed by Dianha Ortega-Ehreth, a former ELCA assistant director of Youth Ministry based in Chicago. She continues to serve young people as the executive director of the Youth Leadership Academy in Elgin, Illinois, a 501c3 organization that builds young community leaders and helps low-income families gain financial access to higher education.*

**SEPTEMBER 26, 2010 – EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: LUKE 16:19-31**

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He was complacent. The rich man was content, satisfied with life in all his wealth. There was a beggar, but he was outside the gate. He was outside the realm of the rich man’s life; nonetheless seen by the rich man in his comings and goings. So why was this rich man not moved to offer help to this beggar?

Last December, an article in the *New York Times* suggested biologists are now finding that we may be born with an urge to help others. From as early as 12 months infants will help adults find things; at 18 months they will come to the assistance of adults by opening doors or picking up dropped objects. This helping behavior seems to be innate because it appears so early and before many parents start teaching children the rules of caring behavior.

So one wonders what happened in the life of this rich man to make him so complacent with his world and so blind to suffering and need. Perhaps there was no one to nurture the intrinsic “helping and caring for one another” when this man was a young boy. Or, maybe he was just hardened by his money and material things, thus missing the real contentment and satisfaction that comes from reaching out with one’s talents and resources to help others.

**Questions for the Week:**

As educators, how are we nurturing that innate urge to help others in the children we teach? Are we providing our students with experiences that show them the real satisfaction and contentment that comes from caring for others?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Good and gracious God, guide our teacher hearts and teacher minds each day, as we impact the young lives that will be leading and caring for our world tomorrow. Instill in the children, as well as their teachers, your divine love and wisdom as they serve, or prepare to serve, in your world with all they’ve been given. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Sharon Koplinski, director of Celebration Children’s Center of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Naperville, Illinois.*

**OCTOBER 3, 2010 – NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: COLOSSIANS 2:6-7**

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

Who is your partner?

The four-year-olds were lined up in the hallway ready to walk across the street to see a theater production. Everyone was holding hands with their partner, ready to go—everyone that is except Stephen. I asked him, “Stephen, where is your partner?”

Solemnly he looked at me and said, “Justin is usually my partner, but he is absent today. He’s sick. But I don’t mind because today Jesus is my partner. Miss Joan says Jesus is always with us, so I asked him to be my partner on the field trip.”

What wonderful, simple, life-transforming words to live by! “Jesus is my partner.” Unfortunately, the many necessary duties of budgeting, staffing, enrollment and maintenance make it easy for us to partner with impatience, intolerance and irritability rather than with the qualities of a true disciple. However, if we have the faith of Stephen to partner with Jesus every day, then our ministries will reflect the light and love of the gospel in all we say and do.

**Questions for the Week:**

Are you willing to let go of your usual partners and take the hand of Jesus in your ministry? Where will Jesus lead you and your ministry?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Lord Jesus, take my hand today. Make me willing to walk with you wherever you may lead me. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by June Airheart, director of St. John’s Day School in San Antonio, Texas.*

**JUNE 2, 2011 – ASCENSION OF OUR LORD  
THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: LUKE 24:45**

*Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures...*

Jesus taught his disciples that he would be crucified, buried and raised from the dead after the third day. After he was raised from the dead he showed himself to his followers and opened their minds to understand the scriptures.

Jesus, after being raised from the dead, in his final moments on earth was still teaching, leading, lifting and blessing his disciples leaving them with something.

As educators we must open the minds of our students!

As educators we must use wisdom to build trust and confidence in the hearts and minds of our students so that whether we are with them or apart from them, they will be confident in our teachings. We must teach them truth and facts, so that if a circumstance or condition arises and challenges them to loose hope, have doubts or fears, they will remain confident because the truth will remain the same. (It was truth that Jesus taught his disciples when he told them that he would be raised from the dead.)

**Questions for the Day:**

As an educator how are you opening and challenging the minds of your students? How will they remember you after this school term?

**Personal Prayer for the Day:**

Lord, please give me wisdom, as well as innovative, fresh and creative ways to open the minds of my students. Thank you for opening my mind. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Sharon E. Robinson, who works in the Global Mission program unit, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Illinois.*

**MAY 29, 2011 – SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JOHN 14:15-21**

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*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.*

We are not alone. Jesus prepared his disciples for a time when he would be away from them, and until the time when he would return, the Holy Spirit—the Advocate—would be with them to help and guide them in keeping his commandments, teaching them everything and reminding them of what he had told them here on earth.

At the end of the school year it is time to say goodbye to our students. Some will be away only until next fall, but some will be continuing on to other schools in their educational journeys. Some may still be with us in church and Sunday school, but the ones we are most concerned about we will never see again. We try to prepare them, introducing them to Jesus Christ and his story, teaching them God’s commandments and ways, and building within them a foundation that we pray will last throughout their lives.

At the worship service at the close of the year our “graduating” students enter the chapel carrying an unlit votive candle, which they place near the altar. During the service we pin a little cross onto the collars of their shirts, and their candles are lit. At the end of the service they carry out their candles—symbolic of bearing the light of Christ out into the world. We hope that wherever they go, God’s Holy Spirit will continue to guide and teach them—not only that, but that they will be able to *be* a light for Christ, guiding and teaching others.

**Questions for the Week:**

Can a little child guide others to Christ? Over the year, how have you prepared children to go out into the world? What elements make up their young Christian foundation?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Lord God, you send your Holy Spirit to your children. We pray that you would protect and support our students when they are away, and give them wisdom and strength to bear Christ’s light of love into the world. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Barbara Krumm, former director at Saint John Lutheran School in Norfolk, Virginia.*

**OCTOBER 10, 2010 – TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: LUKE 17:11-19**

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*On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”*

Only one of them turned back—only one of them thanked Jesus—and he was the “outsider.” God finds a way into the hearts of the least expected and as educators we must seek to do the same.

We have an amazing opportunity to share the love of Christ with children from many different walks of life. Some may often feel like an “outsider” at school and even at home. Every child is a gift and it is important that they know this and feel this each day. Armed with the steadfast love and acceptance of God, children can feel empowered to follow Jesus into the world.

**Questions for the Week:**

What children do you work with who may feel like an “outsider”? As a Lutheran educator, what can you do to help these children understand the unconditional love of Christ?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Ask God for guidance and support to identify the “outsiders” in your school and thank God for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of these children each day.

*This devotion was contributed by Linda Burrier, who has served as the director of Memorial Lutheran Chapel School in St. Augustine, Florida, for 18 years. She is the Region 9 representative for the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association serving the southeastern United States.*

**OCTOBER 17, 2010 — TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 121**

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Recess duty has always been an interesting time in my life. Although it is a bit like herding cats, watching over the children as they play is a very important job. It is also a daunting task, if you think about it for a moment. All at one time, you need to watch the “touch” football game, the monkey bars, the swings, the game of tag, the child pacing on the out-skirts, the scraped knees and the student crying because they didn’t get picked for the kickball team. Feel free to add any other activities that are specific to your situation. If you are like me, your eyes barely have time to rest on one activity before they are diverted to something else.

When you think about all of us on this planet and the billions of activities that go on at one time, God has an awful lot of recess duty every second of each day. Reflecting a bit on these verses from Psalm 121 will give you a clearer picture of how awesome our God is in every moment.

The LORD watches over you—  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;  
the LORD will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.

When the time comes for your next recess duty, remember that as you watch over the precious children in your care, the God of heaven and earth considers you precious and is watching over you.

**Question for the Week:**

Do you really rest in God’s care or are you allowing worry to take over?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear Lord, thank you for watching over me each day. Thank you for your comfort and help during times of need. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Jake Morrow, principal of Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Kissimmee, Florida.*

am doing something I was told not to do, you still protect me. Lord, you continue to love me, even while I am disobedient. I desire to be strong and firm just like you. You keep my feet from being caught in a trap. You give me and my family peace while we sleep. Jesus keep me in your loving arms. you are my safety. In Jesus’ name. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Denise Pickens, who works in Development Services at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Illinois.*

**MAY 22, 2011 – FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 31:1-5, 15-16**

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*I come to you, LORD, for protection. Don't let me be ashamed. Do as you have promised and rescue me. Listen to my prayer and hurry to save me. Be my mighty rock and the fortress where I am safe. You, LORD God, are my mighty rock and my fortress. Lead me and guide me, so that your name will be honored. Protect me from hidden traps and keep me safe. You are faithful, and I trust you because you rescued me. My life is in your hands. Save me from enemies who hunt me down. Smile on me, your servant. Have pity and rescue me.(CEV)*

For years, I watched my daughter move at her own beat. The beat inside her head and heart have always been different from my own. As a little girl playing, she made up her own rules. Sometimes the outcome was very funny. However, as she grew older, the outcomes of her doing things her way were not funny. Often I held my heart in my hands not knowing what would happen next. I would talk to her, lecture her and punish her quite a bit for not following the rules. My constant prayer was “Lord Jesus, watch over and protect her from herself!” One day while on her way home from school, she took a detour from what she was told to do. She went with an older girl from school across town, got lost from her friend and walked home—more than 10 hours later. When she arrived, she was in tears and told us what happened. She apologized for her disobedience.

David reminds each of us to reach out to the Lord for protection. Every believer will one day run into problems and dangerous situations. We must have faith and we must pray. We can find many ways to do things in this lifetime. We must realize that God looks at our souls when we are in trouble and as God helps us, we must do what God tells us to do. We can not ignore Jesus' teachings or forget his sacrifice for us.

**Questions for the Week:**

Have you followed your own beat instead of Jesus'? How did that work out? What are some times in your life when you want to follow your own beat? In what ways do you need God's protection? What promises are you trusting and believing God for, and what are the benefits?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Father, I thank you for your hand of protection upon my family, friends and myself. Thank you for opening my eyes that I am able to see that by not following you, I am hurting you and going in the opposite direction of the life you have for me. You are my refuge. I know that even when I

**OCTOBER 24, 2010 – TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: LUKE 18:9-14**

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*Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

I have been on an exercise program, with pedometer and charts to record my progress. I'm innately competitive, so I feel good when I'm meeting my targets, and I'm frustrated when I miss the goal. This program is a good thing for me, because good health is important. But I would be foolish to think that meeting my goals is more important or basic than God's gift of health. Instead, I try to remember that self-discipline is only a way of trying to be fully appreciative of God's gift.

Jesus' story about two men praying must be heard with care. The opening sentence makes clear that we are not to put trust in ourselves, yet the parable is not an invitation to quit praying or to abandon religious practice altogether. That would be foolish. The story says, “Hey! Religious practice is about God, not about us. It's good to come to God ready to receive God's gifts.” The point is the gifts God gives, not our readiness. God is merciful! The tax collector had it right. God is good all the time.

This week in following your vocations, watch for signs of God's goodness. The more aware we are of God, the readier we are to receive.

**Questions for the Week:**

Look around each day this week. Make a list of all the answers you find to the question, “What signs of God's goodness surround us today?” Use your list for conversations with colleagues and/or as a foundation for thankful prayer. How can you help others this week see the goodness of God?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Our gracious God, today I name these signs of your goodness: .....

Deepen my awareness of your gifts so that I am always open to receive your love. Help me to be an effective pointer, showing others how good you are. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Stanley N. Olson, executive director for Vocation and Education program unit, ELCA Chicago, Illinois.*

**MAY 15, 2011 – FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JOHN 10:1-10**

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Let's see if any of you recognize this game that is usually played in classrooms during the first or second day of the school year.

“Brian bear.”

“Katie koala. Brian bear.”

Matthew monkey. Katie koala. Brian bear.”

“Lily lion. Matthew monkey. Katie koala. Brian bear.”

Do you recognize it? This is an excerpt from the time honored tradition of having the students pick an animal that starts with the same letter as their first name. They will then go around in a circle attempting to remember not only the other students' names, but their animal counterparts as well. I would be quite shocked if 99 percent of you reading this have not either played this or had your students take part.

Remembering new names is an annual task and a very important one. You can connect instantly with a student by the simple use of his or her name. It is much more effective to say, “It is great to see you this morning, Caleb,” than simply saying “Good morning.”

The tenth chapter of John discusses the idea of Jesus as the great shepherd. The sheep in a pasture will respond to the shepherd's voice and only his voice because they are familiar with him.

“...and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice (John 10:3-4).

Jesus, the Great Shepherd, is calling us. He already knows all of our names and does not need any trick to remember us and how much he loves us.

**Question for the Week:**

Have you listened for the voice of the Great Shepherd and remembered how much he loves you?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear Lord, help me to listen for your still, small voice and to rest in the comfort of your love.

*This devotion was contributed by Jake Morrow, principal of Trinity Lutheran Church and School, located in Kissimmee, Florida.*

hopes on your promises, and arouse in me the joy that comes in believing. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Heidi Hagstrom, director for ELCA Youth Gathering, Vocation and Education program unit, ELCA, Chicago, Illinois.*

**OCTOBER 31, 2010 — TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST/REFORMATION DAY  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JOHN 8:31-36**

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*. . . and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*

How often that scripture has been quoted! I know I've used it a time or two myself with children to encourage them to tell the truth. The truth is very freeing. Harboring a secret and having a guilty conscience is very stressful and often lends itself to poor sleep patterns and illness. How good it feels to "come clean"!

When my son was 12, we were moving from one home to another. He was old enough to be very helpful; packing boxes and loading the moving truck with the adults. It came time to pack up the family room when he suddenly developed a stomach ache and had to lie down, moaning and groaning—almost in tears. He hadn't been feeling well for several weeks, and we soon figured out the source of the "illness" when we rolled up the large area rug to load it on the truck. Underneath a corner of the rug was an area of carpet (fairly new carpeting by the way) on which bleach or some other harsh solvent had been used and it was ruined.

Apparently he had spilled something that stained the carpet one day a few weeks earlier when he had been home alone, and thought that bleach was a good way to remove the stain (the carpet was light beige after all). When he realized the mistake he had made, he moved the area rug over the ruined carpet and it didn't even occur to him until moving day that the rug was going with us. His sin had come to light, and for two weeks, he had been a slave to sin, causing him to feel terrible. ". . . and the truth will make you free"—it did make him free indeed! Although there was penance to pay, he was so happy that he no longer had to harbor his secret—he was instantly "healed"!

**Questions for the Week:**

What secrets in our own lives are we harboring that keep us from being free in Jesus? How can we gently and in positive ways help the children in our lives—both at home and in our schools—accept the freedom Jesus offers?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

This week let us pray for those who fear "coming clean" – that they will know God's love and feel the arms of Jesus surrounding them as they become free in him.

*This devotion was contributed by Gayle Denny, executive director of the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association.*

**MAY 8, 2011 – THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ACTS 2:38-39**

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*Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”*

Eddy was just tall enough to see into the baptismal font. This doe-eyed, round-faced child of Russian immigrants, elbows on the baptismal font, chin in his hands, stared deeply into the inviting water. Eddy was not alone around the font: his sister stood next to Matthew’s wheelchair; Caleb was there, gorgeous, Black, and built close to the ground; sweet Miguel was timidly holding his position, and the pastor’s lanky son stood next to another Caucasian child.

Pastor compared the promise of the good life often attributed to money, to the promise of everlasting life through Jesus. Eddy’s five-year-old brain wasn’t engaged by the analogy, but that water was beckoning. One arm dropped, his chubby fingers touching the plane of the water. He cast those big eyes coyly up to the pastor, waiting for a response. “Go ahead and touch it.” To my delight, Eddy put his hand in the water and immediately made the sign of the cross on his forehead. He’d seen it done before. “Can I do it again?” he asked. Then all of the kids did it, and a splashing, grace-filled gala ensued.

The Spirit of God was present that morning as a diverse group of young humans gathered around the water of everlasting life. I can’t help but wonder what they will talk about with each other when they leave this place. I hope they aren’t sad, like those who were on their way to Emmaus, thinking that Jesus was dead. Rather, I hope that they will recognize Jesus, alive and with them in all circumstances of their lives. I also hope that Jesus’ presence will arouse joy (1 Peter 1:8) like it did this morning.

**Question for the Week:**

How does the assurance of Jesus’ presence arouse joy (1 Peter 1:8) in you?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

God of hope, open my eyes to see Jesus walking alongside me in all circumstances of my life. Give me the faith to put the full weight of my

*This devotion was contributed by Marcia F. Miller, who taught third and fourth grade for 19 years in northwest Illinois. Currently she serves as the program coordinator for the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois.*

**NOVEMBER 7, 2010 – TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST/ALL SAINTS DAY  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: EPHESIANS 1:18**

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*...with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...*

Do you remember the first year you taught? Meeting the parents for the first time? At our school, before the year started, we would have conferences with each parent and child. It was a time to introduce ourselves and meet the children and their parents. I'll never forget that first year, and the second parent and little boy I met. After we talked for a while, Mom looked at me with concern in her eyes and said, "We don't go to church, Jason has never been to Sunday school, he doesn't know who Jesus is. Where will you start?"

As teachers and administrators in Lutheran schools, we all have an incredible responsibility. Statistics tell us that over half of the children come to us with no church home. We are blessed with the opportunity to teach the youngest of God's children who take in everything we tell them with little question. You were called and chosen to teach, love, nurture and care for God's children. As a teacher, you are a special part of the relationship that develops when the children learn to follow Jesus in the world. There is no greater reward than to witness the relationship between Jesus and the children grow and become part of who they are.

As ready as I thought I was that first year, I failed to consider an answer to a basic question. Mom was looking me straight in the eye with such trust. My answer; "I will start with letting Jason know how much Jesus loves him."

**Questions for the Week:**

Are you prepared for questions from parents and children on how you will guide them in their faith walk? What about those who don't know who Jesus is?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear Lord, thank you for the blessing you have given us with the opportunity to teach the children of your great love. Guide us with the answers we need to lead them in their walk with you. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Candy Rickard, Evangelical Lutheran Education Association membership coordinator.*

**NOVEMBER 14, 2010 – TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: LUKE 21:5-19**

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*This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends... But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.*

Being a teacher or administrator in an ELCA Lutheran school or center is truly a devotion and dedication to follow and serve our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Too many times we are underpaid and underappreciated. Many of our schools and centers are not appreciated by the congregations for which they are a mission. They are not a priority of the congregation council. The pastor doesn't wish to get involved. The parents complain. And here we stand continuing to do what we do best, serve the children by teaching them of God's love for them. Over and over again I hear, "I would get out of this, but I do it for the children."

The majority of our detractors have no idea what the true focus of our program is: teaching our students about the love of Jesus. They will continue to tell others. This is not difficult for the children. It is what you do for them. They are comfortable doing it for others. What a wonderful gift you have given them!

It is a necessary, but often unpleasant, part of our job to support and defend our schools and centers so that our children can be served. This is not always easy! It is comforting to read the above verses and know that we are not alone. God understands and will support us if we allow ourselves to wait for and listen to God.

**Questions for the Week:**

In difficult situations, how can you better support each other to fulfill your mission of serving the children in your care? How do you wait and allow God to show you the way to answer critics?

**Personal Prayer for this Week:**

Heavenly Father, hear our prayer as we ask for strength and guidance when times at our schools and centers are difficult. Remind us that we are not alone—you will always be with us and give us the words and actions to support your mission in our place. Amen

**MAY 1, 2011 – SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JOHN 20:19-31**

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"Peace be with you." Did you hear the words? In the Gospel, Jesus said to the disciples three times, "Peace be with you." What a thoughtful thing to say to the disciples at that very moment. Peace be with you. They had just watched Jesus die. They were hiding from the authorities in a locked room, and they were lonely and afraid. Jesus did not come to the disciples just to say hello. He came to them offering them peace.

Maybe Jesus was commanding the disciples to be at peace. His words are an imperative sentence, one that demands or gives instructions. Did the disciples gain peace because Jesus told them to? No, there's more to the story. They came to believe that Jesus had been brought back to life by God. They believed Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. They found peace in their belief. What about Thomas? Thomas was not comforted just because he heard that Jesus was alive or because he saw Jesus. Thomas did not even find peace because Jesus told him to. Thomas was comforted when he believed.

We hear these comforting words so many times in church. We even say those words. Are the words more than a greeting we give to one another during a worship service? Was Jesus giving the disciples more than a polite greeting or a command to have a good day? Think about it. Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose from the dead and then offers peace. As Jesus said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

We have the opportunity to find peace because Jesus died for our sins, and God has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. All we have to do is believe. While that's not always so easy, what an opportunity!

**Questions for the Week:**

Where do you find peace when you are lonely or afraid? What brings you peace? How will you share the peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Grace and peace to you brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank God for the peace which passes human understanding. Let us continue to give thanks for the gift of peace, and strive to share that peace with all. Peace be with you.

ing community? Where might “God plays no favorites” find new expression in the life of your school?

**Prayer for the Week:**

God of Easter love which knows no bounds, and knows no favorites, we praise you this day and every day for the gift of resurrection life. Shape us, and shape our schools, for courageous teaching and concrete embodying of your all-embracing grace. AMEN.

*This devotion was contributed by Bill Bixby, ELCA pastor and director for Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the ELCA, Chicago, Illinois.*

*This devotion was contributed by Mary Ann Pollock, retired principal of an ELCA Lutheran school ( preschool and elementary) in Baltimore, Maryland. She currently serves as national board president of the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association.*

**NOVEMBER 21, 2010 – LAST SUNDAY AFTER  
PENTECOST/CHRIST THE KING  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JEREMIAH 23:5**

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This week we celebrate Christ as King of heaven and earth, the one who would “reign as king and deal wisely, and . . . execute righteousness in the land.” Jesus was not the type of king many expected. He was born in the humblest of circumstances. He ate with sinners. He worked on the Sabbath. He healed lepers. He rode a donkey into Jerusalem. He washed his disciples’ feet and commanded them to do the same for others. He even blessed children, saying the kingdom of heaven belonged to “such as these”! It turned out that the wise reign of Christ the King of heaven and earth was not one of political power but one of humility and service, of justice, love and forgiveness.

As educational leaders we, too, are called into a life of service. In one part of our ministry we serve children and their parents. That is an easily understood and accepted responsibility of ours. But, as another part of our ministry, we also serve our staffs—the teachers, assistants, volunteers, librarians, secretaries, cooks, bus drivers, janitors, and anyone else who works in the school. That second part does not always come easily. Many of us, especially those working in an early childhood setting, came to our jobs directly from teaching without any experience or education in administration or business. In order to serve effectively we may need to pursue additional training and education. We also need to remember that although our staff members work for us, it is our job to serve them. That means tuning into their individual gifts and talents and needs. It means listening to their ideas and allowing them freedom to do their jobs in the best way they can. It means supporting them when they are confronted with challenging children or parents. It means that by washing their feet, they are free to do the same for others.

**Questions for the Week:**

How do you support the individuals who work for you? How do you help them grow professionally and spiritually?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Lord Jesus, thank you for loving us and teaching us how to have a servant’s heart. Help us to make a positive difference in the lives of our fellow staff members.

*This devotion was contributed by Karen Freeman, preschool director, San Marcos Lutheran Church Children’s Center, San Marcos, California.*

**APRIL 24, 2011 – RESURRECTION OF OUR  
LORD/EASTER SUNDAY  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ACTS 10:34**

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Following the Risen Jesus means . . . not playing favorites!

Peter fairly exploded with his good news: “It’s God’s own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites!” (*The Message*, Eugene Peterson)

On Easter Day a tomb explodes—and the whole creation explodes—with a sure sign of God’s indestructible love. And, ever since then, on Easter Day the church has exploded with resurrection joy! Alleluia!

Not long after that first Easter, Peter is exploding, too. In the verse above (the first verse of a text that can be read every year), Peter is bursting with the good news that God has acted, once and for all, by raising the crucified Jesus.

It’s Peter’s lead-in that is so intriguing, so revolutionary. Before he erupts into an all-out, public declaration of God’s saving power, Peter blurts out, “God plays no favorites!” Huh?

The context is key. Peter, you see, has just had his most basic religious convictions, well, exploded! In the first part of the tenth chapter, in the stories of his interactions with a Roman centurion named Cornelius, Peter has discovered that God’s indestructible love is for Gentiles, too. For outsiders. For enemies. Now, that is explosive!

In a world saturated with discord and violence based on ethnicity, on economic status, and even on religious confession, this Easter text points us in a different direction. And, this text invites school leaders and educators to shape classrooms and curricula in such a way that “God plays no favorites” is at the very heart of what it means to be a learning community. (Amazingly, young people can sometimes be way ahead of us on this!)

In fact, this text beckons us all, old and young, student and staff. Following the risen Jesus—this Easter day and every day—means not playing favorites. Alleluia to the God who sets us all free—today—to do just that!

**Questions for the Week:**

How does “God plays no favorites” find appropriate expression (values, practices, curricular foci) in the social and instructional life of your learn-

**APRIL 17, 2011 – SUNDAY OF THE PASSION**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ISAIAH 50:4**

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*The LORD GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.*

As I read this passage, Isaiah verifies why teaching in a Christian school is so rewarding. We are God's voice every day; we are the planters of Christ in everyone. As I get up everyday I put that day into God's hand, "Your will be done." It is that trust that leads us to be like Jesus. What would Jesus do? How would he approach the day? Was he overwhelmed with the crowds of people or did he just take one thing at a time? If I had to guess, I'd choose the latter. I find myself asking those questions and the result is to take things as they come. Do not worry about the things we cannot control, but look at the day with a light heart and live as God wants us to live.

As we prepare to witness the journey Jesus took for us this Passion Week, let us remember Jesus gave everything for us. He put himself out there for all to see and took the abuse of people that said they believed in him.

**Questions for the Week:**

Who will I visit? How will I reveal my trust in God?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear Lord, you have given me a voice to speak to others. Help me to grow in my faith as I speak to them. Help me to stand fast in times of trouble and trust in only you. Thank you for sending us your only Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Michelle Schaffer, director, Christian Day Nursery School, Norwalk, Ohio, who has served as Christian Day Nursery School's director since 2007.*

**NOVEMBER 28, 2010 – FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ISAIAH 2:1-5**

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*"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."*

Our school is located on a busy corner, landlocked with houses, businesses and train tracks within throwing distance. Hundreds, maybe thousands of cars pass by our small building every day. With charter schools offering alternative education and changing neighborhood demographics, it is easy to feel insignificant. It is easy to question if this challenging endeavor of Christian education is worth the immense effort.

When I feel discouraged, I turn to the promises of God. One promise is that our world was redeemed in the death and resurrection of Jesus and that Jesus will return and set our world completely aright. The prophet Isaiah offers a vision of this world to come—a vision of every nation streaming to God's holy mountain to hear the word of God. As we live in this time of redemption while waiting for Christ's return, every Lutheran school acts as a mountain where children stream every day. In our schools, we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We share the difference that God makes in our lives. We are places where God teaches "us his ways...that we may walk in his paths."

**Question for the Week:**

What promises of God do you turn to when you feel discouraged?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank God for allowing you to serve in a place where God's word is shared every day. Ask God to put children in the seats in our schools and to give us thankfulness for our ministries.

*This devotion was contributed by Elizabeth Lerohl Hiller, pastor of Ashburn Lutheran Church and School, Chicago, Illinois.*

**DECEMBER 5, 2010 – SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ROMANS 15:5**

*May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another in accordance with Jesus Christ.*

There are lots of people who believe in Jesus Christ. They love him, praise and worship him. They invite Jesus into their hearts. But what does it actually mean to follow Jesus and live in harmony with one another in today’s world? It is a difficult question that can be answered by saying “being in harmony” is not based on whether we like the opinions of others, or the way one dresses, or the language one speaks or one’s country of origin. Being in harmony with Jesus is living and following Jesus in a harmony that cuts across our many differences.

These racial and cultural differences are reflected in our schools and classrooms more than ever before; this diversity can cause situations where children purposely exclude other children based upon race and language. As adults we have the strength and capability to share our harmonic patterns based upon Jesus’ love for those who have been excluded.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” was part of the Old Testament law (Leviticus 19:18). The Jewish teachers often interpreted “neighbor” to include only people of their own nationality and religion. Jesus’ word of encouragement to love your neighbor as yourself and thereby be in harmony with one another is to welcome all individuals at the table.

Following Jesus is about harmony. Following Jesus is about listening. Following Jesus is about putting into practice the things that Jesus taught. Following Jesus and living in harmony means learning to take risks and to open our arms to others and perhaps to be questioned about the process.

**Questions for the Week:**

How do I live out “harmony” in my personal life? How do I serve the needs of diverse children and others to help them live in harmony and follow Jesus Christ in the world?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

“I want to be a follower of Christ,” This is a song that reminds us that to be a follower of Jesus, we have to ask the questions: “Where do you want me to go? What do you want me to do? What do you want me to say, each and every day?” We not only ask them, but wait for the answers and act the way Jesus would.

**APRIL 10, 2011 – FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: ROMANS 8:6**

*To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

When my father passed away a few months ago, all I could think of is “Why him? Why me? Why us?” I felt myself slipping into a state of anger and disconnection from God. I prayed daily for God to shine God’s divine light upon me and keep me from slipping away. As the days and weeks passed, I began to see things in a different light. God’s Light.

I started to feel alive again. I felt the Spirit of Christ breathing life back into me. There was tremendous peace and harmony restored to me as I began living in the Spirit. What does living in the Spirit mean? It means being alive to the presence of God. It means focusing not on the imperfections of life but on the grace of God, always seeking traces of God’s love and presence in every circumstance of our lives. It means always being positive and being aware of and seeking the good in all things and in all people.

**Questions for the Week:**

Stop and reflect on a situation in your life that is causing you grief. Release any negative aspects that you may have about the situation and look for traces of anything positive that has or can come of the situation—no matter how small or insignificant they may seem. Maybe the situation helped you grow and become a better person? Can you feel God’s light and love guiding and healing you as you release the negative and focus on the positive?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear God, please help me to always keep the Spirit of the Divine flowing through me and radiating from me to everything and everyone around me.

*This devotion was contributed by Ana Melinda Valverde, administrative assistant for the Vocation and Education program unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Illinois.*

**APRIL 3, 2011 – FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: EPHESIANS 5:8-4**

*Live as children of the light.* (NRSV)  
*Walk as children of light.* (NKJV)  
*Act like people of the light.* (CEV)

When I was a child, everyone watched Nickelodeon. The kids in my neighborhood particularly loved to gather around the TV set late at night to watch the show *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* A group of young teens called “The Midnight Society” would sit around a campfire and exchange spooky stories of a *Twilight Zone* nature. And I was afraid of the haunting tales about the paranormal activity. I spent many nights in bed with the lights on, feeling safer in an illuminated room as I drifted off to sleep.

We are a people who regularly encounter darkness in ourselves and the world around us—in fictional TV shows and on the nightly news, in encounters with strangers and in our closest relationships, in our thoughts and in our hearts. But in Ephesians, Paul reminds us that through Christ we are transformed. We are no longer darkness, but we are *light*, called to live, walk, and act as a people of the light, exposing the darkness and discovering what is good and true.

**Questions for the Week:**

What memories of darkness and light do you have from your childhood? Are there any particular stories you remember concerning a fear of darkness or a comfort in light? How can you use these stories to teach your students how to “live as children of the light” and to “find out what is pleasing to the Lord”?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Ask God for strength and hope when you encounter “darkness” and for help to teach and live as “children of the light.”

*This devotion was contributed by Katy Resop, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, former program assistant for Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the ELCA, Chicago, Illinois.*

*This devotion was contributed by Adisa Armand Miller, pastor of United Lutheran Church of Oakland, and deeply involved with the ministry of their school, Kids of the Kingdom Child Care, in Oakland, California.*

**DECEMBER 12, 2010 – THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JAMES 5:7 - 10**

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I take my granddaughter to the sitter on my way to work and the sitter brings her to preschool for the afternoon session. Getting a 2 ½ year-old to do something is a challenge but then add time constraints and cold snowy weather and it can be a challenge to everyone's patience—even a devoted grandmother.

A teacher is not only teaching children, a teacher is teaching the child's parents to respect their child's growing sense of who they are, their place in the family and how to function in this ever-increasingly stressful life. Preparing a child for what the schedule for the day will be, listening to their needs and desires and allowing time for playing and learning, as well as instilling in these developing minds the need to respect their parents. Teachers must have received an extra dose of patience to cope with the independent, stubborn mindset of preschoolers.

Each of us is a child in God's eyes, every day we are given a new lesson. God never becomes impatient when it takes many lessons for me to learn something new. God is faithful and patient to help me in learning God's will for my life.

**Questions for the Week:**

When was God more than patient with you? How can you best teach children to be patient with themselves and with others?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank you, God, for always being patient with me when I am stubborn and don't want to make changes. And help me to teach children that you are never impatient, and always forgive our mistakes. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Nelda Hawkins, mother of three and grandmother of seven, who has been a church secretary for 15 years at Jerusalem Lutheran Church, Columbiana, Ohio. As secretary, Nelda takes care of the financial work for JLC Preschool and the board that governs the preschool.*

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank God for the love demonstrated in your life amid the quarrels and disagreements that happen and for the opportunity to share that love with children around you.

*This devotion was contributed by Jennifer Malwitz, who serves as a staff member of the ELCA Youth Gathering, Chicago, Illinois.*

**MARCH 27, 2011 — THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: EXODUS 17: 2-6**

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*They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go...Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.*

Quarrels, fights, heated arguments, righteous indignation—no matter what you call it, it is not infrequent that we find ourselves in situations full of disagreement. Sometimes we are like the Israelites demanding our rights, and sometimes we are like Moses, frustrated to be the one stuck in the middle taking the blame and being asked to choose sides. In no way is anyone unique when it comes to this, we all have to deal with some kind of frustrations and disagreements on a regular basis.

Yet in this season of reflection, we are afforded the opportunity to examine our reactions to the quarrels we find ourselves in. How do you react to the demands of others? Are you offended, surprised, taken aback? Do you get angry too or try to convince others that their feelings are not valid or important? Do you avoid getting involved or quickly jump into the fray? Are you able to not take the situation personally and step back to be a true mediator? Does your reaction depend on the players and the issue?

Most likely you can answer yes and no to all of the above questions, and that leaves one more: What can we take from God’s response to the demands? God heard the cries of both Israel and Moses, and did not abandon them in their needs, despite their anger and poor behavior. Instead of abandoning them, God provided for them a fountain from which to drink. What a powerful example of God’s love! What a lesson to teach our children!

**Questions for the Week:**

Think about a recent situation you have been in: How did you handle the situation? How did God’s love demonstrate itself? What lessons can you take and share with the children in your life?

**DECEMBER 19, 2010 — FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 1:20-21 (NIV)**

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*An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus.”*

Waiting is not something that comes easily for me. In fact, I’m convinced that my entire family would have been diagnosed with ADD, if there were such designations at that time. And, now I live in New York—the most impatient place in the world!

Waiting is what Advent is all about. This week, we have reached the doorstep of Christmas. It’s hard to wait much longer. I’m sure your preparations, parties and present buying are in full swing. At the same time, stress levels are rising. All in eager waiting for the big day. What is the point of all this activity?

Waiting for Jesus—like Mary and Joseph all those years ago—that should be the focus of these days! Stepping back from the whirling pace of Christmas to remind ourselves and our students what all the hubbub is about. That Almighty God came to us in a little baby, our world was changed forever and the gates of heaven are open to believers. What a privilege we have in Lutheran schools to unabashedly share this good news with our students, families and colleagues!

Waiting is not always easy. But may you and your students be filled with both peace and joy as we await again the birth of Jesus.

**Questions for the Week:**

What are we doing this week to focus our children on the story of Jesus as found in the Gospels? How can we help them to relax and appreciate waiting for Jesus’ arrival?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear God, we thank you and praise you for coming into our world to save us. May we patiently await the miracle of Jesus’ birth and focus on him throughout this Christmas season. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by David Hahn, Brookville, New York, who has been Head of School at Long Island Lutheran Middle and High School for 23 years.*

**DECEMBER 25, 2010 – NATIVITY OF OUR LORD**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: ISAIAH 62: 10 - 12**

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*Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones...The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, "See your salvation comes... ." They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord"; and you shall be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."*

Name calling can be a problem. As kids it does not take long before we find words to yell at each other, words we may not understand, but we know hurt their feelings. As teachers, directors and pastors serving in Lutheran schools, we have heard our share of name calling.

In today's text God engages in "name calling," but of another sort. God's invitation is to "...build up, build up the highway and clear it of stones." God's Chosen have been in exile, away from home. God is inviting them back, clearing the stones and the hurt and giving them new names. For Jerusalem God decides upon the name "Zion" meaning "My Delight is in Her." And for the Israelites their new name is, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord, Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."

As a mother of an infant I can't decide on one name for my daughter. Yes, she has the given name Sophia, but her father and I are concerned she may be so confused by all the names by which we call her—Sugar Plum, Sweetie, Darling—that she won't know which one is the real one. Truth is they all are.

Jerusalem or Zion, Israelites or Sought Out, all of these are the "real names." Since, biblical name calling removes stones instead of hurls them, let's be sure to call each other "Child of God."

**Questions for the Day:**

What kinds of names do you find yourself using for yourself, others, God? Remembering that each of us are "God's Child" be creative in your positive name calling this week. Possibly try out, "You are God's Delight" and "Sought Out by God."

**Personal Prayer for the Day:**

*Based on the hymn "Bring Many Names" by Brian Wren*

Bring many names beautiful and good, strong mother God, warm father God, old aching God, young growing God, great living God, God of many names help us to reveal in your love for us by recognizing and calling each other by the name, "Child of God." Amen

**MARCH 20, 2011 – SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 121**

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*The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.*

I take great relief that my going out and coming in is being tracked by God, because there are definitely moments and days that I can't keep track of my own schedule. Having worked in a residential child care facility, I know the difficult task of keeping track of children all too well. I only had 11 boys to keep track of...I can't begin to imagine what it is like to track every Child of God.

And on top of keeping track of every one of us, "he who keeps you will not slumber." God manages to do all of this tracking without a moment's rest! That clearly makes my small task and my small calling in life a great relief (especially on the nights I get lots of slumber).

The greatest source of relief comes from verse two of the psalm: "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." A friend once told me that while our daily challenges may seem difficult, we have the greatest personal assistant—just one prayer away. May you lean on that personal assistant when you can't find strength in your situation.

**Questions for the Week:**

When was a time that knowing God is keeping track of you has brought you relief? How do you turn to God for help?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Praise God for keeping track of you and all those for whom you care about deeply. Take a deep breath and feel the relief of God's helping presence as you pray for help with this day's struggle.

*This devotion was contributed by Pamela Evans, administrative assistant for Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the ELCA Vocation and Education program unit. Prior to this call, she had the joy of living in a home of 11 at-risk boys ranging in age from 9 to 13 following her graduation from Wittenberg University.*

How does this help us prepare for Lent?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Gracious God, our Creator and Redeemer, we give thanks for the wonderful world we inhabit while waiting to rejoin you. We come from dust and will return to dust. Show us the way, so that we can help others.

Your strength carries us! We cherish and thank you for the gifts of peace, justice and love! In the name of Christ. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Donna Wiegel, assistant director, Youth and Young Adult Ministries Vocation and Education program unit of the ELCA.*

*This devotion was contributed by Janelle Rozek Hooper, pastor, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois. She is also children's chapel pastor at the Celebration! Children's Center Preschool.*

**DECEMBER 26, 2010 — FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 2:13**

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*Now when they [the magi] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream... (RSV)*

God communicates with Joseph through a dream. An angel warns Joseph to flee to Egypt because Herod means to do the holy family harm. And Joseph obeys the angel's instruction. Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus make their escape before Herod can send his troops with orders to slaughter the Holy Innocents, the male children under age two in Bethlehem. Dreams in Scripture are an important means of divine communication.

Dreams are the life-blood of the young. Our students are brimming with dreams, excitement and energy. But dreams are fragile things. They can be so easily crushed. They go into hiding, kept in secret places of the heart by those who fear exposing their dreams to the light of day. Sometimes, if they stay there too long, we forget our dreams. As educators, part of our job—perhaps the most sacred part of our jobs—is to nurture the dreams of our students. Education, in a fundamental sense, is really about nothing more than equipping our students with the tools to fulfill their dreams. The most precious gift a student can share with us is to share their dreams.

**Question for the Week:**

Joseph followed his dream and saved the life of our Lord. How can we encourage our students to follow their dreams?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Grant me the courage and the faith to follow my dreams, and the wisdom to encourage and equip my students to follow theirs. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Charles H. Oberkehr, senior pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Epiphany, and the Epiphany Early Childhood Learning Center, in Hempstead, Long Island, New York.*

**MARCH 13, 2011 — FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 32:8**

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*I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

A gentle, yet firm, promise is in this verse; we are to be given instructions and guidance.

As we begin our journey through Lent, these words assure us that we will be provided what we need to keep us steady on our pilgrimage. As sinners, what we need from God is not always what we think we want. But in the fullness of the passage, the psalmist reminds us that we are freed from earthly restraints—through confession and forgiveness—and God is ever with us, watchful, caring and compassionate!

As baptized children of God, we all make our way through the world. Teachers, parents, siblings, pastors, peers and caring adults pass their collective knowledge on to rising young people. Young people, in turn, help their elders remember what it is they seek.

Generations, one after the next, have carved out paths for others to follow. Sometimes our path narrows, disappearing into crevasses that take us deeper than we want to go. At other times the path is as wide as the horizon, and we risk getting lost in the openness. Then we climb to the glorious mountain top, but the path is difficult, hazardous. We must step carefully. By the time we reach our end, having been preserved from trouble, the Psalmist says that we are “surround(ed) with glad cries of deliverance.”

We never walk alone. Saints have gone before us, and saints will come after. Our time is in the middle, the here-and-now. But God's time is always. God's guiding hand is forever. The love of Christ endures.

“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

Glad to be given both earthly instructions and spiritual guidance, and grateful!

**Question for the Week:**

The *Lutheran Book of Faith Study Bible* tells us that Psalm 32 falls under the category of Individual Songs of Thanksgiving, and is a testament to the importance of the spiritual practice of confession and forgiveness.

### Personal Prayer for the Day:

Lord, we thank you for the gift of time and possessions that you have given us. In this time of Lent prepare us to receive the ultimate gift of life through your Holy sacrifice. Help us to share the gifts we have with others and to remember your example of humility and kindness.

*This devotion was contributed by Marlene Lund, executive director of the Center for Urban Education Ministries, part of Wheat Ridge Ministries. She is an associate in ministry and has been a Lutheran educator for 36 years serving as teacher, guidance counselor and principal.*

### JANUARY 2, 2011 – SECOND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: EPHESIANS 1:4-6

*...[J]ust as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

Each year I am faced with the daunting challenge of teaching 130 pre-school-age children how to behave during chapel. “Sitting on pock-ets, hands in lap with bubbles in mouth” for any length of time can be excruciating at age 5 and nearly impossible at age 3. Through methods of trial and error, I now begin each year with an explanation of how God sees each one of us as a king and or queen, chosen from the beginning of time, to know God and to live in God’s kingdom. I explain that we do not earn this title or choose this honor, but that God has picked us as God’s own and that each day , no matter how we behave, God still sees us with a crown on our head and loves us completely for just who we are. We just can’t mess this up no matter how we try, nor can we earn it by being extra especially good. We can just take it like a present, open it and enjoy it. Of course, many of the following lessons help to explain the great cost of this gift to God in the sacrifice God’s son, but the image of our undeserved inheritance is reinforced daily as I award a flamboyant cape and crown to the King and Queen of “chapel manners” and ask them to lead us in the closing blessing. In the beginning, it is rare that these crowns are bestowed on the most worthy recipients. In fact I find myself choosing the wiggliest members of each class to march proudly up to receive their honors as “Chapel King and Queen.” Amazingly no one has ever said, “Hey, they don’t deserve that”, or “What about me?” All enthusiastically give a “chapel cheer” for their reigning royalty and resolve to be chosen next time. **Wow! And the most amazing transformation slowly creeps through the ranks of my tiny congregation!!!** By the sixth or seventh week of school, EVERYONE is cheerfully demonstrating excellent chapel manners. Without fussing teachers, without stars for good or demerits for bad, without time out or treasure box incentives... they ALL, emphatically, start looking like Kings and Queens. “Accepted in the Beloved,” “before the foundation of the world,” “holy and without blame”... they begin to make it look easy.

### Questions for the Week:

How are you at receiving your royal inheritance, wiggles and all? How

good a cheerleader are you for the in-perfect Kings and Queens placed in your care?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Ask God to empower you to grow into God's plans and to refine your chapel manners today!

*This devotion was contributed by Joleen Howard-Browne, director, Grace Lutheran School, Conroe, Texas, where she has served as director for six years.*

**MARCH 9, 2011 – ASH WEDNESDAY**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: ISAIAH 58:10-12**

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*If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

Giving something up for Lent is a tradition that many Christians observe. Beginning with Ash Wednesday we tend to get in the more solemn mindset where we think about fasting and denying ourselves something that is difficult to do without. It's a time when we focus on the ultimate sacrifice that our Lord Jesus made for each of us—giving up his very life for our salvation. A number of years ago a friend of mine decided to forego the discipline of giving something up for Lent, but rather decided to add something to his routine in order to be a benefit to others. In his case, it was to work in a soup kitchen. I decided that I would try to do the same, especially if it meant not giving up chocolate for eight weeks! I also decided to ask my students if they thought we could do something together. We decided that for the season of Lent we would all be engaged in random acts of kindness toward others, those who we knew well and those who were strangers. What a marvelous eight weeks it turned out to be. Students added all kinds of things to their lives from being nice to younger siblings to making up the cots for the church homeless shelter to collecting canned goods for the food pantry. It was a learning experience for all of us and as promised in the scripture from Isaiah, the more we gave the more we received! The students decided that rather than stopping this Lenten discipline of giving at Easter we would continue throughout the year. I know that for me these many years later I still try to follow the discipline of adding some charitable works to my routine during Lent. I like to think that my students do the same! May your Lenten journey this year be a time where your light rises in the darkness and you become a repairer of the breach.

**Questions for the Day:**

How might you and your students add to your Lenten journey by serving others? How can we as Christians be seen by the world as repairers of the breach and restorers of the streets?

**Questions for the Week:**

How do we model Christ's love and servanthood to others? What do we do to share the good news with our students?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear Lord, may we continue to be examples of your love. May all those who have heard the good news and believe continue to share this with others. We pray for those who have heard and don't believe. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Jo Groth, a fourth grade teacher at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Waverly, Iowa.*

**JANUARY 6, 2011 — EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD****THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: ISAIAH 60:1-6, MATTHEW 2:1-12**

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*Memories of a Magus*

I have searched deeply for reasons.

Countless people asked me for them. Husbands, wives, leaders, slaves, wealthy and poor, all looking for guidance. I listened to them, stared at pinpoints of light winnowing in midnight, then delivered answers—reasons for their lives' turns, and new pathways to follow.

But I invented it all. I gave my customers empty symbols for which they imagined the meanings. They filled in their own details and left feeling one step closer to joy. And yet, I found no joy in this world. I lived alone. I was no longer the favored magus of the shah. My friends and colleagues ostracized me for political gain. Depression swallowed me. I was aimless, pointless. I had nothing to follow.

One morning, sunlight flickered through the window drapes, and I remembered a time I had something to follow: thirty years ago, when a star guided two friends and I to a newborn king. Carrying that memory, I left home, traveling once again to find him.

The king had long departed the sleepy town where he was born; but people spoke loudly of him, and I found him (now a young man!) preaching to people on hillsides, healing the sick, feeding the hungry and asking them to follow him. "Follow me," he had said. Not stars with false portents. Not playing cards, animal entrails, or wrinkles on hands. Just him and his true, clear words of hope and love. I had something to follow. At last I was given a reason.

**Questions for the Week:**

Is there anyone in your life—in your classroom or home—who is wrapped in the "thick darkness" of being lost, of feeling purposeless? How can Christ be a guide for them?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

O Lord, you came into this world to bring light to the darkness. Help us to rejoice in your light. Guide us so that we may reveal that light to others. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Benjamin Chandler, who serves as junior kindergarten teacher and art teacher for Grace Lutheran School in River Forest, Illinois.*

**JANUARY 9, 2011 – BAPTISM OF OUR LORD  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 3:13-17**

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*And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him...*

I love January, because that's when I get to break open the new calendars and start filling in all the little squares. There's a whole 365 of them, brand new and just waiting for a purpose.

Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his ministry, and all the days that followed marked the progress of his mission on earth—even beyond that into the present day, as we go about continuing that mission to proclaim the good news and reclaim humanity for God. When we look back on our own baptisms, we are aware that the event marked a new beginning for us—the beginning of our mission as Christians. How do we fill up our days and weeks and years with a Christian purpose?

My calendar quickly fills up with birthdays and anniversaries, meetings, appointments and dates with the grandchildren. As a teacher I especially enjoyed planning out a year's worth of teaching themes, and as a director I love mapping out our weekly Bible stories across the year. As I review my calendar at the end of each year, I hope that each of those little calendar squares represents not only what I have planned, but also will represent some progress in God's plan for my life.

**Question for the Week:**

Can you remember a time in your life that marked a new beginning for you? Describe how you felt God's presence, blessing or approval.

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Lord Jesus, help us this week to support each other in our baptismal calling. Remind us to use our time each day to be a light to others, and especially we pray for those preparing for baptism, including children, adults, parents, grandparents, godparents and sponsors.

*This devotion was contributed by Barbara Krumm, Director at Saint John Lutheran School in Norfolk, Virginia.*

**MARCH 6, 2011—LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE  
EPIPHANY/TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 17:5, 9**

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*He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead."*

Just imagine the awe the disciples must have felt when, on the mountain-top with Jesus, they heard the voice of the Lord. How they must have wanted to go tell everyone what they heard that day and yet were commanded not to!

Serving in a parochial school, we have a unique opportunity. We can be Jesus' hands and lips. We can, now, proclaim that good news to our students. In our actions and speech, we can try to mirror what Jesus would do if he were here. We can teach and discipline our students so they can see the love of Jesus and know he is the Son of God, and they are children of God. In my fourth grade classroom, we begin each day with devotions and then prayers. We pray for students who are sick, relatives and friends with health concerns or who are in the service. We give thanks for food, clothing, shelter and family. During the time we are writing our prayer and expressing our joys and concerns, the students always have to find something for which they are thankful. I try to help them realize they are indeed blessed.

Years ago, a colleague, who was helping an academically challenged student, related this story. The boy she was helping would get very frustrated because learning was so difficult. When he reached a certain frustration level, he would bang his head against the desk. She, of course, tried to get him to stop this. One day, she brought in a picture of Jesus. She asked him who this was. He responded, "Jesus." She then read the verse from the Bible saying we were made in God's image. She asked him, "If you are made in God's image, and you are a child of God, how do you think God feels when you hit your head against the desk?" He was silent for a moment while he thought about the implication. She said he continued to get frustrated, but never again hit his head on the desk.

What a privilege we have been given to be able to share God's love everyday of our lives. We, as Christian educators can share the good news: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

your circumstance, but faith will! Faith in a Father who definitely can meet our needs!

**Questions for the Week:**

What worries do I bring into the classroom with me? What faith do I bring? How will I teach trust in God? Will it be by example or word?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear Father in heaven: I thank you for your provision for all needs in my life and in the lives of the children and families I serve. Help me to get past the lesson plans and get right down to the child. Help me see where I can help or where I can send for help. Most of all, thank you for being the kind of Father I can trust for every possible lack in my life! In Jesus name I pray.

*This devotion was contributed by Nola Smith, director of Salem Lutheran Preschool, Dalbo, Minnesota.*

**JANUARY 16, 2011 — SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JOHN 1:29-42**

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Our monthly celebration of baptism anniversaries at our school's chapel worship service is a powerful, public witness to God's power and promise. Invitations to families are sent home the week before and they are invited to sit with their children during worship, and accompany them as they receive a certificate—on which they place their one-of-a-kind thumbprint—and a dove pin. If family members are not able to attend, the celebrants are joined by classmates and teachers. Then they journey down the middle aisle to the baptismal font, where they make the sign of the cross on each other's forehead with water from the font. The celebration is made complete with hugs and joyous song.

God reveals to John that, as he is baptizing with water, the Holy Spirit would descend and remain on the one who baptizes with the Spirit. As John testifies that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lamb of God, disciples begin to follow Jesus. John's public witness to the glorious baptism of our Lord calls people to attention.

On a daily basis, those servants of Christ who work in Lutheran schools and centers witness to the children in their care. Whether using words or actions, they call students and families to attention as they relate the promises of the Messiah and encourage them to follow Jesus. Thank God for these faithful servants!

**Questions for the Week:**

Have you asked your family to share the story of your baptism? How do you think baptism has changed your life?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank God for the gift of baptism and all its benefits—freedom from sin and death, making us inheritors of eternal life, allowing us to bear witness to our faith, and the many gifts of the Spirit.

*This devotion was contributed by Christine Hauge, Associate in Ministry and principal of Leif Ericson Day School, Brooklyn, New York.*

**JANUARY 23, 2011- THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 27: 1, 4-9**

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The psalmist recognizes the Lord as his light, salvation, defense, hiding place, foundation and victory. Notice that he runs to God and seeks God's face—not God's hand. Do we recognize the hope of this passage? We can overcome discouragement, loss and fear when we run to our Heavenly Father and focus on God's face. We nestle deep in the Lord's peace, knowing that as we seek God and God's kingdom first, all things will be added to us. There are times to make requests in prayer, but more importantly, we need to sit quietly, dwell in God's presence and meditate on God's word. How difficult it is for us to ignore the many voices and sounds that clamor for our attention, when we should listen for the voice of the Christ who loves us and refreshes us with his presence! How much do we miss by tossing up rapid prayers, thoughts and concerns as we rush from chore to chore or person to person. Jesus always took the time to spend with his Father. We should too.

**Question for the Week:**

When you are challenged in the classroom or in your personal life, do you seek the face of God or do you simply make requests for God's hand to move?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

The hymn, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" can become your prayer when you personalize the stanzas: "Turn my eyes to you, Jesus, I'll look in Your wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of Your glory and grace."

*This devotion was contributed by Gail Hayman, director at Church of the Savior Nursery School in Paramus, New Jersey. Gail has been with Lutheran schools since 1989.*

**FEBRUARY 27, 2011 – EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 6:24-34**

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*No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

This is a difficult scripture for me, especially when I remember my childhood. I went to a church elementary school. My mom worked in the office to pay for my tuition. I remember the day she found out our family qualified for the breakfast program. She shouted for joy! I cringed with fear. What was a positive help to our family, was a negative to me. I was the third child and, for some reason, thought this "food" financial hardship was my fault. I worried all the time that we wouldn't have enough at home, so I better eat as much as I can at school. I'm past that now.

I see some of my preschoolers "starving" for snack. I know very little of what breakfast is like at their home. It triggers my compassion for them. I ask about breakfast. Some say there wasn't time. Some say they weren't hungry. No one ever says there wasn't any.

Children typically trust their parents for everything: food, clothing, a bed to sleep in, a ride to school, and a roof over their head. They don't even think about the next meal or who will buy their clothing. They trust their parents to provide. I believe this is what Jesus was teaching about in this text. Trust God to provide each day's supply to you. Worry won't change

**FEBRUARY 20, 2011 – SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-11, 16-23**

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The text talks about our foundations—are they strong? If they are not, then the whole building is weaker—we can't stand up well against storms or quakes. But if Christ is a part of that foundation, the building stands firm and it can continue to grow. Think about the people of faith who are part of your “bricks and mortar.” Consider not only those whom you have known personally, but who have influenced you through their writings, music, or actions.

Our children need strong foundations in order to grow physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. You become part of the brick and mortar that helps them as their lives progress. You get to have an eternal influence on many of God's temples! As you look at children who seem to have no foundation or very unstable ones, consider the ways God is calling you to be Christ's hands and feet for those children, to be part of the building blocks that lead to lives of hope and joy.

Don't forget that you, too, are God's temple and that God is sending good bricks and mortar your way, too, to help you sustain the calamities that are part of life, but also to be a rampart for those who need the support of a strong structure.

**Questions for the week:**

Who are the people who have been part of your foundation (can you name 100?)

What are some ways we can help our students see that they are God's temples; special structures who can honor God?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Thank God for the mentors that have been sent your way and ask to be a strong guide for the children in your care. Ask to be continually reminded that you are God's temple, holy and special in his sight.

*This devotion was contributed by Renee Kallenbach Jefferson, who has served as the director of education at Transfiguration Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minnesota, for the past 11 years and as an adjunct professor at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.*

**JANUARY 30, 2011 – FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 15**

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*O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; Who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; In whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the Lord; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.*

“Those who do these things shall never be moved.” Can you picture the teacher who instructs her students to always do what is right, speak the truth, and is not moved, but stands firm? These are important characteristics to model for our students. Next to parents, teachers have great influence over children and need to remember how often they are admired. Many times when students are asked about a favorite teacher, it is one that was disciplined and always desired her students to do what is right. It was the teacher who spoke the truth and was not afraid to tell you of your shortcomings while also encouraging you with gentle praise. This teacher seemed to have a strength that could not be moved. We may even picture this teacher as a super-being with a firm stance, hands placed on hips, wearing a cape that billows in the wind. Remember as we follow Jesus in the world, our character can also model Jesus in the world to others.

**Questions for the Week:**

Are you setting an example of Jesus to your students through your actions? Do you model doing what is right and speak the truth from your heart?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Pray that as you teach, you also model doing what is right and speak the truth. Ask God to help you show Jesus to your students through your actions and words. Thank God for allowing you opportunities to honor the Lord through your teaching.

*This devotion was contributed by Kelly Catlett, preschool director at Incarnation Lutheran Church, Poway, California.*

**FEBRUARY 6, 2011 — FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: PSALM 112:1**

*Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands.*

What a great verse to start a conversation with our children about what God commands us to do. I can see this verse opening up a teacher's curriculum about the importance of following the rules, showing compassion and empathy, and being helpful. This could also lead into a discussion on what is expected of them in the classroom daily. Children can learn the importance of being a good friend or what it means to truly help someone in need. Imagine the effect that these lessons could have on a young child. You could really touch their little life and they could take these lessons with them into adulthood and really change the world for the better.

**Questions for the week:**

What commands do you value? Which of those were what your parents valued and passed on to you?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear God, guide us as we teach our children your ways. Help us to provide a positive environment in which your children are nurtured and thrive. In your name we pray. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Audra Catlett, assistant director, Incarnation Lutheran Preschool, Poway, California.*

**FEBRUARY 13, 2011 — SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
**THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: MATTHEW 5:22 — 24**

*Jesus said: "But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; ... So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift."*

I hope your school never experiences a time where two staff members cannot look one another in the eye. Sadly, this sometimes happens. They pass one another in the hall and look down. They relay information in an overly polite way that hurts.

Anger is normal and natural—we've all learned this. The question is then: What do I do with my anger? We can let it lead to insults and gossip, or we can take the much more difficult road of reconciliation.

"Why bother?" you ask. "It's just so hard." You're right: it IS hard. You might need help. You might need to look inside and ask for forgiveness, pray for the ability to forgive, then go to the other person.

It's worth bothering for the sake of the school community, for the sake of the children we serve. It's worth bothering because Jesus said so! He has reconciled us with himself and longs for us to be reconciled with one another.

**Questions for silent meditation:**

Think about those with whom you have argued. What strategies can help affect reconciliation? Why is reconciliation important: for you and for the people with whom you work and for the young people you serve? What help do you need for this work?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**

Dear God, it's hard sometimes. Forgive us. Lead us. Strengthen us for the sake of your children in this place. For Jesus' sake. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Beth Orling, who serves as interim pastor in the Southwestern Washington Synod of the ELCA.*