



*in peace,
service,
witness,
prayer,
and song*



2006-2007

A devotional guide for use by educators
in the Lutheran settings

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Devotion Guide project coordinator and editor, Donna R. Braband,
ELCA Director for Schools

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Dare to Soar...



Dear Partners in Ministry,

It is my pleasure to present to you the 2006 ELCA schools and early childhood education centers devotion guide. Our theme this year is Dare to Soar in Peace, Service, Witness, Prayer, and Song. The devotions in this guide have been written by teachers, administrators, pastors, and friends of Lutheran education.

We ask that you use this guide to provide a weekly devotion for staff, board meetings, and other times that the school community gathers. We encourage you to freely reproduce this devotion guide for use in your school or congregation.

“Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals. The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life.” (*Out of Solitude* by Henri J. M. Nouwen)

Jesus found strength by going off by himself or with his disciples to pray and have discussion. During these times energy grew to go and teach and baptize. As a faculty, school board, or groups within the congregational community use this devotion guide to find that time alone and be lifted up personally as well as in your work with students and their families.

A special thank you to all those who wrote a devotion, to the designers and editors of Augsburg Fortress, and to all those who make this devotion guide a part of their spiritual lives.

Donna R. Braband
ELCA Director for Schools

August 6, 2006
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Ephesians 4:1-16

The Scripture text tells us to grow up in every way, into Christ. So, God wants me to grow up in every way or even soar like an eagle, when just yesterday a parent told me I was harsh because I told her to stop when she tried to tell her child how to release a security door that was put there for her child's protection. Just about every day when I deal with parents I have to hold my tongue or stop and take a deep breath. Some days I don't feel like I'm grown up into Christ because of the thoughts that scamper through my brain.

Three things keep me focused on the higher road and walking in spiritual maturity. First, the children I work with deserve it. They watch me to see what I am doing and saying. I want them to learn the very best behavior. I promise myself to disagree without being disagreeable, and to treat those who differ with my values with respect and dignity because they, too, are created in God's image.

Second, I make sure I take time each day for prayer. It keeps me balanced and centered. A wise teacher once told me every growing Christian should spend at least twenty minutes each day in prayer and Scripture study. Those of us dealing with children probably need more.

Third, I am doing my job to the glory of God. Keeping that in mind helps me strive for excellence.

Question for the Week:

What are some actions you can do to keep expressing God's love and grace to those who push your stress buttons?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for God to give you enough grace to be an instrument of God's love in all your actions with children and their parents.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Marcia M. Thompson, pastor, Zion Lutheran Church and Preschool, Flourtown, Pennsylvania. Pastor Thompson writes for the local paper and has published a book on spiritual healing.

August 13, 2006
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Ephesians 4:32

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:32 (NRSV)

“In all your deeds and words you should look on Jesus as your model, whether you are keeping silence or speaking, whether you are alone or with others.” – Bonaventure

As a child, this was one of the first Bible verses I committed to memory. It was a cute Sunday school song with finger motions for the chapter and verse numbers. Memorizing this verse has served me well over the years. I remember babysitting in my early teen years and quoting it to the little ones I was in charge of. It was a good verse to use when they weren't being very nice to one another and provided a jumping off point for talking about Jesus. Being kind to one another is a habit. Habits are difficult to form and easy to lapse away from. Often, it's much easier to be indifferent than to be kind. As I have gotten older, the tenderhearted part of the verse speaks to me. It's hard to be tenderhearted to the people that need your forgiveness; especially when their words or actions have truly cut us to the quick.

How we model kindness and tenderheartedness will matter to the students we encounter each day. They see us as their role models and want to emulate much of what they see us do and say. Remember, what you teach today will be useful to your students for the rest of their lives.

Question for the Week:

Are you catching your students being kind and tenderhearted and praising them for their actions and words?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, help us to form the habit of being kind and tenderhearted as we practice forgiveness. Be with us as we try to emulate the model of you, Son Jesus. Forgive us, as we don't always hit the mark. In Christ's name, Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Brooke Witsberger, head of school, Stepping Stone Montessori School, Plainfield, Illinois.

Thought for the Week: Proverbs 9:1-6

“You that are simple, turn in here!” The ancient Hebrews used the picture of Lady Wisdom to personify godly life and understanding. In this text, Wisdom has built a welcoming home and prepared a great feast. Then she sends out her servant girls with an invitation, “You who are simple, turn in here.” That is, you who are not wise, you who live by your present narrow view of life, turn in here. Turn your life from the simplistic to the breadth and depth of God’s world. These young women call out a fine invitation, “By God’s grace, you now find life very good, but there is more than you have yet imagined. Come. Find wisdom!”

As Christian teachers and school administrators, you issue the invitation, day after day, lesson after lesson, “Come, children, come young people, your lives are good now, but there is more. There are great ideas to discover, fine patterns for living, deep insights into yourselves and others.” As educators, you invite children and youth to wisdom at entry points appropriate to their capacity. You entice them into the knowledge of God’s world that has been accumulated over the centuries by artists, teachers, philosophers, mechanics, scientists, business people, parents, pastors, and all. You live in the house of wisdom and God sends you out to announce this invitation, “Do not be satisfied with what you know now. There is more to be thought, more to be lived, for God is limitlessly good, amazingly great.” And, this invitation is always also for you.

Question for the Week:

As you plan for the school year ahead, how can you be one who invites children and youth into the wonderful wisdom God makes available?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the joy of discovery: Lord, let me hear today a fresh invitation into your wisdom, and make me a joyful, effective inviter of others. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Stanley N. Olson, executive director, Vocation and Education, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

August 27, 2006
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

In this passage, Joshua carefully implements a plan to lead the people of Israel back to God. First he calls them together, gives them a historical review of what God has done, then follows with the command to "...put away the gods which your fathers served...and serve the LORD." However, Joshua doesn't stop there. He then models this decision-making process by stating, "...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." The people respond as they follow Joshua's example, declaring, "...we will also serve the LORD, for he is our God."

Joshua's plan is simple: Gather the people together; Teach the lesson; Model the concept; Allow the people to take action. We do the same in our classrooms as we Welcome our students; Present the information; Provide real-life examples; and Allow the students to apply what they have learned.

Joshua took a chance when he gave people a choice, but then led them by providing his life as the example. We, too, can trust our students' wisdom by giving them the freedom to make their own decisions. When we model our faith, they will be inclined to follow our example; daring to soar in their choices to serve, witness to, and worship our LORD and Savior.

Question for the Week:

How are you modeling your faith at school?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for guidance as you lead by example and for the confidence to enable your students to make choices based on what they have learned.

This devotion was contributed by Lynn Hess, director, The School of Grace, a parent participatory preschool, Grace Lutheran Church, Raleigh, North Carolina.

September 3, 2006
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

“Make them (God’s words) known to your children and your children’s children.” What a great text for the beginning of another school term! This text places us as teachers right in the midst of a parade of all those who have taught, are teaching, and will teach children and children’s children. We teach what the Lord commanded; namely, the will and grace of God.

Reflect for a few moments. Who taught you God’s will? How far back can you trace that great company of teachers—to grandparents, to someone born on another continent? I recall Jewish ancestors in the Old Testament, the disciples, Christians persecuted by Rome, cathedral school nuns, Martin Luther, Sorbian Lutherans coming across the Atlantic on a ship named the Ben Nevis, my mother... See yourself in that long line. Image yourself making Christ known. See the children you are currently teaching; now image them teaching their grandchildren the same love of Jesus they learned from you.

What a challenge! What a blessing! What an inspiration to follow our teaching vocation faithfully and joyfully.

Questions for the Week:

To the best of your knowledge, for how many generations has your family practiced Christianity? What primary message about God’s will are you hoping your current students will pass on to their children?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for allowing you to be a faithful teacher in a long line of those who taught children so that they can teach their children’s children.

This devotion was contributed by Melvin M. Kieschnick, Carlsbad, California, who served Lutheran schools nationally and internationally for 50 years and in retirement is a staff associate for Wheat Ridge Ministries.

September 10, 2006
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: James 2:1-17
(especially verses 15-17)

“If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

What has always inspired me about teachers of all stripes is your ability to “dig deep.” Sometimes it is “digging deep” emotionally or mentally, preparing for another hectic day. Sometimes it is “digging deep” physically, mustering enough courage to teach and to witness. Sometimes it is “digging deep” into our own pockets, pouring out what we have so that our school children have adequate supplies, clothing, or food.

The book of James cautions us: “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Instead of a “dead faith,” we have a lively faith, a faith in Jesus Christ, the one who has triumphed over the dead. And we have the promise of the Holy Spirit’s presence with the church, equipping us and calling us to overflow with good works in service of our brothers and sisters in Christ and our neighbor.

Let us show the world that our faith is indeed alive and overflowing. And if you need hope this week, read Isaiah 35:4-7a and Psalm 146.

Question for the Week:

How might I live this week, so that the faith in me spills over into good works?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for all who live in places of the world where they cannot afford to go to school. Pray for those who have inadequate supplies and facilities for learning. Pray that we as Christians might once again “dig deep” and respond to schools beyond our own.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Matthew Musteric, one of the pastors, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Pemberville, Ohio, who enjoys the sounds of sheer joy from the Christian preschool upstairs.

September 17, 2006
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 50:4-9a

“The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning God wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.”

We have been blessed with the tongue of a teacher, but do we always listen to our students? If we listen we might “hear” a great deal. Our children are calling out to us. Many, if not all, are in great need. They want to be heard. They want to be loved. They want to succeed. They want someone to be proud of them. This is true of students of all ages, and begins with the very youngest.

In order to meet the needs of the children, we need to prepare ourselves for the task. We could start each and every day thanking God for the gift of the tongue of a teacher and praying that God will awaken our ears to really hear the children in our care.

A smile, a gentle touch on the shoulder, a hug for a little one, a kind word or a pat on the back, are all good ways to let students know we care. If the children in our care trust us, how much more will they be willing to trust God when we share the good news of Christ’s love with them? And if they trust God, won’t they begin to feel confident about themselves? If they feel confident won’t learning become much easier for them? And so it goes. What began with a prayer in the morning has us flying by the afternoon if we Dare to Soar.

Question for the Week:

In what ways can we truly listen to our students?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that we might be able to get to know each student by listening and reaching out to each one so that each one might, in turn, trust us.

This devotion was contributed by Dottie Fergus, preschool teacher, Minnetonka Lutheran Preschool and Childcare, Minnetonka, Minnesota and director of Christian Education, Calvary Lutheran Church, Edina, Minnesota.

September 24, 2006
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Mark 9:30-37

Have you ever had—or been—the kind of student the disciples were? Just previous to this passage they had failed to cast out demons because they had neglected to pray, something Jesus had certainly instructed them to do. Here Jesus tells them openly what is going to happen in Jerusalem, and they not only don't get it, they are afraid—like students everywhere—to ask Jesus to explain what he means. Then Jesus catches them deep in discussion. They are afraid to tell Jesus what they're talking about—and rightly so. They're discussing who will be the greatest in God's kingdom. Obviously, they hadn't gotten the point. All of this sounds like familiar classroom behavior.

The disciples had been with Jesus long enough to hear Jesus' preaching and parables. They had witnessed Jesus' healing and miracles. But they still didn't get it. How often have we, as students, missed the point? How often have we, as teachers, been exasperated by our students' lack of understanding?

And yet Jesus chooses and uses these twelve to begin building God's kingdom, and thousands of generations later we continue to experience the results. Inexplicably, Jesus chooses and uses us to continue the building of Christ's church. Flawed and confused as we sometimes are, we are God's instruments in the world. In humility and thankfulness, strengthened and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we carry on the holy work begun all those centuries ago.

Question for the Week:

How can you help build Christ's church in your classroom?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that all teachers and students may contribute to the spreading of God's kingdom.

This devotion was contributed by Mary Mortimore Dossin, a graduate of Valparaiso University, former academic dean and instructor in English at Luther College, Teaneck, New Jersey, and a contributor to many Lutheran publications.

October 1, 2006
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Mark 9:38-50

Too often we discount the influence we have on other people's lives. At the 100th anniversary celebration of the first parish I served some twenty years ago, a member came up to me and said, "Do you remember what you said to me the day we met in your office?" I did not remember. He told me what I had said. It was not earth shattering, but it helped set him on a course that changed his life for the better.

As the new senior pastor of a large downtown church with a pre-school, I received an unsolicited e-mail recently. A portion of the e-mail said, "Dear Rev. Sommer, we have never met; however, I wanted to share with you that I attended first grade at St. Martin's in 1962. I will be 50 very soon. Although I only attended for one year, I have very fond and vivid memories of that year. In fact, I believe I still have the handwritten note that my teacher, Leona Grimes, sent to my second grade teacher when we moved..." She goes on to recall that life was a struggle for her mother, a single parent, and concludes by saying, "Now I look back at those times with a sense of gratitude.... I am always happy to see that St. Martin's is still around."

I am especially thankful for Ms. Grimes, wherever she is, and her handwritten note.

"Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink..."

Question for the Week:

Who could you thank that has influenced your life?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to remind you that the little things matter as you work with children.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Craig Sommer, senior pastor, St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas.

Thought for the Week: Mark 10:2-16

We serve in the midst of seismic changes to the family such as divorce, single-parenting, and new household configurations. Parents struggle to balance marriage and family against such pressures as multiple-incomes, tight schedules, and uncertain values. Where is the “rule book” for them and for us, to decide all these competing pressures and needs?

In our text the disciples seek a second audience with Jesus on the question of a legal basis for divorce; later, they “protect” Jesus from the nuisance of the little ones, deemed to be of little value in the human pecking order.

To the disciples’ surprise, Jesus slams shut traditional legal loopholes allowing either the abandonment of a spouse or the denigration of a child. In the reign of God there is no appeal to the “fine print.” There is but space for grace. God grants forgiveness and new life to all who will learn to pray: “forgive us, renew us, and lead us, that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name.”

As the LBW marriage service states, “Because of sin, our age-old rebellion, the gladness of marriage can be overcast and the gift of the family can become a burden.” Can, and does. “But,” the text goes on, “because God, who established marriage, continues still to bless it with abundant and ever-present support, we can be sustained in our weariness and have our joy restored.” Grant this Lord—by your word of grace—to us all.

Question for the Week:

How do you model God’s grace for your students and their families?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that all those in our care may respond to Jesus’ radical welcome and acceptance, and that the reign of God may flourish in our classrooms, our ministries, and our lives.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Bill Hurst, senior pastor, First Lutheran Church and School, Torrance, California.

October 15, 2006
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Hebrews 4:12-16

Professional football teams don't want to take a chance. Each spring, tryout camps are conducted for the top college prospects. Scouts for the pro teams time each athlete and see how strong they are. When it's time to select players, the teams use the scout's information to decide who measures up the best. In other sports there are also ways in which prospects are measured. If a pitcher isn't throwing his fastball in the 90s range he probably will not be drafted. Other position players are rated by their speed afoot and their throwing arms. Although there are sometimes surprises, professional sports have their ways of judging talent.

As Christians it's not always so easy to judge others or ourselves. Sometimes we are deceived by those who regularly attend church and do many good deeds. We must be careful not to fool ourselves into believing that we deserve God's favor because of our words and actions. Hebrews 4:13 warns us that, "And before God no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account." We must never lose sight of the fact that we are sinful and deserve the wrath of God's punishment. It is only through God's grace that we are made clean through the precious blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We will never measure up to the standards that God has demanded. Without Jesus none of us would "make the cut." We can't fool God. God alone sees us as we truly are.

Question for the Week:

Have there been times when we have felt that we are better than others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that we remain humble in the knowledge that God can see into our hearts at all times and knows our true sinful nature.

This devotion was contributed by Paul Buchheimer, principal, Advent Lutheran School, Boca Raton, Florida.

October 22, 2006
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 53:4-6, 11 and Psalm 91:9-10

Preschoolers have little grasp of pronouns so replacing pronouns with nouns becomes almost automatic for their teachers. But this can help adults, too. Just give it a try. Let the little children lead. Allow God to speak directly to you in these passages by putting your name in the blanks instead of pronouns. (Note the added urgency in this passage when the same substitutions are made with Jesus' name.)

Isaiah 53 becomes “Surely **Jesus** has borne _____’s infirmities and carried _____’s diseases yet _____accounted Jesus stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But **Jesus** was wounded for _____’s transgressions, crushed for _____’s iniquities, upon Jesus was the punishment that made _____ whole, and by **Jesus**’ bruises _____ is healed. _____, like a sheep, has gone astray & _____ has turned to _____’s own way and God has laid on **Jesus** the iniquity of _____ and everyone _____ knows. ... **Jesus**, the righteous one, God’s servant shall make _____ righteous and **Jesus** shall bear _____’s iniquities.”

Pray the passage, inserting the names of students, co-workers, classmates, and friends—especially the *problem people* of your life. Marvel as God changes hearts—even your own heart!

Pray promise passages like Psalm 91 to combat fears.

“Because _____ has made the Lord _____’s refuge, the Most High _____’s dwelling place, no evil shall befall _____, no scourge come near _____’s tent.”

Questions for the Week:

How can I bring God’s Word alive to others? What other passages can I personalize?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O Lord, may your Word come alive through me and to me.

This devotion was contributed by Linda L. Schlitt, coordinator of Cradle Roll Ministries, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Livermore, California.

October 29, 2006
Reformation Sunday

Thought for the Week: Romans 3:19-28

Martin Luther dared to soar. Luther knew he had to make his newly discovered knowledge known and he certainly didn't suspect where his biblical findings would take the Church. As an educator and theologian, Luther studied the Scriptures and found through this study that God's gift to those who believe in God is free and unconditional; Jesus Christ had long before given his life for all of us through his death on the cross. Luther nailed the 95 theses to the church door inviting others to debate him. The rest is history.

According to Dr. Mary Havens, professor of Church History at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, the basic premise of Luther's Reformation was that the Church needs always to be re-formed, renewed, and re-spirited through a fresh encounter with Holy Scripture. She further states that as children of Luther's Reformation, we cannot be content to just rest upon what others did in the past but rather we must always be armed with the Scripture and open to new ways the Spirit is leading us to bear Christ to the world which God so dearly loves and seeks to redeem.

Question for the Week:

How are we arming our students with Scripture and encouraging them to be open to where the Spirit is leading them?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Guide me, as the teacher of these students who are precious children of yours, to do your will in leading them as they learn and soar.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. Mary Ann Shealy, Newberry, South Carolina, a former chairperson of the board of the Division for Higher Education and Schools in the previous structure of the ELCA.

November 5, 2006
All Saints Sunday

Thought for the Week: Revelation 21:1–6a

Marcus Borg in *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (Harper, San-Francisco, ©2003, pg 155 ff) introduced me to the Celtic Christian understanding of “thin places.” It is based on the understanding that God is “right here” as well as “more than right here.” He quotes Thomas Merton: “We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time. . . . God shows Himself everywhere, in everything – in people and in things and in nature and in events. It becomes very clear that God is everywhere and in everything and we cannot be without Him.”

And occasionally, when the boundary between us and God is “thin,” when “the veil momentarily lifts, and we behold God, experience the one in whom we live, all around us and within us,” we experience God’s presence in profound and powerful ways. Worship, prayer, conversation, contemplation, acts of service, music, poetry can all be thin places. Thin places usually can’t be found by looking for them. They must be discovered in real time, serendipitously. The Christian seer John who authored Revelation saw God’s presence as a shiny, jeweled city. I believe he intended the faithful to discover that this “kingdom reality” is not just a future event, but a present one as well.

I also believe that even the most ordinary of days spent in front of a classroom of students can harbor glimpses of that holy presence. Thin places abound in the life you will live today. Will your eyes be open to see God’s presence when the veil is lifted? Will your heart leap when you realize that the child standing in front of you is a window to a kingdom far beyond us, and right in front of us?

Question for the Week:

What was I doing, where was I going, what was I feeling the last time I became aware of the immanence of God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ever-present God, who swirls around us and within us, so move in my life now that I cannot help but be awakened to your presence and holiness, and cannot resist the power of your love to fill me and flow through me into the world you so much desire to redeem. Lead me to places that are thin enough for me to know you and to be known by you.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Robert Braband, pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Lombard, Illinois.

November 12, 2006
Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Mark 12:38-44

“ . . . she out of her poverty has put in everything she had.”

Kristyn takes special care of the children who come into our pre-school and child care center at 6:30 a.m. hungry, or tired, or who speak another language, or who are feeling sad or strange their first few weeks at school. One rainy evening at 6:15 p.m. (we close at 6) I saw her with her head down on a child's table. The last child had just been picked up. Kristyn had been carrying around our newest teary child on her hip for the last 2 days; she had changed a very messy set of clothes (our kids are required to be out of diapers), cleaned up a medical emergency, and played and taught as usual. Exhausted, she had “put in everything she had.” We could retell this anecdote millions of times in the lives of teachers and parents late at night when they finally get to bed. Jesus recognized the offerings of those who “put in everything.” Jesus declared those offerings greater than those of the rich who were not so stretched.

Jesus also “put in everything” when he went to the cross and grave. And God “put in everything” to defy the laws of expectation and raise him from the dead “once for all” (Hebrews 9:26). That is why we do not have to “put in everything” to be made right with God and one another. Yes, we love; yes, we care; yes, we work hard! But we are each loved for who we are: one of God's children!

Question for the Week:

Can you bask in God's grace and love on days off as well as on those days when you have “put in everything”?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for all the teachers and parents who “put in everything” and thank God that we are loved for who we are, not just for what we do.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Beth Orling, former pastor, St. John, Westville, New Jersey, home of St. John Care child care center.

Thought for the Week: Hebrews 10:19-25

My 9-year-old son, Luke, had a hard day in the third grade. Several hard days, in fact, with a fellow third grader named Cody who had been pinching him and telling him he was bad at math. We'd had Cody at the house once for Luke's birthday party and, I have to admit, I was not too taken with the child—he was loud, sassy, and rude. So I told Luke that it didn't sound like Cody was being a real friend, and that he didn't have to play with him if he didn't want to.

A few days later, I asked him how it was going with Cody. "Oh, we're still friends," he said. "I thought I should give him another chance. Maybe he doesn't know any better."

Forgiveness. Hard enough to do when one has sinned against you and admitted it; harder yet when there is no acknowledgement of guilt or expression of regret. Yet, Scripture shows us that one of the most profound ways in which Christ encouraged people was when he forgave them. I can think of nothing more discouraging than to know that there are no more chances and that your sins are remembered and counted up.

We often think of our work with children as modeling for them Christ's ways of love, encouragement, and forgiveness while failing to see the seeds of faith that have already been planted in these little ones. Full recipients of God's grace and members of God's kingdom, children many times are the ones to teach us lessons—lessons we once learned about what it means to live in grace-filled communities where people "stir up one another to love and good work."

Question for the Week:

In what ways do we see children living out lives of grace?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for hearts open to forgiveness and encouragement; eyes open to the good works of others; and arms open to love and lift up.

This devotion was contributed by Jenny Peterson, Austin, Texas. Jenny is a past member of the DHES Board of Directors.

November 26, 2006
Christ the King Sunday

Thought for the Week: Revelation 1:4b 8

This week's Scripture describes an all powerful God who has always existed, who rules all the kings of the earth, and whose coming will cause all the tribes of the earth to wail.

Alone, those passages are enough to make us feel rather insignificant and even a little uneasy!

But John's greeting delivers the incredible message that this powerful and everlasting God offers us two special gifts—grace and peace.

Several children come to our Lutheran schools from homes filled with tension and uncertainty due to divorce, drug addiction, or neglect. Many of these children are now being raised by grandparents because their primary family structure has collapsed. Many have not heard of God's great love for them.

They are well-acquainted with power used to control and destroy. But some have never witnessed the use of power to forgive and offer peace.

I'm so grateful we have the opportunity through our schools to greet these little ones with messages of grace and peace. We have the joy of sharing the truth that God's love for them does not change.

Through our schools, we can provide a place of forgiveness and peace, and demonstrate loving, gentle ways of resolving conflict.

For whatever brief time we have with these children, our message of God's grace and peace can bring a ray of light and hope to their young lives, providing a sense of security and comfort they can carry with them throughout their days.

Question for the Week:

How can I emphasize God's message of grace and peace in the Bible stories we explore this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, please continue to call little ones to you through our schools. Thank you for giving us such a powerful message of joy to share with them. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Julie Young, secretary, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Polson, Montana. Julie also serves as a member of the Education Ministry Team overseeing Little Friends Preschool.

December 3, 2006
First Sunday in Advent

Thought for the Week: Luke 21:25-28

In the late spring I would wake up between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. and then not be able to get back to sleep. I decided one of these nights that I needed to get a cup of hot chocolate and experience silence and the peaceful darkness.

I was amazed to find that the darkness was filled with the singing of birds. I could see no evidence that sunrise was coming, but those birds knew that the sun was ready to rise and they were greeting it with song.

As Christians we are out singing in the darkness. Aren't we? We wait, knowing that dawn will come even when we can't see evidence of it. We trust the promise of a new day. We, in the darkest month of the entire year have the courage to light candles of joy and peace because we wait for the promise of God's Son made flesh. Or are we waiting for the second coming of his Son? Both, it turns out.

When Martin Luther was asked what he would do if he knew the end of history was coming soon, he answered: "I would plant an apple tree." Why? Planting an apple tree is a symbol of waiting with hope. We wait for the tree to bear fruit in its season just as we wait with hope for the coming of our Savior.

Just as we wait with anticipation and hope for the coming Christ, we plant the seed of faith and hope in the children we teach. We nourish that seed and wait with hope that it will grow and produce the fruit of peace, hope, kindness, and love.

Question for the Week:

What will you do this week to listen in the darkness with hope?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the children of Lutheran schools in Palestine who find islands of peace and hope in a world of fighting and war, that through their education they may become vehicles of peace in the world.

This devotion was contributed by Donna R. Braband, director for schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Thought for the Week: Philippians 1:3-11

Two sixth grade boys have decided to settle their differences with their fists. An irate parent stands in your doorway. You have a stack of papers 2" high on your desk that need to be graded. You're not sure if you should scream or cry.

As you sit down for a minute to recoup, you open a letter and begin to read, "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best."

What a great letter from Paul to the Philippians, from Paul to us, from God to us! God began a good work in us and God will complete that work. God will make our love overflow and will give us knowledge and insight to deal with the problems of everyday life. There are no promises that it will be easy but the promise is there that God will be with us always and will bless us with all that we need as we work day by day with God's precious little ones.

Question for the Week:

What challenges face you this week as you share the gospel with those whom God has entrusted to you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for God's special blessings in the areas in which you need help the most as you continue to live in God's love.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy Wackenhuth, educational coordinator of the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation, Chicago, Illinois.

December 17, 2006
Third Sunday in Advent

Thought for the Week: Luke 3:7-18

I recently participated in a small group Bible study that was part of a large conference for church leaders. The Bible study leader posed a very interesting question: how does courage intersect with mission? He used as an example the travels of Lewis and Clark and their journey through the western United States to reach the Pacific Ocean. In the midst of traveling through a new, uncharted, and hostile environment, these men could not have accomplished their mission without exercising a great deal of courage.

John the Baptist surely possessed courage as he pointed the way to Jesus. He told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! Telling church leaders that they needed to repent could not have been easy. Telling armed soldiers to be fair and compassionate must have been tough, too. Not to mention advising tax collectors to be honest!

Courage is required each and every day for Lutheran educators who dare to soar. Bringing peace, service, witness, prayer, and song to children and families each day is not always easy. Classrooms are challenging places. Parents can be difficult. Sharing the counter-culture message of the cross to people whose world is filled with other values and priorities can seem overwhelming.

Lutheran educators who dare to soar stay focused on Christ crucified and risen! We 'walk wet' in the waters of baptism and live well in the Lord, even in the midst of difficult and challenging times. Fortunately, we know our God is with us as we face moments where courage is needed. We echo the words of Isaiah, "I will trust and not be afraid." (Isaiah 12:2-6) We rejoice in the truth of Paul's words to the Philippians, "Do not be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:4-7).

Be strong and courageous today as you dare to soar for the sake of the mission!

Question for the Week:

When have you experienced a time when the pursuit of mission required you to be courageous?

December 17, 2006
Third Sunday in Advent

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for courageous Christians everywhere—leaders of churches, missionaries, and people everywhere who live and share their faith in hostile environments.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. Richard Herman, president of Wheat Ridge Ministries, an international ministry dedicated to seeding new ministries of health and hope, in the name of the healing Christ.

Thought for the Week: Luke 1:39-45

The season is filled with joy and wonder! The children are excited as they learn the story of Jesus' birth and often participate in programs at their church and school. As educators, we are, at times, exhausted by the energy of the children and all of the organizing and practicing for the Children's Christmas Programs as well as our personal commitments. As I read this verse, I thought of Mary and how overwhelmed she must have been and yet, she readily accepted God's will.

Educators in the Lutheran Church have answered God's call to serve as teachers of children. It is not a glamorous career with excessive pay and benefits, and we can at times feel unappreciated. The rewards are humble: more often in the form of a homemade gift from one of our students, a note of appreciation from a parent, or a hug from a child. These rewards can instantly re-energize us and remind us why we serve God in this manner. We are the chosen instruments of God to share our knowledge of academic studies and to act as a guide while children navigate social, emotional, and physical growth. But most importantly we are given the opportunity to communicate the love of God and Jesus. We reach all over the world as children return to their homelands, grow up to join in mission work, or stay in the neighborhood and grow into faithful citizens of the community. Much as Mary's story and the birth of Jesus changed our lives with the promise of grace and eternal life, we touch lives of children.

Question for the Week:

What path do you think God is calling you to follow?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the children that they would follow the teachings throughout their lives. Pray for the educators that they be renewed and continue to serve God through serving the children.

This devotion was contributed by Gail Holdbrook, director, Amazing Creations Preschool, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Sunnyvale, California.

December 31, 2006
First Sunday after Christmas

Thought for the Week: Colossians 3:12-17

“And whatever you do...do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” One Christmas, long ago, when my son was just three years old, he stopped opening his presents and asked me, “Mama, where are the presents for Jesus, isn’t it his birthday?” I stumbled through a weak explanation that seemed to satisfy him for the moment, but the thought didn’t leave me.

The next week I shared the incident with a colleague of mine, and she told me about a tradition they had in their home. She said they kept a Christmas stocking hanging up all year, and whenever they saw someone doing something extra kind (or special in some way), they would write it on a piece of paper and put it in the stocking. When Christmas would come the next year, they would pour out the stocking and read about all of the gifts they had given to Jesus. My family adopted the tradition, and it has helped us to keep Christmas alive all year long. Also, it has helped us to keep our focus on doing what is right and good. I have shared this message with many people over the years. Now they too have a stocking hanging in their homes year-round.

Question for the Week:

How are you keeping Christmas alive year-round for your students, so that they might do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

May we all stay focused on Jesus, that we might do everything to his glory, and in his name, giving thanks to God.

This devotion was contributed by Carol Sutterfield, director, Holy Trinity Learning Center, Irving, Texas.

January 7, 2007
Baptism of Our Lord

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 43:1-7

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” God, in Isaiah 43:1-7, redeems Israel from Babylonian exile. God calls and claims Israel into a close relationship in which the people of Israel belong to and matter to God.

Children today need to feel that they belong and that they matter, especially when even family members can be exiled from one another by society’s fast pace.

I attempt to show our 85 daycare and afterschool students that they belong to and matter to God. I regularly draw a water cross on their foreheads while giving a blessing recalling their baptisms (or invite them to baptism), to those who wish to participate. This liturgical season’s blessing is, “It is Epiphany. God appears in Jesus. Jesus loves you.”

In baptismal water, the God of Israel and of Jesus calls these children and each of us by name and claims us for a close relationship that redeems us from being self-exiled from God’s love. We belong to and matter to God just as much as Jesus does—the One whose baptism we celebrate this week.

It is wonderful to celebrate baptism with the children and to see them smile as they approach the font. Many of the children now draw the water cross on their foreheads themselves.

YOU, too, have the opportunity to remind God’s children and youth that they in their baptisms belong to and matter to God...Just as YOU do!

Question for the Week:

How do you show your students and yourself that you all belong to and matter to God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Consider praying in thanksgiving to the God of Israel and of Jesus who in baptism redeems you and your students and calls you all by name.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Karl Biermann, pastor, Grace Lutheran Church and Noah’s Ark Daycare Center (birth through fifth grade), Bandera, Texas.

January 14, 2007
Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Thought for the Week: John 2:1-11

In our reading today we hear a familiar story, one of that first miracle performed by Jesus at the wedding at Cana. I remember hearing this story as a young child in Sunday school and being utterly amazed and enthralled with the “magic trick” that Jesus performed.

But this miracle of Jesus was more than just a magic trick; it was the first public act that clearly displayed his divinity and the powers that go along with it. Just moments before performing the miracle, Jesus said to his mother, “My hour has not yet come.” But now he had determined that his time had come. From this point forward, Jesus’ life would not be the same. The demands on his time were about to increase—from preaching, to healing, to feeding large crowds, his ministry was now in full swing. As servants in the ministry, the demands placed on us are also many. While our ministry may seem less miraculous than our Lord’s, he certainly does great things through us in our congregations, schools, and centers.

As Moses had changed the waters of the Nile to blood, Jesus changed water into wine, reminding us of the redeeming work we celebrate in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

May this gift refresh you for service in the Kingdom!

Question for the Week:

What miracles has God performed through you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for pastors, teachers, and administrators that they may be refreshed and energized for service.

This devotion was contributed by Kyle B. Chuhuran, principal, Messiah Lutheran School, Fairview Park, Ohio.

January 21, 2007
Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Thought for the Week: Luke 4:14-21

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives.”

Jesus came to set us FREE. Do we imprison ourselves by saying, “I cannot as I do not have the ability, education, physical build, or money.” Jesus says we are FREE! Are we too intimidated to try something different?

When I was a teenager, I was asked to teach Sunday school. I did. Although I enjoyed the children, I realized I had no idea how to teach, so I prayed. Then the thought occurred to me that I needed to go to college, but I had NO money. I prayed. I was able to attend college. I became a teacher. Now I look forward to teaching Vacation Bible School each summer.

What would God have you do? Make a list. God sent Jesus to release the captives. Dare to Soar!

Question for the Week:

What would God have me do differently this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to give you courage and persistence. Try your wings. You’ll soar beyond your greatest expectations.

This devotion was contributed by L. Leone (Lewis) Sommerfield, substitute teacher and mother of three children who attended Zion Lutheran School, Hastings, Nebraska. She is currently a member of First St. Paul Church in Hastings, Nebraska.

Thought for the Week: Jeremiah 1:4-10

God has called us to serve the children and their families through our schools and centers. When we accepted the call we were never guaranteed that it would be easy. Sometimes, depending on the day, the hour, or minute our calling to this ministry becomes difficult. Staff dis-sention, challenging/demanding children (and parents), facility issues, congregations, and more can create doubt in us about our ability to fulfill this calling from God.

We can be sure that Jeremiah experienced his share of difficulties during his ministry as prophet to the nations. But Jeremiah had complete trust in God's promises. "I am with you and will rescue you." Jeremiah 1:8a. God, who formed him, called him, equipped him, and walked with him every step of the way has also promised to always be there for us: God, who formed us, calls us, equips us, and walks with us every step of the way.

As we welcome, nurture, and love the children and their families in our centers and schools we must always remember our call and then trust that God will continue to provide everything that we need for our ministry.

Question for the Week:

Have you ever felt inadequate because of age, education, talent? What did you do about it?

Song/Hymn for the Week:

"When You Call My Name" by Brian Doerksen & Steve Mitchinson, Vineyard Songs

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Precious God, thank you for your love and support, and for calling us to work in this ministry. Because you walk with us we dare to soar in peace, service, witness, prayer and song as we minister to your children. We love you and you love us, Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Patricia Garrett, preschool director, Trinity Lutheran Preschool, Enumclaw, Washington.

February 4, 2007
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Thoughts for the week: Luke 5:1-11
(references to Isaiah 6:1-8 , 1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

We are all familiar with the little song “I will make you fishers of men.” This Sunday school song comes from our Gospel story in Luke, when Jesus surprises James, John and Simon Peter with overflowing nets of fish and tells them that from now on they will be fishers of people. Imagine how they felt...and how confused they must have been! When Jesus told them that, he was not talking *fishing*; he was commissioning them to bring the gospel to their world.

The other two Scripture passages for this day go right along with this theme: The text from the writings of the prophet Isaiah tells of Isaiah’s commissioning. The Lord says, “Whom shall I send?” and Isaiah answers, “Here I am! Send me!” And in 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us about his dramatic commissioning story.

You may be thinking, “What does this have to do with me?” Well, it has EVERYTHING to do with you! If you are reading this, you most likely work for a Lutheran school or preschool, and Jesus’ commissioning words are meant for YOU!

Your job description probably involves teaching curriculum to the children in your class each day, whether it is colors, numbers, or social skills in a preschool; reading and writing in an elementary school; or algebra and social studies in the upper grades. Because you work for a Lutheran church, you are also commissioned to bring the gospel to the children and families you work with each day. You are an important part of the evangelism outreach of the church you work for.

Question for the Week:

Your heart challenge for this week: Think about your job—are you taking God’s commissioning seriously? How are you bringing the hearts and souls in your classroom to Christ? Drag out your “fishing nets” and try some of the ideas listed below:

- schedule in daily devotions and prayer with your class
- send home a weekly list of “things we prayed about this week in class” so families can see that the children are praying for each other’s families
- invite parents to attend weekly chapel services
- begin parent conferences with a prayer together

February 4, 2007
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

- invite families to attend Sunday services and special outreach opportunities
- during your personal prayer time, pray for each child in your class by name

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the strength and faith to enable you to reach out to everyone you can to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This devotion was contributed by Shirley Becker, director, First Lutheran Early Education Centers, Torrance and Lomita, California. Shirley was selected as the ELCA Director of the Year for 2005-2006.

February 11, 2007
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Thought for the Week: Jeremiah 17:5-10

Teaching children is a profession that gives my life meaning; helps me to make a joyful noise unto the Lord in my heart. I love looking at their eyes as they grow and learn in Christ.

But often I find myself leaning on my own understanding and strength. I'm busy. I have lists of things to do and I find myself depending on my own strength. I find myself drained and exhausted. I become parched and I wonder why. I have not tapped into the Living Water. I need to spend time with my Lord in prayer, through Scripture, and in worship. As I pray and share myself with the Lord, I become like the tree whose roots extend into the stream. The stream provides me with unending strength and wisdom and love. I can continue to pour myself into whatever work God asks me to do each day.

Oh God, you are an awesome God and I praise you and I give thanks for your graciousness. I cry at thoughts of the times I have turned away from you and not drunk of your water. Oh Lord, let me stay close to you, at your feet, forever and ever.
Amen.

Question for the Week:

Are you drinking of the water each day? You can pour yourself out. What do you need to do to drink deeply of God's love?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that all who follow Jesus may find quiet time to spend with God each week; time to be refreshed, renewed, and filled with God's love so that this love may be shared with a world so desperately in need of it, and with the children who are in our care.

This devotion was contributed by Beth Cash, teacher, St. Mark's Christian School, Middleburgh, New York.

Thought for the Week: Luke 9:28-36

Three hundred children's voices gathered from the Lutheran schools in my hometown of Sheboygan, sweetly and attentively singing a benediction across a crowded concert hall—that's one of my mountaintop experiences in Lutheran education. Now, twenty years into a ministry career serving as pastor at a church with a Lutheran daycare and low-income senior housing project (alongside all the usual church activities), I know I've seen another side of the mountain! Congregational politics, the enrollment roller-coaster, budget worries, staffing dilemmas, and the everyday issues associated with running a school can cloud the joy of serving children and families—overshadowing the goals of ministry.

While Peter was searching for a solution to the problem he perceived on the mountain in the presence of the transfigured Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, he and the disciples were terrified as the cloud encompassed all of them. "Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'" When everything else cleared away there stood Jesus, alone.

We work hard in the church and in all our schools to get people of all ages to listen. The voice from the cloud reminds us that all our listening needs to be tuned in to Jesus. He can share with us the vision of where we are going. He desires to walk with us through the clouds, up and down the mountains, and into the lives of children and their families, of our colleagues, and of our own beloved ones.

Question for the Week:

What listening activities can help you and your students tune in to Jesus and his message?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for God to clear away the clouds that are keeping you and those you serve from perceiving the presence and power of Jesus.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Donna Herzfeldt-Kamprath, pastor, Hope Lutheran Church, Tiny Hopefuls' Daycare, Preschool, and Kindergarten, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

Thought for the Week: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

As I read this passage I was reminded of several Lutheran schools and preschools that I have visited in the past few years. While they are missions of the individual congregations or clusters of congregations, there is not always ongoing support for the schools or centers. There are those individuals who, for whatever reason, do not think that schools ought to be a part of the ministry of their congregations. When money becomes tight in the congregation, it must be that the school is draining the congregation's funds, or the opposite: that the school or center ought to be a "cash cow" for the congregation.

In too many cases the administrators and staff must be very committed to the mission of the school for it to survive. The question often becomes, "Why am I bothering to do this when there is so much opposition?" The answer is always, "I do it for the children." We allow our students to "dare to soar!" Indeed, we encourage our children to soar, to excel, to grow, to know of God's love, and to share God's love with others. We know that we plant the seeds of the fruits that will grow and ripen as our students grow. It is then that we... "shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house." [Or in our case, your school or center.]

Question for the Week:

Do you remember why you are so needed to serve in an ELCA school or early childhood center?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for all teachers and administrators, especially those in difficult situations, that they allow themselves and their students to "dare to soar" so that their students can reach their full potential.

This devotion was contributed by Mary Ann Pollock, National Board president of the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association.

March 4, 2007
Second Sunday in Lent

Thought for the Week: Psalm 27

Danny was an eighth grader in the school where I served as principal. He was one of those children who could nudge his teachers, classmates, and me right to the edge of sanity. No disciplinary or counseling action seemed to work, even those tried and true methods all the experts tell us will work if we're just consistent. After a long list of infractions and a particularly bad incident, Danny was expelled. Even though the teachers and I felt some relief, there was also a feeling of deep sadness for this child we felt we had lost.

I love the psalms for their comfort and their assurance of God's presence. Psalm 27 is no exception, where the psalmist speaks of the Lord as his light and salvation. It has been such a privilege to spend my career in Lutheran education, where one can freely pray for and about children like Danny. It is a comfort to know that even when we feel like failures or when it feels dark and hopeless all around us, God is there shedding light on us and giving us peace.

Danny came back to see me when he was a senior in high school. He had a tough time in school, but wanted to let me know that I had been fair to him. He told me that he was sorry for the trouble he had caused, but most especially for the opportunity he had lost in being part of our Lutheran school. I often think about Danny and of the thousands of students who have touched my life. I have no doubt that God continues to shine light on each of them.

Question for the Week:

Do you have a Danny in your school or classroom? What, if anything, can you do to help children like him? What can you do for yourself?

Prayer for the Week:

We pray for all of the children who test our patience and who desire our attention. We ask that God would shed light upon all of our teachers, students, and parents assisting us to be the people we were born to be.

This devotion was contributed by Marlene Lund, executive director of the Lutheran Schools Association which serves the schools of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. She is an Associate in Ministry and has been a Lutheran educator for thirty-two years serving as teacher, guidance counselor, and principal.

Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 10:13

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and God will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing God will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

The year was a turbulent one for our family from traumatic beginning to devastating end. It seemed as though things couldn't get any worse, but then they did—over and over and over again.

Finally a new year came, and after a few months, a ray of hope.

It happened in a small group of Christian educators where, over the course of a few days, we shared our pain with each other, and brought each other before the Lord in prayer. A sense of relief came over the group as we prayed for each other. Knowing that we were being prayed for brought a special sense of comfort. After experiencing the power of prayer in community a sense of renewal accompanied us on our journey home, as well as strength for what life still held in store.

In Lutheran schools and early childhood centers, staff and students share joys and sorrows and problems with each other, but the sharing doesn't stop there. It goes beyond as prayer is offered for each other.

Prayer in community brings about the healing of God's grace. It is through prayer in community that we are enabled to hear God speaking to us more easily and feel God's presence more closely. Struggles continue to come, but we can endure them better thanks to God's grace and faithfulness and strength which we experience more intensely when we gather as believers and unite in prayer with and for each other.

Question for the Week:

What is your high for the day? What is your low for the day? Share them with at least one other person at your school or center, and ask them for their daily high and low.

March 11, 2007
Third Sunday in Lent

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lift each other before the Lord, sharing and multiplying the high or joy of each other. Lift each other before the Lord, sharing and alleviating the low or pain and fear of each other.

This devotion was contributed by Billie Navarro, former teacher in Lutheran schools, ELCA director for schools from 1988-1995, now retired and living in The Woodlands, Texas.

Thought for the Week: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

The Golden Rule is what we try to teach our students every day. “Treat others the way you would want to be treated” is something we might say to a child on any given day in our profession. I also say, “Forgive others as you would want to be forgiven.” Although this may be hard to teach, we are being guided by God. God is “entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” As “ambassadors for Christ,” we have an extremely important responsibility. Being in Christian education we have the opportunity to teach each student to be an “ambassador for Christ.” What that involves may be different for every person, but hopefully the gift of forgiveness will play a large part. Being able to truly forgive another person is profound. It is a powerful gift that God has entrusted to us. Find your example in Christ and be an ambassador for him.

Question for the Week:

In what ways are you an ambassador for Christ?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for those who are ambassadors for Christ; guide them in the work they do.

This devotion was contributed by Stacey Parish, director and teacher, King's Kids Christian Preschool, Hutchinson, Minnesota.

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 43:16 21

Our Lenten journey is in its final phase. We are ever closer to the promise of Easter; that time when God wants “to do a new thing” for us. But although it is a new thing, the radical transformation that the Lord wants to achieve in us is not a sure thing. In fact, it comes with a condition. It can only take place with our consent, our yes.

The relationship between God and us is somewhat akin to that between us and our students. We can coax and persuade them. We can be present to them and attentive to their needs. We can even prepare creative and compelling lessons to guide them. But our work will take hold only if they make at least some contribution to the enterprise. Our work can be accomplished only with their assent.

The ways of God are similar. To make a way in our wilderness, to create a river in our desert the Lord requires our surrender. God is not looking for heroic deeds on our part. God is the one accomplishing greatness; it is God’s glory, not ours. But for this work in us to unfold, we need to say yes. It is merely a matter of being open to God’s grace, receiving God’s blessing, and letting God’s goodness unfold within us. It is what God intends for us. God formed us for God’s self. God wants to give our parched soul a refreshing drink. But we have to accept it.

As we prepare ourselves and our students for the glory of Easter, let these final weeks of Lent be a time of surrender. Let this be a time of openness to God’s life in us. Let it be a time of saying yes.

Question for the Week:

What is stopping you from surrendering to God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the grace and courage to embrace God’s lavish plan for you.

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

Thought for the Week: Philippians 2:5-11

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”

St. Paul calls us to have a mind, or attitude like that of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful goal! Can we ever hope to reach it? It's hard to cultivate a mind like that of Christ. It requires us to give up so much of ourselves—to be selfless.

When I offer to sweep up after the lunch crowd, or take care of someone else's trash duty, it's easy—even satisfying—to think I'm working on having the heart of a servant—like Christ. But wait! I took on those jobs by my own choice. It's different when I must wrap that servant attitude around someone else's mess that I'm stuck with cleaning. Even if the grumbling doesn't come out, it's certainly going on inside me.

Yet that is the very time when I must really work on having a mind like Christ. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed to have a choice, but in the end said, “Not my will, but yours be done.” No one ever had a better reason for resentment than Jesus, who, though sinless, gave up his very life for our sins—to clean up our messes. Christ overcame that resentful human inclination with his love, his obedience, his sacrifice, and his forgiveness.

People should clean up their own messes—that's a lesson we all work on from preschool on into adulthood. Yet we end up cleaning up behind someone else all the time. If we all had the mind of Christ, though, how wonderful it would be! No complaining, no resentment—just obedience to the will of God.

Question for the Week:

We are called to have the mind of Christ. When are you most challenged to keep that Christian attitude? How can you meet that challenge?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask for God's help to cultivate a servant attitude and a mind like Christ. Lord, help me to remember your willing sacrifice, and push me to step in, without resentment, whenever I can be helpful.

This devotion was contributed by Barbara Krumm, director, St. John Lutheran School, Norfolk, Virginia.

April 8, 2007
Easter Sunday

Thought for the Week: John 20:11-16

When was the last time you had “one of those days”? Maybe you are frustrated with a student who continually challenges your authority. It could possibly be a parent who does not respect your point of view; or maybe you are down on yourself because it seems impossible to keep up with all that is expected of you.

In John Chapter 20, to say that Mary was having “one of those days” would be a gross understatement. She had seen Jesus, her friend and Savior, die on the cross. Emotionally spent, she now stands outside the tomb weeping. Her Lord is mysteriously missing. Mary is so engrossed in her own grief that she does not remember Jesus’ words regarding the resurrection, nor does she recognize Jesus when she sees him stand before her.

It would be easier to find fault in Mary’s behavior if we were not so much like her. How often do we forget the promises of Jesus when we are having “one of those days”? So often, our emotions get the best of us and adversely affect the witness that we have to our students. We miss seeing Jesus as he reveals himself to us throughout the day because we are focused on our own problems. As we live this way, we not only miss experiencing Jesus, we miss the opportunity for him to come into our world of frustration and redirect our day. Mary was not expecting Jesus to show up that day. How about you?

Question for the Week:

How do your daily words and actions reflect the peace and presence of Jesus to your students? Do you allow Jesus to redirect your day?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that God’s presence will be clearly known to you throughout this week, and that God’s glory would raise you above any disturbing circumstances you may face.

This devotion was contributed by Joyce Kortze, former teacher and coach at Lutheran High School in Rockford, Illinois. She is now a full-time home schooling mom. Her husband, Donald, is principal at Lutheran High School in Rockford, Illinois.

Thought for the Week: Revelation 1:8

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

How do we really tell when something has begun and when something has come to an end? With a book, it’s easy—there’s the first page and there’s the last page. But the Easter season muddies the waters. When does Jesus’ life begin? Is it in the midst of the Christmas story? Is it at the very beginning of time, as the Gospel writer John tells us? And when does it end? Does the life of Jesus end at the darkened tomb on Good Friday? Nonsense—we know that on Easter Day, Christ was raised from the dead to live forever!

When does Christian education begin with our children? Is it when we buy them their first Bible? Is it on the first day of school, when they are filled with fear and apprehension? Or is it when they finally begin to feel comfortable coming into our classrooms and participating in the songs and the stories? When is the “omega” moment—when does Christian education end? All of us involved in the education of children know that it never ends. As long as God gives us breath, we are learners.

The writer of Revelation reminds us of the all-the-time nature of Christ, when the writer tells us that God was, is, and is to come. For those involved in education, we know that, with the help of the Spirit, we touch lives yesterday, today, and tomorrow, a never-ending parade of days, “now and forever, amen.”

Question for the Week:

When do you think you will ever stop learning about God’s love?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that the Spirit will move through the lives of the students today, tomorrow, and forever!

This devotion was contributed by Rev. David B. Jost who is privileged to lead chapel time worship services at reJOYce Christian School, Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church, Hainesport, New Jersey.

Thought for the Week: John 21:1-19

In the 21st chapter of the Gospel of John, the risen Jesus asks Simon Peter, “Do you love me?” After each affirmation Christ replies, “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep,” “Feed my sheep.” As teachers and leaders, the opportunity to tend God’s sheep couldn’t be much greater.

As the brand new director at our church preschool, I was sitting in my office when a voice in the hall next to me said, “Hello, Mrs. Lande, do you remember me?” As he gave his name a shiver ran down my spine. A name I knew all too well from the days of my children’s teen years. A name associated with pot, sex, and no parental supervision. Yes, I remembered him well. Yet, here he was, all smiles with his two adorable little girls enrolled in our preschool—our Christian preschool.

As we spoke and caught up on the past I could tell that he had changed and grown a lot from those days, but how was I to receive him now? I wasn’t happy with how he had affected my children’s lives. However, I knew that if I chose to cling to the past it could bind us both in the past. Christ died that we might be free to build and grow our lives closer to him. Christ died that we—not just me—might be free to change. How could I not come to enjoy this voice from the past and the brightness that came with it? This young father had been someone others sought out and still do. What an opportunity for him to set things straight. How could I not want to help lift him even higher?

“Tend my sheep.” Opportunities walk past you every day.

Question for the Week:

Is your hand ready to reach out to a student, parent, or fellow employee to help them go a little higher, a little closer to God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that we may be willing to unburden ourselves of our pasts so that we may be set free in Jesus to tend those in our paths.

This devotion was contributed by Susan Lande, director, St. Luke’s Christian Preschool, Long Beach, California.

Thought for the Week: Acts 9:36-43

"Meet My Network!"

Cingular® ran a television ad that showed a man going to meet a “shady” looking fellow and his associates. The fellow says, “I thought I said to come alone,” then asks, “Who are all those guys?” The answer is simple, “That is my network!”

The ad was popular and people understood what it meant to talk about the network. The Church is like the network. If we believe and look, we are never without our network.

In this reading, Tabitha dies and friends summon Peter for help. When Peter arrives, he tells everyone to leave the room. I don't believe anyone had a clue that Peter had the power to bring her back to life.

It's clear that Peter had a conversation with the devil. The question from the devil could simply have been, “Who are all these people?” Peter's response could easily have been, “This is God's network!”

What happens next is beyond belief. Peter tells Tabitha “to get up.” Tabitha opens her eyes, sees Peter, and gets up.

I believe that this story is important. This resurrection story takes place after the resurrection of Jesus. It's symbolic of the fact that the power of resurrection continues for believers who follow after Jesus.

Wherever there is faith, God continues to be present and the love of God prevails. Death does not have the last word. The love of God lives on. Like the Cingular network, it goes wherever we go. We are never out of touch!

Question for the Week:

How strong is your network with God? What are you doing to build it up? Are you willing to share your network with others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Gracious Lord, give us the power and desire to build and share your love with everyone so that together we may have an infinite network to glorify you forever!

This devotion was contributed by Alex Cardenas, principal, Trinity Lutheran School, Hawthorne, California.

Thought for the Week: Acts 11:1-18

The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us... If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God? (vss. 12a and 17)

Differences, Yes, but No Distinction

Upon entering the boy's bathroom one morning at my church's day school, I heard uncontrollable sobbing coming from a stall. Inside I discovered a boy from our third grade class whose face was heavily distorted from crying. As he continued to convulse with tears, he revealed the source of his trauma. For the first time in his life, he had received a less than perfect grade on an assignment! He deeply feared telling his parents about his "failure."

Even at a very early age, we can learn to fear the judgments made about our work because many voices tell us that such judgments are also judgments about our worth as a human being. Our ELCA schools speak in a different voice. We speak and act in our judgments and evaluations as people who know that ultimately no distinction exists among individuals in the eyes of God. In our daily lives, we must regularly identify differences among and make judgments about people. Our schools could not function without such judgments, including the judgments that are central to evaluation. But for us, these differences point to no fundamental distinctions among our students. All are children of God, individuals of ultimate worth.

Conveying this to our children is not an easy thing, but we do so in the critical moments, as did the teacher of the boy in my story. And it changes lives.

Question for the Week:

How do I hinder God's word of complete acceptance from being made real in my students' lives?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Blessed are you, our God, for your unfailing love and acceptance of me, despite my weaknesses and my failures.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Dr. Mark Wilhelm, associate executive director for Educational Partnerships and Institutions and director for Theology in Daily Life of the ELCA.

May 13, 2007
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Thought for the Week: John 14:23-29

“My peace I give to you. . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.”

Countless times throughout the Bible we hear Jesus and angels encourage, possibly even admonish, us to “not be afraid.” Do we really carry that ultimate assurance with us at all times, recognizing Christ’s presence in our lives so that all else is secondary, or do we build up worry, stress, and anxiety depending upon our own talents and determination to see us through?

How many times have you spoken to a child, encouraging him or her with, “Don’t be afraid, it is only____,” or, “Don’t be afraid, everything will be all right”? We hope our words are effective in calming their fears. We wouldn’t say it if we didn’t mean it or it wasn’t, in fact, true. Our emotional and physical closeness to those children will determine how successful we have really been. So much more than, our closeness to Christ should help us to meet our needs, untrouble our hearts, cast out our fears, and thereby bring us peace.

We stand in awe of Almighty God, of the sacrifice of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. We are not troubled. We are not afraid. Instead, we go forth boldly, meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges of our lives with his peace that overwhelms all threats to the balance of our lives. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Question for the Week:

When and where are you afraid, in need of hearing Christ’s assurance? When and where are your children afraid, in need of your assurance of Christ’s message?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Almighty God, fill our hearts and minds to overflowing with your love and peace so that there is no room or need for fear in our daily lives. Enable us to live confidently in Jesus’ name.

This devotion was contributed by Alan Feddersen, director of schools for the Lutheran Schools of Southern California and Hawaii, Pacifica and Southwest California Synods, Glendale, California.

May 20, 2007
Seventh Sunday of Easter

**Thought for the Week: Acts 16:16-34,
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21, John 17:20-26**

Having recently read Taylor Branch's award winning three-volume history of the civil rights movement in the USA, I am struck by the parallels between Paul and Silas' experience in jail (Acts 16:16-34) and the numerous jailings of the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States. Many people, mostly African Americans, willingly and peacefully went to jail to change the discriminatory practices of their community and country. Eventually legislation was enacted and judicial decisions were made to provide a legal framework for more equitable treatment of all citizens.

Our task today is to live out the equality designed by law and put it into practice. We can work to contribute to the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-26, "that they may all be one. . . . The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one." We can work to say "Come" (Revelation 22:17) to everyone.

After the earthquake Paul and Silas remained in jail to face their captors. They had an opportunity to say "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Through Jesus, Paul and Silas were freeing people of their sin. We have the opportunity to do that in our classroom devotions and lessons, and through contacts with parents. By working for human equality for all we also have the opportunity to witness to the power of our forgiveness.

Question for the Week:

How is the question "What must I do to be saved?" answered in your classroom?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that those you are responsible for teaching may know the answer to the question "What must I do to be saved?" Pray that you may be effective in making equitable treatment of all students a routine part of your classroom.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. James Mahler, Professor Emeritus of the School of Education, California Lutheran University. He is the 2005 recipient of the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association's Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award.

Thought for the Week: Acts 2:1 21

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place....All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

Cultures throughout history have valued their language. In our society there is a renewed enthusiasm for teaching languages. Children are being enrolled in Spanish Immersion and other language experiences with long waiting lists.

The ancient Toltecs were known throughout southern Mexico as “women and men of knowledge.” In one of their texts, The Four Agreements, the first tool of this philosophy is simply, “Be impeccable with your word.” These people of antiquity recognized that “the word” is a force, but like a sword with two edges your word can create the most beautiful dream, or destroy everything around you.

In more recent history, following WWII Loris Malaguzzi developed an early childhood philosophy in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy. At the heart of this exceptional educational approach is the belief that children, right from birth, are capable and creative and can express themselves in a “hundred languages.”

Today, as educators we who so strongly want to respect our children, must do so by listening and honoring their thoughts as we capture their words in daily recording and documentations.

Returning to our Pentecost story, the “devout Jews from every nation under heaven....Amazed and astonished, they asked...how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” And they asked the question we claim as Lutherans, “What does this mean?”

Perhaps it means that we too must ask: What am I hearing? Am I listening respectfully to students, to their parents, to my colleagues?

Question for the Week:

What of God’s love do my students, parents, and colleagues hear when I speak?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that we are impeccable in our word and respectful in our listening.

This devotion was contributed by Marilyn Stalheim, director, Westwood Early Childhood Center, St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

Thought for the Week: Psalm 8

I recently changed pastoral calls, which meant a new church, a new house, and a new neighborhood. And while the transition has been challenging for me, it has been a piece of cake for my dog, Belle. An English mastiff, Belle is totally enamored with our new situation. With a park and a school across the street, and the daycare next door, she is surrounded by children. And Belle loves children.

I have seen Belle's personality turn on a dime in the presence of a toddler, for example. For an adult, Belle will remain her bubbly and energetic self, with her "love me, love me, love me" personality intact. For a child though, it's a complete turn-around. She becomes calm and relaxed—submissive even—and exudes not so much a "love me" attitude, but one of "I love you."

It's an amazing thing to watch what happens to Belle, but even more so what happens to the child. Belle seems to bring out the best in even the most timid and shy of children. I have seen little ones approach her with hesitation and nervousness, and skip away in a bundle of giggling delight at having received a lovely, slobbery Belle kiss on the cheek.

Maybe it's their size that attracts Belle to children. There IS something about being able to look one directly in the eye, I suppose. Or maybe it's that she sees in them what we, as adults, can't always see ... the beautiful spirits that reside within them. She doesn't look at a little girl and see a child with behavioral issues. She doesn't see a little boy who has trouble in social situations. She sees a divine creature worthy of love and attention.

Silly of me, I'm sure, to imagine my dog is that much of a deep thinker, but it does get me wondering if perhaps our challenge as educational leaders isn't to see the beautiful spirits that are inherent in all whom we meet, young and old. That's not an easy thing to do, is it? But we are reminded in Psalm 8, that we are made "a little lower than God" (v. 5). By God's love we are created, and by God's grace we are saved, and by God's mercy we are made holy.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we adopted an "I love you" attitude: if we could recognize the essential godliness of all creatures, big and small?

June 3, 2007
Holy Trinity Sunday

Question for the Week:

What are we doing as educational leaders to help our children see the beauty that resides within them?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Spirit God, give us the love, mercy, and grace to see you in each other.
Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Lisa Raylene Barnes, St John's Lutheran Church, Westville, New Jersey.

Thought for the Week: Galatians 1:11-24 (KJV)

“For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it.”

This verse from Galatians is a relevant and true reminder of how things are developing in our world today. So-called Christians, and also believers of other faiths that are in many ways similar to Christianity, are acting in ways that help create barriers and hatred between nations, peoples, religions, and cultures, rather than build bridges of brotherhood and friendship. The media most often concentrates on conflicts in different parts of the world, rather than on serious attempts by many true Christians to build bridges, and bridge gaps between different cultures and religions. Such true Christian efforts are most of the time overshadowed and wasted by media reports that aim at sensationalism, often presenting twisted and/or exaggerated stories that are misleading to the average viewer.

In the Schools and Educational Programs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), we bring pupils closer together by our special curricular and extra-curricular programs and projects that promote and encourage coexistence, tolerance, non-violence, dialogue, and also communication with students internationally, thus promoting and applying the true meaning and spirit of Christianity.

Question for the Week:

What can you do in your school to help build bridges of trust, friendship, and exchange with students and communities of different cultures and religions worldwide?

Personal prayer for the Week:

Pray that we may all defend and strengthen the church of God through acts that our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. Charlie D. Haddad, director of Schools and Educational Programs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. The ELCJHL is a partner church of the ELCA.

June 17, 2007
Third Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Psalm 32: 8-9 (NIV)

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.
Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.*

Madeleine L'Engle in her book of poems, "A Cry Like a Bell," has written a poetic improvisation on this text. In the last stanza of her poem she adds to the text above: "Merrily, Lord, help me to play,/ride me without bit or bridle,/ride me bareback, without saddle,/ride me, move me to obey."

We have come to the end of the year. Think of one or two students in your class who have been a horse or mule, having to be led or controlled by bit or bridle, but through your teaching and God's counseling no longer needs a bit or bridle. You have sometimes been a horse whisperer, coaching and guiding in a quiet way. You have also probably had to be a horse tamer, disciplining and reigning in.

Madeleine L'Engle's addition to the psalm text fills in what is implied by the text, but not stated. God, through you as a dedicated teacher, has instructed and counseled your equestrian students and caused a transformation in them. They no longer need a bit or bridle; they can be ridden bareback, without saddle. They have developed understanding. God has been with them and will be with them as they leave your class. Trust God to watch over them. You have done a great job this year as their horse whisperer, tamer, and transformer of lives. You have been faithful and devoted in your stewardship. Now, God takes over and watches over them. The next time you see them God will be playfully riding them bareback; without saddle, and without bit or bridle.

Question for the Week:

Share how one of your students went from needing a bit or bridle to playfully being ridden bareback without saddle, bit, or bridle by the end of the year.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for your equestrian students that God will watch over them and give them playful understanding.

This devotion was contributed by Hollis Thoms, educator and composer, who has served Lutheran schools as a teacher, principal, and interim director of Lutheran Schools of Southern California and Hawaii.

Thought for the Week: Galatians 3:23-29

The story from Galatians 3 is about Jesus healing the demon-possessed man by tossing the demons into a herd of pigs. I was stuck by the notion that this story is actually acted out countless times in our Lutheran classrooms and Sunday schools. Not necessarily demons, but definitely problems that change lives.

Let's think of it in this way; how many of us have had a child at the beginning of the year that we know will drive us crazy? How many of us have had children in our classrooms with more issues than Newsweek. I am confident that all educators have dealt with a "problem student" at one point in their careers. Isn't it wonderful when we have a breakthrough with that child? What made the difference?

In the story of Galatians, Jesus loved the man enough to confront the demons and throw them into some pigs. After that, the man was "normal" and went merrily on his way. This is what makes what we do so vitally important to the lives of countless students. We must love each student unconditionally and let them know we are there for them and that God is also there for them.

Have you ever thought how remarkable it is that students can function with all of the problems in their homes and lives outside of school? Are we doing everything we can to make school a refuge for students? With God's help, we can confront students' problems (demons) with love and help them remember that God also loves them.

Question for the Week:

How are you helping students who are dealing with their own personal demons?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for every child who enters our school that they may be shown patience, love, and forgiveness. Help us remember those who need extra care.

This devotion was contributed by Jake Morrow, principal, St. John Lutheran School, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Thought for the Week: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

“For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 5:14

Neighbors—a nasty incident years ago left me wary of getting too close to those who live adjacent to my physical space in life. As an early childhood center director at an urban church in a “not so nice” neighborhood some years ago, I had issues with the neighbors in the homes surrounding the church as well. They parked their cars in our parking lot, their dogs barked while the children were napping, and I strongly suspected the neighborhood teenagers of several incidences of theft. And here is God calling me to love my neighbor as myself. God doesn’t just tell us once—but a total of eight times in the Bible! How much easier it is to convince ourselves (and others) that we love our neighbors when we are speaking rhetorically and not about the people next door!

My guess is that I am not alone. We all like to interpret biblical text in a way that “works” for us. I am fine with this “loving thy neighbor” stuff when it comes to helping with the church outreach program or donating money to disaster victims. It’s the up close and personal neighbors I struggle with. But what kind of example do we set for the children in our schools and centers when we are in conflict with the neighbors of our buildings? Many schools and centers are in residential areas, or adjacent to businesses that are our weekday neighbors as well. We may not view them all as ideal neighbors, but neighbors they are, nonetheless. May we keep God’s words in our hearts and minds as we seek to love, and get along with them all.

Question for the Week:

What can we do at our school or center to foster a positive relationship with our neighbors?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for God’s guidance and wisdom in our personal and our professional lives as we continue to learn how to love our neighbors as ourselves.

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

July 8, 2007
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

**Thought for the Week: Isaiah 43:18–19 and
[excerpts from] 1 Thessalonians 5: 4–11**

The seasons tease us. The line in the thermometer fluctuates, sinking and rising. One week the plants in the garden outside of the kindergarten rooms start to peek out of the earth, only to be burned by frost a week later. One day the children ask to take their jackets off during recess and the next they ask to go inside because it's too cold.

But there are signs beyond mercury passing numbers that something new is coming. The days become longer as summer advances. Between waking and showering and putting on my hat, I watch a square of yellow sunlight glide along my bedroom floor and wall in the morning. And while I drive home, the sun lingers and burnishes the clouds orange as sherbet. Where once there was night and dull, gray darkness, now there is golden illumination.

Even in our lives at Grace, you feel the pull of newness. A new semester begins. We speak with parents, hand out report cards, do those small teacherly rituals that help us to clear the past so we can move on to something else.

Over the weekend I visited my parents. The service bulletin from church was still on the kitchen table. I glanced at it and read the passages from Isaiah: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

Isaiah was talking of a new world—a world illuminated by Christ. But I think just as the mundane can reflect the profound, the reverse is true. God gives us “a new thing” daily. Minutely. God’s forgiveness is endless, God’s love boundless. And because we are recipients of that love, we are like that yellow patch of light crawling on my apartment floor. We can be that morning light of Christ, the new thing.

Paul writes, “But you, beloved, are not in darkness...for you are all children of the light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of the darkness...But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation...Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.”

July 8, 2007
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Question for the Week:

How do you share the excitement of “new things” in your children’s lives? Remember, it is all new to them!

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that the joy and excitement of the “newness” in children’s lives can include the inspiring light of God’s love each and every day.

This devotion was contributed by Benjamin Chandler, kindergarten teacher and Hugh Kress, principal, Grace Lutheran School, River Forest, Illinois.

July 15, 2007
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Colossians 1:1-14

As Paul gives thanks to the faithful in Colosae, I give thanks to God for all those who teach and care for the children in ELCA church settings all across the United States. Paul heard about the Colossian's faith in Jesus and their love for all the saints. Your faith in Jesus and your love for teaching and for sharing Jesus' love with your students has called you to this vocation. THANKS BE TO GOD!

Paul continues talking about prayer and the importance of praying for others. As you go about each day, pray for each of the children you teach or care for. Pray that you will provide an environment where they can become who God intends them to be. Pray that you will love them, respect them, and have patience with them. Pray that the students will become independent thinkers and be empowered by your knowledge.

Question for the Week:

Think about your love for teaching and sharing the gospel and how it has influenced your vocation.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that God will strengthen you in your chosen vocation and lead you to a better understanding of the tools you need to teach God's children.

This devotion was contributed by Mary Fetter, retired ELCA preschool director and member of Abiding Love Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas.

Thought for the Week: Luke 10:38-42

Whenever I enter one of our preschool classrooms I am always amazed at how the teacher is focused on the children. Regardless of what is happening in the classroom the teacher has chosen to be concerned about each student in the class. The teacher knows what is most important—the care, teaching, and loving of each child. Even in my intrusion the teacher never loses focus.

In this kind of environment the children know that they are the center of the teacher's attention. They know this teacher cares about them, loves them and wants them to learn. The nurturing of children who are developing in early childhood requires our undivided attention.

Children can certainly distract us with their actions and reactions in a classroom. Keeping the focus on them can be challenging. People and other things can distract us from our main focus.

Jesus came to the house of Mary and Martha. There Martha was distracted by many things. Jesus told her “that only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion.” Jesus was telling Martha that Mary was focused on what was really important—his teaching.

Question for the Week:

How do we as teachers and administrators “Dare to Soar” in service to our children while we keep our focus on the Lord Jesus who empowers us in our service and ministry to our children?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord Jesus, might I “dare to soar” in my prayers to you so that I may keep you in all my teaching and caring for our children. Enable me to “dare to soar” in witness, service and song for them.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Jim Rill, pastor, Saint John's Lutheran Church and Childhood Center, Millheim, Pennsylvania.

Thought for the Week: Luke 11:1-13

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

As our children step into our classrooms they will be taught much whether they are in preschool, elementary, or secondary schools. Yet, we are given a special opportunity to share with our students a much deeper knowledge than what is learned from textbooks. As teachers we can present to students truths that are found in the Word. Envision the word “ASK,” printed across the front of your classroom. Encourage your students to ask questions they might have about their developing faith. Help students to seek out the answers for themselves by encouraging Bible reading and sharing Bible stories with them. Give students the genuine opportunity to knock on the door to true wisdom in Christ.

Indeed, each phrase of this Bible verse ends with a positive statement...it will be given you; you will find; the door will be opened for you! How encouraging to our students and to each one of us personally, that God will and has revealed God’s self to us through Christ Jesus. Then, as these children grow in their faith they too will have the opportunity to pass along their blessed wisdom to others they meet along life’s pathway.

Question for the Week:

How can you encourage your students to ask, seek, and knock?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for all that they may truly take the Word of God to heart and will ask, seek, and knock.

This devotion was contributed by Toni Sanford, retired preschool teacher and director of an ELCA early childhood education center. She is an active member of First English Lutheran Church of Wausau, Wisconsin.



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