

Hands for helping: children and youth doing God's work

2009-2010 Devotion Guide for ELCA Schools and
Early Childhood Education Centers



For more information about the extensive ministry of the ELCA in education, please go to www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Education.aspx 800-638-3522, ext. 5074 Donna.Braband@elca.org

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HENRY JAMES "JIM" MAHLER

1938-2009

IN MEMORIAM

This devotion guide is dedicated to the glory of God and in grateful honor and memory of Jim. Jim lived his life as a witness to the value and effectiveness of Lutheran schools.

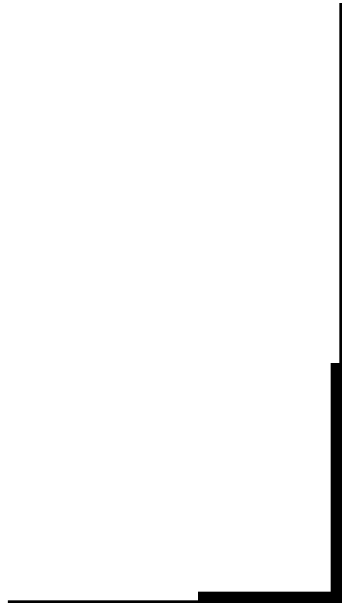
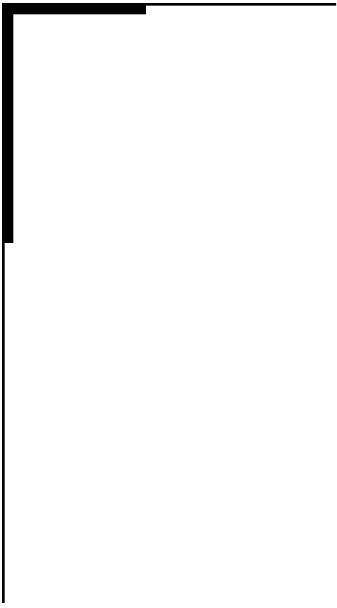
Jim attended a Lutheran elementary school (Zion, Hinsdale, Illinois) and a Lutheran university (Concordia, Chicago). He founded a Lutheran elementary school (Zion, Westwood, New Jersey) and served as interim principal and later as a member of a Lutheran school board (Ascension, Thousand Oaks, California). He supported Lutheran schools with active participation in the offerings of the ELCA Schools department and the ELCA.

His vocation was that of teacher. After earning his doctorate in education from Columbia University he taught at Concordia, Chicago, and then for 25 years in the education department of California Lutheran University. Jim was a frequent speaker at conferences for ELCA educators and for 12 years advocated for Lutheran schools in a regular feature in the magazine *Lutheran Partners*. He consistently urged Lutheran teachers as well as early childhood centers and schools to seek certification and accreditation. Always active in his local congregation and synod he was a steady voice for the cause of children and those who nurture them. In recognition of his extensive contribution the ELEA honored Jim with its highest award, the Donald Vetter Educational Service Award.

There is, of course, always more to one's career than a listing of positions held or articles published. So also with Jim. The cause of Lutheran schools seemed to be in his DNA. He loved Jesus, and like Jesus, Jim loved kids. He felt deeply that they deserved only the best. Quality Christian education from preschool through graduate school deserved the finest that church and society have to offer. Having personally experienced the grace of God it was important to Jim that Lutheran schools at all levels be places where students experience grace.

Jim died May 9, 2009. His memory is honored by all who follow in his footsteps teaching all that Christ has commanded—to the end of the age.

Melvin Kieschnick



August 2, 2009 – Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 78:23-29

“And they ate and were well filled for he gave them what they craved.” (v. 29)

As teachers it is our jobs to give our children what they crave. What children crave is the same thing that we as adults crave, a relationship with the Lord. It is a teacher’s main responsibility to share with their children the amazingness of God’s love in every area of the day. A teacher has many opportunities during the day to share God’s love. When a child is sad because a friend hurt their feelings, a teacher can share that they always have a friend in Jesus. When a child misses Mommy, a teacher can encourage prayer by encouraging them to pray to Jesus for Mommy’s safe return. When a child is mean to another child, it is a great time to talk to them about what Jesus would do and teach the child about God’s forgiveness. Being a teacher is a huge responsibility. It is important to try to take all the small moments and turn them into teachable moments. It is in all these small moments that a child can truly learn about God’s love.

Questions for the Week:

What are some different ways to fill the cravings of your students? How can you show your students God’s love for them?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, help us as teachers to show our students your amazing love. Teach us ways to draw them closer to you so that their cravings may be filled with you. In your name we pray, Amen

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

August 9, 2009 – Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 1 Kings 19:4-8

Bread. Today it is just a “carb” and has moved around on the food pyramid in a variety of positions. But, in ancient times it was the mainstay of life and a principal form of food. In its different varieties, it was prestigious. It spoke of one’s wealth, one’s health and how well you took care of yourself and your family. Even Egyptian tombs are known to hold rolls and loaves of bread to accompany the departed in the afterlife. And remember the Israelites took it in a flat form when they fled from Egypt. Bread has a long history for a reason. It’s a healthy and nutritious food that fills the stomach as well as the soul.

When Elijah ran to Horeb in fear, twice an angel came to him in his desperation admonishing him to eat hot bread and drink from a jar of water, “... for the journey is too much for you.” Twice, Elijah drank from a jar of water and ate from a cake of bread baked over hot coals; and both times he was strengthened and replenished.

The analogy was well-chosen when our Lord declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Sometimes when our journey is too much, we need an angel to tap us on our shoulder and offer us bread; so that Christ, “the bread of life”, might strengthen and renew us. Offering bread for the journey is the epitome of hospitality, and our Lord is the perfect host.

Question for the Week:

As educators, we’ve all taught children about caring for their health and well-being; what to eat, what not to eat, along with all the good lifestyle habits. Are we also teaching them how to care for their spirit so that is healthy and strong for their journey as well?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Good and gracious God, as educators and administrators giving shape and definition to the lives we touch each day, keep us mindful of the magnitude of that calling. Let us not forget the spirit side of each child and staff member. Help us to be instruments for spiritual health and well-being to those we interact with each day.

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

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask for ways to share our blessings with others.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. Dwight Robinson, Renton, Washington, retired from Western Washington University. He is a broadcaster with KLAY Radio am 1180. Dwight and his wife Anne worship at Cross & Crown Lutheran Church, Renton Washington.

August 23, 2009 – Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost Thought for the Week: Ephesians 6:10-20

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. (vs. 14-15, English Standard Version)

There are times in every teacher's career, as well as every administrator's career, when you have to go out on a limb. It may be a child who needs special attention—more than you can give—and you have to somehow convince the parents that assessment and possibly special services are needed. It may be a colleague viewed as an excellent teacher by most, but whom you have observed doing or saying something inappropriate to a child and you need to make your administrator aware of the situation. It may be that as an administrator, you need to go to bat for your staff with your school board to obtain employee benefits when the board does not view it as a priority.

Life, and certainly Lutheran education, is full of “tricky” situations which require us to stand firm in our convictions. If we are timid, it can be overwhelming. We usually know in our hearts, as we listen for God's voice, what we must do. How wonderful that God gives us the “belt of truth,” the “breastplate of righteousness,” and the “readiness given by the gospel of peace” to prepare us for the task of speaking up when we are hesitant. Wow! We have the power!

Questions for the Week:

What situation has arisen for you recently that required you to stand firm?
What situations are looming where you need to stand firm?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for giving us truth, righteousness, and readiness to deal with the tasks that need our attention and to stand firm and speak up when needed, especially as we advocate for the children in our care and nurture.

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

August 30, 2009 – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Deuteronomy 4:9

But take care...so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.

We have a volunteer librarian and storyteller who meets with the children weekly, reading to them whatever Bible story is scheduled for the week. She's been doing this for years and years. On one occasion, she prepared to read a story to them, and one boy, catching sight of the book, remarked: "Oh! We've heard this story before! Are we doing it *again*?" Calmly, she replied, "Well, yes you have heard it before. We're going to keep telling it to you until you can tell it to other people."

Sometimes we fear repetition, trying to keep things "fresh and new." If we use a story for Mother's Day last year, we certainly don't want to use it again this year! Other times, repetition of the "tried and true" becomes tradition—the annual trip to the local pumpkin patch, the paper doll display for Lutheran Schools Week, the student art show for the Week of the Young Child. And how many children can recite their favorite videos because they've watched them over and over?

We know repetition is a powerful tool in education. But it's not only effective for children, but also for the adults who are teaching. I know there are songs and stories from the Bible I probably wouldn't remember except for having taught them to children over and over. We may be a blessing to our children for teaching them God's Word, but they also are a blessing to us for bringing God's Word home to us again and again.

Questions for the Week:

What Bible story or lesson are you teaching your children this week? How many times have you taught that story? Is its meaning for you different now that it was when you taught it the first time?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord God, I give thanks for the privilege of teaching your children, and pray that through them I might have insight into your Word. Help me find ways to put your stories and lessons into their hearts, so that they may carry on these same stories through generations to come.

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

September 6, 2009 – Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost Thought for the Week: Psalm 146

Praise the LORD! ...Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob. who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. (vs. 1, 5, 7)

Also read: Isaiah 35:4-7a; James 2:1-10 (11-13) 14-17; Mark 7:24-37

It always amazes—how the Word invariably fits our circumstances and leads us to new understanding of God’s goodness. As I write this devotion, our congregation and school community is poised for engagement in an exceptional opportunity. Shortly we will be hosting 500 volunteers packaging 115,000 meals, Kids Against Hunger packages will be sent to the widows and orphans in Dodoma, Tanzania.

Last summer I traveled with members of our church staff and congregation to attend the dedication of Arusha Road Lutheran Church sanctuary. A major part of our time was spent with Arusha Road church members traveling to visit their outreach projects. We witnessed the meals we had packaged being placed into the hands of the widows, the families living with HIV, and the families living in abject poverty, who nevertheless opened their humble, humble homes to welcome orphans. We witnessed a growing congregation as they joyfully shared the scripture, songs of praise and prayers of thanksgiving. We were humbled as we witnessed our African brothers and sisters deeply caring and sharing, and we could only respond, “Praise the Lord.”

Questions for the Week:

What opportunity to share will be opened to you this week? How will you “Praise the Lord” today and tomorrow?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Let us pray that our hearts will be opened to see more clearly all that we can do as an individual and as a school/center to praise the Lord.

James 2:5 *Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?*

This devotion was contributed by Marilyn Stalheim, director, Westwood Early Childhood Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Marilyn and her dedicated professional teaching team and staff with the strong support of Westwood Lutheran Church, have successfully completed ELEA accreditation and been granted a full seven-year accreditation.

September 13, 2009 – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost Thought for the Week: James 3:1-12

Working with very young children, I often hear the unbridled slinging of hurtful words. ‘I’m not your friend anymore.’ ‘You’re mean.’ ‘Poopie-head.’ And perhaps the worst of all—‘You’re not invited to my birthday party!’ It’s easy to dismiss those outbursts as very young children still learning to navigate their emotions, still trying to figure out how to deal with hurt feelings, still learning to forgive.

But, deep down inside, I think we know that these angry sentiments do not just come out of the mouths of four-year-olds. We adults can just as easily delve into juicy gossip, bad-mouthing, and less innocent scatological insults.

Words are powerful. James describes them as like a spark that ignites a forest fire. Words backed by anger, fear, or pain can breed more of the same. Think of Simon Peter with his unbridled tongue and how often he let rash statements get in the way of doing what God asked of him. An unbridled tongue can interfere with following God’s call.

But James reminds us that our tongues are also capable of being powerful tools for good. Hymns, prayers, praise to God all issue from the tongue, as well as kind words and caring support to our neighbors. Again James writes of our tongues, comparing them to the rudders on huge boats, guiding massive ships as the pilot directs. As teachers, let us use our tongues to steer us through our ministries and calls, using our words as tools for praise and forgiveness.

Question for the Week:

What have been some moments where your students have been an example to you for using words correctly?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, harness our tongues so that they may steer us closer to you. Let our words be sweet sounds to you and our neighbors, and fruitful examples to our students and colleagues. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Benjamin Chandler, the visual arts and junior kindergarten teacher, Grace Lutheran School, River Forest, Illinois.

September 20, 2009 – Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Mark 9:30-37

Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (vs. 36-37)

Such beautiful words—among my personal favorites—but consider for just a moment what it REALLY means to welcome a child in Christ’s name. Consider what it means to receive a child as though he or she is a “Little Christ.” Consider what it means to welcome Christ into our lives the way we welcome an infant, with warm, snugly gentleness.

On the surface it all sounds simple enough, but I wonder ... can we really live in that simplicity? Or do we WANT to make the good news more complicated than it is? Do we set up false rules and parameters and hierarchies just to make things harder on ourselves? “For on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.” (Mark 9:34)

The gospel really is as simple as this: God loves you, and Jesus welcomes you with outstretched arms. That’s easy enough for a child to get. How about us adults?

Question for the Week:

In what ways can we seek to simplify the gospel message for ourselves and for our children?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Merciful and precious God, continue to show us your presence in all that we say and all that we do. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Lisa Raylene Barnes, pastor, St. John Lutheran Church, Westville, New Jersey, home of St. John Care.

September 27, 2009 – Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 19:7-14

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (v. 14)

How quickly words slip out of our mouths. Sometimes they are kind and loving, and sometimes mean and hurtful. This scripture, Psalm 19:14 is a wonderful prayer to be claimed and used every day as we encounter the children in our midst. How quickly a child will respond to loving, caring words from us instead of harsh and hurtful ones.

Our meditations should be centered around our Lord and what comes from within our hearts. Our prayer should be that they are acceptable to our Lord Jesus. He is our rock and our redeemer.

All through my grade school years this was a verse that was heard every Sunday in the worship service. The pastor spoke this verse as a prayer before beginning the sermon for that day. Soon, it was very familiar and it was memorized.

As an educator serving in our Lutheran early childhood centers or schools it seems even more appropriate to use this verse as a prayer for each day. We do want the words we speak and the thoughts from our hearts to be pleasing, kind, loving, and acceptable to the Lord and to God's children.

However, that doesn't always happen easily. Daily reminders could be used to help make it an intentional act. Here is an idea or two to try. Type the verse on a 3 x 5 card and place it on your desk so that it catches your eye every now and then. Maybe placing a card in the top draw of the desk with the verse on it so that every time the drawer is opened it's a visible reminder. Ask the Lord for God's help to make it happen.

Question for the Week:

How are you going to remind yourself each day to make your words and meditations of your heart pleasing and acceptable to the Lord?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord Jesus, help me to choose the words that I speak to others and to the children so that they are pleasing and acceptable to you, my rock and my redeemer.

This devotion was contributed by Marge Robison, retired early childhood education center director, elementary school principal, teacher and Evangelical Lutheran Education Association Region 4 representative, Austin, Texas.

October 4, 2009 – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

The writer of Hebrews was writing to a group of Christians who faced opposition all around them. They were in danger of abandoning the Christian faith. The writer encourages them in their faith showing that Jesus Christ is the true and final revelation of God. Today we are constantly being challenged in our faith. The media and news reveal the worst of the world. We work with students who call for special attention. Parents demand an explanation for all that we do or say. We are bombarded with rules and regulations. There is never enough time in the day for all we have to do. How do you spend that time?

Through our faith we are assured that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Jesus is superior to the prophets, angels, and Moses. Jesus learned true obedience to the Father through the suffering he endured. In our daily lives, we often forget what Jesus went through for our salvation. We complain, we argue, we criticize, and we lose our temper. Are we children of God? Do we follow in the footsteps of Jesus? What must Jesus think of us!

Through Jesus, the believer is saved from sin, fear, and even death. Jesus provides the true salvation. Let us remain faithful to Jesus Christ. Let us be faithful in our daily prayer, not just for ourselves but also for others. Let us love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus, as the likeness of God, sustains us through God's Word. We have the assurance that Jesus will be with us in all that we say and do. Is the Word of God as much a part of us as eating and sleeping? Do we practice what Jesus would do?

Question for the Week:

What you see in people shapes you. Your belief governs your conduct. Do your voice, friends, work, and service to others display Jesus in your life?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Jesus, Savior, Lord, your presence is with us in our daily life. May our every action display our love for you through our thoughts, words, and deeds. Pray for us.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy Kalin, principal, Bethel Lutheran School, St. Louis, Missouri. The school's ministry program serves preschool through eighth grade.

October 11, 2009 – Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the week: Hebrews 4:12-13, 16 (CEV)

God's word can cut through our spirits and souls and through our joints and marrow, until it discovers the desires and thoughts of our hearts. Nothing is hidden from God! (vs. 12-13)

So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help. (v. 16)

When reading verses 12 and 13, we can fully understand the power of God's word. It may even be a little unsettling to realize that power—it cuts through to our very core, physically, emotionally, spiritually. Nothing is hidden from God. I am awed by such power, and actually relieved that this omniscient God knows me so well.

Through the dedicated ministries of talented teachers and staff, students in our Lutheran schools study God's word and come to know our gracious God, our Savior Jesus Christ, and the essential power of the Holy Spirit. Children's lives are forever changed, not only because of their knowledge of Christ's sacrifice and promise, but also because their faith allows them to open themselves to God. There are, at the same time, feelings of freedom and security in realizing how intimately God knows us. And it is with those feelings that all can come before our gracious God, our merciful Savior, and find peace, kindness, and the help needed.

Our students come from diverse home settings. Feelings of freedom and security may not be available to them. So it is with joy, purpose, and a strong sense of mission that we minister to these children so that they may come to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior—the most merciful, who will treat them with undeserved kindness and help them. Spiritual formation, faith in action, and modeling Christ in our classrooms is a great responsibility. God knows that. And God will help us.

Questions for the Week:

How do we model our faith in action throughout the school day? As we have opened our hearts to God, where has God's help entered?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

From Augsburg Fortress *Worship and Praise* Songbook – “You Are My Hiding Place.”

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

October 18, 2009 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 91:9-16

For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.
(vs. 11-12, RSV)

Each of us can recount personal experiences when we felt heavenly intervention was active in our lives. In retrospect we may have depicted it as just a close call, an answered prayer, or even a miracle. Striking and profound as those memorable experiences may be, they are only the tip of the iceberg, a spark of heavenly light and care, a sampling of what is happening to us and for us every hour of every day as we dwell in the shelter of the Most High. Even something as minor as stubbing your toe is not too small for God's protection.

We know that living is a high risk activity. Even when we do not invite or recognize dangers, they are present and threatening. Consider today. It may be only morning devotion time at school but earlier in the day—the step you didn't miss, the burner you didn't touch, the car accident you didn't have, the keys you didn't lose, the route you didn't take, the words you didn't say. God's holy angels regularly deliver us from disasters we invite and those of which we are unaware.

Our complex lives are bound up with legal protections against accidents, injuries, liabilities, unsound practices of every sort. Yet they all deal with compensation after the fact, not with avoidance or protection before the fact. Our Father's love and care for us is proactive. Through God's angels we are lifted up and delivered on a daily basis as well as eternally when we are shown salvation.

Our children in school oftentimes do foolish things or fear what may happen to them just as we do. They, too, need to learn, trust, and appreciate that their loving Father is watching over them, protecting them and sending holy angels to care for them. Share with them that comfort and confidence you have because you make the Most High your habitation and God promises to be with you in all your ways.

Questions for the Week:

What recent experiences have you had that suggest the intervention of God's holy angels in your life? What experiences went well where you gave little or no thought to there having been the possibility of a negative alternative? How often have you given God thanks for watchfulness and care of you in your everyday life, even in its mundane events?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Good and gracious God, you offer me refuge and invite me to make you, the Most High, my habitation. Whatever dangers or evils I encounter this day, known or unknown, of little consequence or of major importance, I know that you will protect me and deliver me. I pray that you would send your holy angels to watch over me, to guard me, to lift me up. I pray as well for the presence of your angels in the lives of the children under my care. Thank you, Lord, for this continued angelic manifestation of your love for me in my daily life. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Alan Feddersen, retired Lutheran schools administrator, former executive director for Lutheran Schools of Southern California and Hawaii.

October 25, 2009 – Reformation Sunday
Thought for the Week: John 8:31-32

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Truth grants us freedom.

John often records Jesus talking about his word, the truth, light, and freedom. The concepts hang together. Those who “do the truth” live in the light of Christ and draw others to the light. “Doing truth” is living a life of transparency and freedom from the fear of having one’s deeds exposed.

Noreen had done something for which she was ashamed. Her school friend knew it and threatened for days to “tell the teacher.” Noreen did everything she could to keep her friend from telling. One day she couldn’t stand it any longer and she told her teacher herself. The teacher was concerned, but also relieved to know the truth and to be able to share words of forgiveness and acceptance with the frightened girl. “I was afraid to tell you,” said Noreen, to which her teacher responded, “That’s what forgiveness is for.”

Other cases do not end so easily. Our children and young people often carry burdens of abuse. It is sad to hear their stories. Now the responsibility passes to us to tell the child protective service of our state. Pain abounds. But, God willing, a greater pain is stopped. Forgiveness may not be easy. But “doing the truth” brings us and our young student into the light that we pray will make him/her free.

May God grant you the courage to tell and hear and “do” the truth, to free another life by offering words of acceptance and love. Thus God’s word lives in you!

Question for the Week:

Is there a piece of truth that you could or should help a child shine light on?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord God of light and truth, we ask your mercy on children and teachers who have painful secrets. We pray that they might be freed to live more abundantly in our school family and in their own family at home. For Jesus’ sake. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Beth Orling, Grace Lutheran Church, Port Townsend, Washington.

November 1, 2009 – All Saints Day
Thought for the Week: John 11:32-44

As educators it can become so easy to focus on academic achievement and focus less on the importance of teaching compassion, patience, and trust that God can and will do major things in our lives if we accept the invitation to be in relationship with God. In our reading today Jesus wept with Mary over the loss of her brother and rather than immediately take care of her needs he waited. Some may ask—and did ask, “Why would he wait and make her suffer?” But if we look at the outcome of waiting, many people were able to then testify to what they had seen and in turn more people were brought into God’s kingdom.

Let’s commit ourselves to teaching the children the importance of patience and relying on God by possibly planting vegetables with your children, tending to the plants and watching the slow process of growing. We can also teach compassion by visiting the elderly in assisted living facilities, sponsoring a child overseas or helping people by collecting for the ELCA Good Gifts animal program.

Questions for the Week:

Do you show your children daily examples of God’s love for us? Are you committed to furthering God’s kingdom through your children and their families?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Father God, thank you for being patient with us as we struggle to listen and do what you would have us to do. Thank you for inviting us to be part of your kingdom and trusting us to further your kingdom through the children we are blessed to serve.

This devotion was contributed by Kris Martin, teacher and director, American Lutheran Church Christian Preschool, Rantoul, Illinois.

**November 8, 2009 – Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 146**

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down...he upholds the orphan. (v. 9)

The psalmist trusting in God reminds me that it is human nature—particularly in children—to turn to those who love and protect them.

Our Lutheran schools and early childhood education centers and their staffs minister in the real world. Some of the children who attend are bowed down and—in effect, if not in fact—are orphaned by unhealthy family situations, or by poverty or abuse.

For some children, that school or early childhood education center is that promised place of Zion where God cares for them through the caring hands of a nurturing staff. Here, children are fed, taught, hugged, and mentored. They learn, in being introduced to Jesus' love through the hands of others, that it is safe to turn to others and to God.

The students themselves end up singing, "Praise the Lord!"

Question for the Week:

How does God help us when people let us down?

Personal Prayers for the Week:

Consider praying in praise and thanksgiving for the ministry of child advocacy entrusted to you by God and those places where God has triumphed. Perhaps those praying could visualize all of the children in their uniqueness, while also focusing on those in particular need.

This devotion was contributed by Karl Biermann, pastor and freelance writer, Grace Lutheran Church and Noah's Ark Daycare Center (birth through 12 years old), Bandera, Texas.

November 15, 2009 – Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Mark 13:1-8

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. (vs. 5-8, NIV)

Jesus instructed his disciples about the future so that they would not be deceived. Knowledge was empowering, because it allowed the disciples to frame the difficult times ahead in the context of God's presence.

When a crisis comes, we often feel that God is absent. We may even take it as a sign of God's displeasure and judgment. Young children and adolescents are often acutely attuned to these perceptions, even more so than adults.

Jesus teaches his disciples that difficult times are not the evidence of God's absence, nor are they necessarily signs of God's judgment. They are all part of the inevitable coming of God's reign.

As educators, we go to our classrooms every day and carry out our lesson plans, so that our students may be equipped to face the challenges life will inevitably bring them. Not so much for the sake of the knowledge itself, but that they may discern the sure and steady currents, flowing beneath the roiling surface of life's challenges, which are carrying them straight into the arms of God.

Question for the Week:

How do we teach our students discernment?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Jesus, you taught your disciples by walking with them and sharing with them. Help me to be there for my students, similar to the way that you are there for me. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Charles Oberkehr, pastor, The Lutheran Church of the Epiphany, Hempstead, Long Island, New York. Epiphany operates the Epiphany Learning Center, a New State licensed program offering full day care for toddlers through third grade.

November 22, 2009 – Christ the King Thought for the Week: John 18:33-27

You may already have heard this story. It's a great story: Many years ago, when Hitler's army occupied Denmark, he ordered that all Jews in Denmark were to identify themselves by wearing armbands with yellow stars of David. The Danes had seen the extermination of Jews in other countries and guessed that this was the first step in that process in their country. The King did not defy the orders. He had every Jew wear the star and he himself wore the Star of David. He told his people that he expected every loyal Dane to do the same. The King said, "We are all Danes. One Danish person is the same as the next." He wore his yellow star when going into Copenhagen every day in order to encourage his people. The King of Denmark identified with his people, even to the point of putting his own life on the line because of his love for his people.

It's a wonderful story with a powerful point. The only problem is it isn't true. It's an urban legend. Too bad! What an image for a king, identifying with his people because of his love for them.

The king at that moment became the teacher just like each of you. He taught his people the full extent of love and trust for one another. Like the king, on the day of his death Jesus became a teacher to Pilate speaking about love and trust, the ultimate goal of education. The truth is that God so loved the world that he gave his only son now standing in front of Pilate to first teach and then give his life for the truth of God's love.

We began the church year anticipating the birth of Christ with Advent and now on Christ the King Sunday we see Jesus, the truth incarnate, shaking up our world through his death on the cross. Jesus was a teacher, a shepherd, a king, one who testified to love and truth, a teacher...that is each one of you. You were called to this vocation. Everyday you are with the children and youth that you teach, listen for Jesus. He will be saying, "I love you. I trust you."

Question for the Week:

How will you identify with the children in your class through love and trust this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray this week for your vocation of teaching. Pray that Jesus our master teacher will nurture you and identify with you as you shape your life around your call to teach.

This devotion was contributed by Donna Braband, director for schools and early childhood education centers, Vocation and Education program unit, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Illinois.

November 29, 2009 – First Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: Jeremiah 33:14-16

It's the first Sunday in Advent! How did it creep up on us so fast? The countdown toward Christmas has begun, and our students are no doubt caught up in the hype and tension as much as we are. When you read this passage from Jeremiah notice that Jeremiah is referring to a PROMISE that God made to the people of Israel. God promises that someone will come from the line of David and save Judah.

Promises...we hear children every day in our classrooms and on the playground... "You PROMISED!" To children, promises are binding, and we need to be careful that we don't promise something we can't follow through with.

Here in the book of Jeremiah, God makes a promise...a very serious promise...and during this Advent season, we will be reading about, singing about, and hearing about how God kept that promise by sending Jesus to save God's people.

This is one promise that you can definitely make to the children in your classrooms. Promise them that Jesus came to love them, to walk with them daily, and to hear their prayers. Share God's promises with each child, starting with the promise of salvation.

Challenge for the Week:

Talk with your students about what it means to make a promise. They will have many creative answers! Share God's promise with them, and make it a focus during your Advent devotions this week.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, keep me focused on your promise during this upcoming Advent season. Help me to keep the "Reason for the Season" in the front of my mind, even as the festivities, shopping, and parties escalate. Thank you for keeping your promises! Amen

This devotion was contributed by Shirley Becker, director, First Lutheran Early Education Center, First Lutheran Church, Torrance, California, and First Lutheran Infant and Toddler Center, St. Mark's, Torrance, California.

December 6, 2009 – Second Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: Psalm 25:1-2

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame.

In my years as a parish pastor, during pre-confirmation interviews, I'd often say to the student, "Tell me why God is important to you." Often the answer went like this, "God is always with me," or "God's just always there for me." As a young pastor, I wasn't pleased with those answers because they didn't seem very deep.

Looking back, I think that I may have been wrong. Those kids were like the psalmist, knowing from experience the deep dependability of God who is always engaged, who always hears. They just weren't great poets yet.

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul." I hear that opening as intentional engagement with the God who engages us. It is a declaration of trust in the one whose trustworthiness is tested and well-known. It is trust in the one who is always there.

Young children also look to God in their own ways and with their own words. You who work in schools and early childhood education centers have the opportunity to hear and nurture some of these children's very earliest expressions of trust and praise. May God bless you in that faith-nurturing role!

This psalm reflects back to God what God offers to us—presence and trust. That's the Christian life, being close to God and being shaped by what God is—at every age. Trustworthiness begets trust. Knowing God makes us become like God. We sing God's song back to God.

May your soul be lifted up!

Question for the Week:

How is God letting you hear children's expressions of trust? Think of a time when you have been able to nurture a child's faith. And think of a time when your faith was nurtured.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for children by name: those who seem to be growing in faith, those who seem to have no interest, and those who may be hostile. Give thanks to God for specific times when your faith has been lifted up.

This devotion was contributed by Stan Olson, ELCA executive director for Vocation and Education, the program unit of the churchwide organization that includes work with schools and early childhood education centers.

December 13, 2009 – Third Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Don’t worry, be happy.” I love singing that song, if it were only as easy to put those words into practice. In our world today, there are many “step” programs for a variety of problems. Today’s Scripture reading seems to contain the ingredients for experiencing peace with God in only three steps. Sounds simple, doesn’t it?

The first step according to the verse is to rejoice, not once but again and again. Our God has done so much for us. If we set our eyes on what God has done for us, then we can be not only thankful, but perhaps even giddy.

Second, the verse says, “let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.” I’m not sure if the author meant for those two sentences to go together or not, but I was reminded of being in a classroom and listening to children talking unaware that I was standing near. Every once in awhile, they were surprised and maybe embarrassed by what they had said. What would we say or do if we truly believed God is near.

The third step is to strive not to worry. Instead we should pray, giving thanks and letting God know our needs.

Then, the passage says, we will know God’s peace. Our problems will not dissolve away, in fact they may not go away at all. But we can be at peace, knowing we have given the problem to God and we have a God who is big enough to take care of it.

Questions for the Week:

Think of something you are struggling with, either in the classroom, with other staff, or in your home life. Is it time to give it to God and see how God will handle it?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, you know each one of us, our strengths and our struggles, our hopes and our fears, our worries and our cares. Please help us to know you are near and want to be involved in our lives. Give us peace as we look to you to guide us. In Christ's name. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Cindy Decker, teacher and director, St. Mark Lutheran Church Preschool, Mt. Prospect, Illinois, for seventeen years. Cindy is currently serving as Youth and Family Coordinator at St. Mark.

December 20, 2009 – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: (Mary’s Song of Praise) Luke 1:46b-55

If ever someone did God’s work, it was Mary, wasn’t it?

Mary, a humble servant of God, was to be the mother of Jesus. Can you imagine being asked by God to bear a child—especially this child—the holy Son of God?

It appears that in no time, Mary accepted the angel’s news as God’s will and became quite comfortable and yes, even excited about it.

As Mary arrives at the home of Elizabeth, she offers her song of praise. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name”.

Mary’s faith in God is sure; her willingness to serve is obvious; her praise of God is beautiful. In our personal walk with God or in the teaching of God’s word to the children in our midst, are we that certain, that devoted?

Daily living is often challenging—sometimes we don’t really feel like saying “Yes, God, here I am.” Often, we learn from the children—they accept God’s love in a “matter-of-fact” way and are eager to follow God. In a circular fashion, through the example of children, who learn through the example of others, we are all strengthened. With God’s help we are able to praise God’s holy name, to proclaim God’s goodness, and to serve God.

Thank you, Mary, for your example of faith. Thank you, God, for your constant faithfulness.

Questions for the Week:

Describe a time in your life, when you felt like God was asking the impossible of you. What was your first reaction? How did your faith enter in? What was the end result?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Good and gracious God, we love and praise you for your goodness. Help us to say, “yes,” to you. Help us to share your love with the children in our midst. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Julie Peck, director, Our Redeemer’s Lutheran Preschool, Helena, Montana.

December 25, 2009 – The Nativity of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Psalm 97

Psalm 97 speaks of the glory of God's reign. Who is this God who desires to reign over the earth and in our personal lives? Can we even imagine that the creator of our universe loves and cares about so small a planet as earth and its people? The psalmist writes that "the heavens proclaim his righteousness...all gods bow down before him." Our Jesus, the light of the world, lay in a manger bathed in the light of the magnificent star, while civilization remained ignorant of such an incredible gift. How blessed were those few shepherds who saw and heard the proclamation of the angels!

Our God appears daily to us. We, too, might miss Jesus' presence as we hurry about our lives, worshipping "idols" and ignoring God's gentle voice to worship Jesus and make him king of our lives. Idols don't necessarily have to be glaring—like a golden calf or a statue. Idols may be a television show we must see, a book we must read, an Internet connection, a sport, or even a person. How many times have we missed seeing God in the beauty surrounding us, the kindness extended to us in a time of need, or the blessing of God's presence when we are so absorbed in ourselves?

Questions for the Week:

Is God the king of your life? What captures most of your time and thoughts?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, help me to make you king of my life. Help me to see that you want to fill me with the Holy Spirit daily so that I may have a closer walk with you. Give me a hunger for your presence every day and keep me refreshed in your word. In Jesus' name. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Gail Hayman, director, Church of the Savior Nursery School, Paramus, New Jersey. Gail has served as assistant, teacher and director since 1989.

25 diciembre de 2009 – La Natividad de Nuestro Señor. Pensamiento para la Semana: El Salmo 97

El Salmo 97 habla sobre el reino de Dios y su gloria. Quién es este Dios que desea reinar sobre la tierra y en nuestras vidas personal? Podemos imaginar que el creador de nuestro universo ama y cuida a un, pequeño, planeta tierra y su gente? El salmista escribe que “los cielos proclaman su justicia...” Que todos los dioses se postren ante él!” Nuestro Señor Jesús, la luz del mudo, acostado en un humilde pesebre, es irradiado por una estrella magnífica, mientras que la civilización permanecía ignorante a ese regalo tan increíble. Cuan bendecidos fueron el grupo de pastores que vieron y escucharon la proclamación de los ángeles!

Diariamente Dios se manifiesta y se aparece ante nosotros. También nosotros nos perdemos su presencia como nos apresuramos en nuestras vidas adorando “ídolos” e ignorando la voz de Dios de adorar a Jesús y hacerlo el rey de nuestras vidas. Cuando adoramos ídolos no nos referimos a los que son brillantes como un becerro de oro o una estatua. Los ídolos pueden ser un programa favorito de televisión, un libro, una conexión con el Internet, un deporte, o aún una persona. Cuántas veces hemos perdido ver a Dios en la belleza que nos rodea, en su bondad y misericordia que nos da en tiempo de necesidad o en la bendición de su presencia cuando estamos envueltos en nosotros mismos en lugar de darle la prioridad que merece en nuestras vidas?

Pregunta para la semana:

Es Dios el rey de tu vida a quien tu dedicas tu tiempo y pensamientos?

Oración Personal para la semana:

Señor ayúdame a que tú seas el rey de mi vida. Ayúdame a reconocer que, diariamente, tu me llenas con el Espíritu Santo para caminar a tu lado, cerca de tí. Dame hambre y necesidad de tu presencia, permitiendo que pueda deleitarme en tu palabra. En el nombre de Jesús. Amén.

Traducción al Español por Ruth Duran, Mission Developer, AIM encargada de Educación Cristiana en la Iglesia Luterana “Santa Cruz” (ELCA), Chicago, Illinois.

December 27, 2009 – First Sunday of Christmas
Thought for the Week: Psalm 148

Praise the LORD!

*Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!*

*Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!*

*Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted:
his glory is above earth and heaven.*

*He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to
him.*

Praise the LORD! (vs. 1, 13-14)

Praise the Lord! God spoke and our beautiful world came into being. Majestic mountains, oceans teeming with life, shining stars, the waxing and waning moon, creatures that crawl and birds that fly, all living creatures, angels and the human race were created by the Lord's command. We sing praises to our mighty Creator for the beauty of God's universal glory.

As teachers, we have a responsibility to teach care of creation. God gave us dominion over all living creatures and the task of being good stewards with the creation. We have the opportunity to empower our students to see the urgent need to love and respect our universe. How can we leave a smaller carbon footprint with our everyday actions? How can we conserve energy, discourage industrial pollution and destruction of the rain forests? How can we enlighten our youth with the notion that every choice they make has an effect on other people or on the environment? For example, the bottled water industry has devastated some people's lives in India. Big business has made essential life-sustaining water a commodity. We are all children of God and we must think globally. Let's educate, empower, and enlighten our youth to take notice of God's global gift, and therefore take positive action in our care of creation. Praise the Lord!

Questions of the Week:

Can we as educators teach good stewardship a step at a time? Can we start with a concrete personal change of behavior for God's glory and the creation? Each day can we expand the care of creation to encompass far corners of the earth until all our brothers and sisters in Christ and all God's creation sing "Praise the Lord!"?

Personal Prayer of the Week:

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us coworkers in your creation. Give us wisdom and reverence to use the resources of nature so that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Prayer from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* page 80)

This devotion was contributed by Su Hartman, director, Family and Youth Ministry, St. James Lutheran Church, Verona, Wisconsin.

January 3, 2010 – Second Sunday after Christmas
Thought for the Week: Jeremiah 31:7

For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."

HAPPY NEW YEAR! As the celebrations of the holiday season begin to fade, we can still look back and remember the love we felt as we opened a special Christmas present, or sang Christmas carols during a silent, candlelight worship service, or a joyful party with friends. It is easy to sing and shout during those joy-filled holidays. But in our reading for today, God challenges us to sing and give praise for other reasons.

In our work with children and parents, God calls us to welcome all who would enter our schools and churches. These verses in Jeremiah are affirmations of hope for Israel's restoration. The hope is based on God's grace and loving kindness and is written during a time of despair and exile. When families enroll in our schools and early childhood programs, they, too, may be facing difficulties, looking to us for hope and a new beginning.

The imagery of God as a loving shepherd gathering and keeping God's flock, in verse 10, can be our call to guide, care for and restore hope to the children and families who come through our doors.

We may not know all of the needs, but we can share the gracious love of God through our words, our actions and our teachings. Just as God gives love to us freely, even though we haven't earned it, so we can give freely to others.

Questions for the Week:

As educators, administrators and pastors in our Lutheran schools and early childhood education centers, we are daily blessed with the opportunity to share our faith and God's love with others. Is it a blessing we take for granted? How will you "sing aloud with gladness...proclaim and give praise" to God this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O Lord, thank you for the daily blessing of teaching in a place where I can freely share my faith with others and be a reflection of your love.

Pray for one family this week who may be feeling hopeless, lost, or in despair. Pray for strength to share God's love with them so their "mourning may turn to joy."

This devotion was contributed by Nancy Hafner, director Early Family Ministries, Vinje Lutheran Church, Willmar, Minnesota. Vinje's ministry to children and families includes Loving Arms Child Care Center and Preschool.

January 6, 2010 – Epiphany of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

On a flight between Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Montana, I was quickly running out of daylight. I landed my single engine airplane in a farmer's field at Portal, North Dakota.

The next day a storm prevented my take-off. That evening I walked out to check the plane's mooring lines. In the driving snow I soon was lost. I couldn't even find my own airplane. I needed direction. As I turned around I saw the powerful lighting of the railroad yard of Portal and I followed it back to safety.

When the people of Isaiah's time saw the darkness around them, Isaiah told them to "arise, shine, and give God the glory" for their light had come. They were to look to the Lord for their bright light. God's light is our hope today in Jesus.

Questions for the Week:

What does it feel like to be lost in the dark?

Why is Jesus called the Light of the World?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you, Lord, for the peace and joy found in your light. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Dwight Robinson, a private pilot and member of Cross and Crown Lutheran Church, Renton, Washington.

January 10, 2010 – Baptism of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

When Jesus' baptism is described in Luke, the three persons of God are present: Father's voice from heaven, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a descending dove.

Do you remember your baptism? You probably don't if you are Lutheran, since the Lutheran church practices infant baptism. Do you know the date of your baptism?

Baptism wasn't as celebrated 63 years ago as it is today. My mother had to go out the next day and buy a certificate for the pastor to fill out, since that congregation didn't give one. My four older siblings each had a certificate given to them on their baptism so there had to be one for me! Celebrations have increased over the years. Our family celebrated our daughters' baptisms with a dinner and gifts to remember the special day. Even today, as adults, they look for their flowers on their baptismal birthday. And now our four grandchildren receive gifts on their special day to remind them about God's love for them.

After Jesus' baptism, he went about the countryside telling everyone about God's love. At our baptisms we, too, are commanded to "Let your light shine before others, so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

Questions for the Week:

Do you know your baptismal birthday? If not, try to find out when it was.

How do you "Let your light shine" each day in the classroom?

How can you encourage your students to "Let their lights shine"?

Challenge: Begin each day by making the sign of the cross to remember your baptism.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God each day for the love shown to us through Jesus.

Ask God to help you "Let your light shine" each day with your students and to help you encourage your students to do the same.

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

January 17, 2010 – Second Sunday after Epiphany
Thought for the Week: John 2: 1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Ca'na of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (vs. 1-5)

Our mothers are one of our greatest support systems. At times they almost know us better than we know ourselves. They care for us, encourage us, and sometimes push us a little beyond our comfort zone. Is this what happened at the wedding at Ca'na between Jesus and his mother? She informs Jesus, "They have no wine." His first response is almost one of apathy by trying the question of, "Woman, what concern is that to you and me?" Like many children, if we ignore something, or someone, maybe it will go away and not bother us anymore. Or, maybe the child tries another excuse of not being quite ready, "My hour has not yet come." How many times has a parent asked a child to do something and the child's response is simply, "Later." Mary, the mother of Jesus, was not giving in and simply told the servants "Do whatever he tells you." Even though Jesus was an adult at this time, it is almost as if you can see the eyes of Jesus roll, and hear under his breath, "Ah Mom, do I have to?" But it was as if Mary knew Jesus would give in, obey her, and do the right thing.

Mothers seem to have the incredible intuition of knowing what is best for their children and giving that little extra push when they delay. Mothers are not only one of our greatest support systems, but our first teacher.

Teachers have a genuine love for their children and want the best for their students also. They always care and sometimes just hold hands for comfort and support. They encourage and give that little extra push when needed. Teachers, like mothers, want the best for their students and have the challenge of finding the right balance to care, but also to push their students to greater achievement.

Questions for the Week:

Think about the children in your class and care. Are you finding the right balance of not being too soft or too hard on them? Are you showing them you care, but at the same time, giving them that extra encouragement they might need?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for allowing you to be a faithful teacher. Thank God for allowing you to be an example to the children you work with. Ask God to help you see the needs and the talents of the students in your class. Ask for a blessing of balance between compassion and strength to give extra encouragement to those who need it.

This devotion was contributed by Kelly Catlett, preschool program director, Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, Poway, California.

January 24, 2010 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

A few years ago, in the process of unloading luggage from a trailer, my big toe ran into misfortune. It had a collision with a wheel on a bag and, well...it got the worse end of the deal. After a trip to the emergency room, and some minor surgery, I finally went home on crutches. Now, you know, I have no idea exactly why God has placed toe nails on the end of our toes, but I can tell you this—since they are there—they are very important to have and very painful to let go! Who would have thought something so small could hurt so much!

Toe nails might seem insignificant—but they most certainly are not!

You know, some of us in the body of Christ, might feel like we are insignificant. We can always find others who are better than we are at things. We can always see others who seem to be more important or who seem to play a bigger role in things. But the truth of the matter is—we all matter!

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians makes this point—we all matter. We are all needed. Whoever you are—God needs and wants YOU! God has gifted you and placed you in the time, place, and space you are in, so you can serve God and others. No one else is exactly like you. No one else has your opinions, your perspective, your exact heart. Without you the way you are, the body is incomplete.

So, today—take a moment and think about your toe nail...think about your place in the body of Christ and celebrate!!

Questions for the Week:

How has God shaped you to be uniquely qualified for the life you lead?

How can you help others this week to discover or rediscover their own God-given uniqueness and rejoice in it? How can you help them see that they are an important part of the body of Christ?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O Lord, you have such a creative mind! Thank you for making me who I am! Today, open my eyes and heart to the opportunities you place before me to serve you and others, using who I am. And in my serving remind me how important I am to your body and grace me with great joy! In your name and power, Jesus, I pray. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Vicar Jane Jebsen, Lutheran grade school and college alum, 20-year veteran of Youth and Family Ministry in Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois, now completing her degree at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, with plans to become an ordained pastor in 2010.

January 31, 2010 – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 13:7

Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail. (Good News Bible)

Unbeknownst to us, three-year-old Anthony was bounced from his last two preschools for social-emotional problems. After a week in school, his mother sat in the director's office as the director reviewed Anthony's behavior: chair throwing, kicking, scratching and plastic fork jabbing of his friends. Not a good first week.

The mom braced for the words that would end her child's tenure at the school, dabbing red eyes and reaching for tissues. How quickly her look of frustration and anger turned to one of relief and surprise when she was told that Anthony would be moved to another classroom with older children and a teacher that enjoyed "special challenges." We were not ready to give up on Anthony; we had another plan for him.

During the next two years Anthony's mom, dad, and teacher did not give up. Ever hopeful, patient, and optimistic he was taught to socialize and transition from the classroom and projects with developmentally appropriate behaviors. He graduated from preschool as a well-adjusted child no longer requiring the aid of special therapy.

In second grade Anthony tested into the "Challenge" program for young achievers. Today, he and his mother visit our school annually to update his teacher on his new accomplishments. His mother believes what happened at the school was a miracle.

As a teacher, it is really difficult to love some of the kids placed in our care. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he talks about the power of love. "Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail." If we could try a little bit harder to love that demanding child, maybe there would be a few more miracles in our classrooms. In turn, the power of love will give us the faith, hope, and patience required for our success.

Questions for the Week:

Is there someone in your classroom that needs your love and attention? Do you find it hard to love children that are difficult to work with or cause class disruptions? Is there a child in your classroom that you have given up on?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Jesus, help me to love my children more fully so that I may not ever give up on any child that is in my care. Fill me with love's promise of faith, hope, and patience that I may have the strength, knowledge, and wisdom to handle the challenges of your service. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Susan K. Wallisa, director, The Learning Center at Living Word Church, Katy, Texas

February 7, 2010 – Fifth Sunday after Epiphany **Thought for the Week: Psalm 138**

I give thanks to you, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise. (v. 1)

Those words were so easy for me to say when I was content and happy in my preschool that I loved, but one day when my world fell apart, I had trouble thinking why I wanted to praise God.

Right after Easter my fifty-eight-year-old husband, suffered a massive heart attack, lost both his legs because of an allergy to heparin, received an artificial heart, and later a heart transplant. Living in a motor home in the hospital parking lot and being in a huge unfamiliar city, alone, was when I really began to feel lots of new emotions, and definitely a lot of questions that I had with my Lord.

Day-to-day preschool events; such as parents showing up very late, pile and piles of paperwork, parents delinquent with their tuition, new rules and regulations to follow, not being able to pay teachers a wage they deserve. Those were problems I could work with and praise God daily for. But now my question was, “Lord, help us! Isn’t losing his heart enough? Why losing his legs too? How can we financially afford this? Neither of us is working.”

Through the months of recuperating, getting a heart transplant, receiving leg prosthesis, five years with a new heart, and wonderful volunteers and teachers keeping my director position open for me at the preschool, I now know what praising God means with all my heart.

Through prayer, God brought us through a fatal diagnosis to where we are today. The heart transplant happened after being on the transplant list for only five days. My husband can now walk great. The only concern we have is keeping him off ladders.

Question for the Week:

Is there anything that is too big for God to do, and do we need to learn to praise God even when the road seems hard to walk?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart and thank you every day for all my blessings and even my trials. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Gwen Quig, director and teacher, Prince of Peace Lutheran Preschool, Casper, Wyoming. Gwen has served thirty years as a teacher and eight years as the director.

February 14, 2010 – Transfiguration of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Luke 9:28-36

I like Valentine's Day at school, especially when it comes time to exchange valentines in the classroom. Most students pass out various cards featuring the latest celebrities, movies, or comic book heroes. Then, you have that one student who has spent extra time choosing the perfect valentine for their "crush." As the time nears to open the card, the giver turns a slight shade of pink, which matches perfectly with the red and pink décor of the classroom. The tension builds as the little decorative heart on the flap of the envelope is torn apart. The card is lifted out, the message is read, and...

In the text for today, Jesus' face turns whiter than lightning. He had traveled up a mountain with his friends and encountered Elijah and Moses. There, Jesus seemingly glows from the inside, enters a cloud, and receives positive reinforcement from God. God said to Jesus' friends, "Listen to him." Peter, in all of his exuberance, utters, "It is good for us to be here."

Going back to the school valentine, it is the giver's hope that the message is received the right way; that the emotions are evident through the piece of paper with cartoon hearts, Hannah Montana, and the inscription that reads *You're the Best of Both Worlds*.

God's message to Peter, John, and James was simple and easy to understand. *Listen to Jesus. Don't miss a word. This is very important.* In our every day lives, it is easy to get so busy that we don't take the time to actively listen to God or heed Jesus' words. Take a moment to listen to the Creator who has great things to share such as grace, love, and forgiveness. We can be confident of the love because we are already God's valentines.

Question for the Week:

What are some different ways you could actively listen to God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, help me be thankful for all that you have done for me. Let me hear your still, small voice as well as other messages that you have for me.
Amen

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

February 17, 2010 – Ash Wednesday
Thought for the Day: Joel 2:13

Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

A wailing “Noooooo” sails down the corridor through my office door, followed by the shaken and obviously frustrated presence of my new Pre-K teacher. A red-faced four-year-old, arms and legs flailing, tears flowing, voice booming in protest, is being carried out of the class after executing his fourth hostile rebellion of the morning and losing his last chance to remain in group play. Both teacher and child are in need of a break and a fresh start to the day.

After giving the child space to calm down and collect himself, I ask, “Nate, just what are you carrying on about?” He responds in his raspy Texas twang, “Well, that teacher just won’t let me do what I want to do and then I have to get mad!” Wow, I think, isn’t that about the clearest statement on the human condition I’ve ever heard.

The Bible chronicles story after story of man’s attempt to control his own destiny independent from the Creator of the universe. Like Nate, we flail against God’s good plans for our day, God’s desire to teach us, and to keep us safe from ourselves. How foolish we look as we are “carried down the hall” by the consequences of our own rebellion.

As I look into Nate’s bright green eyes and ask if he sees any way this might have turned out better, he replies with a sheepish smile that indicates he knows exactly where things went wrong. “Well, I guess I could just try being good.” “And what happens when you make a mistake?” I ask. Nate ponders for a moment, then looks up with excitement, “I betcha’ I could say I’m sorry!” The sincerity of his revelation is heart-melting and we finish off with a hug as I send him back to his classroom for that fresh start.

How like our heavenly Father we are when we respond with grace and mercy when confronted with a truly repentant heart. That “fresh start” we can offer and share in is an affirmation of God’s kindness and the blessing promised for all who return to God.

Question for the Week:

What daily acts of rebellion do you initiate as you seek to control your own destiny, independent from the God of the Universe?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the gift of a heart that can both give and receive a “fresh start” in response to true repentance.

This devotion was contributed by Joleen Howard-Browne, director, Grace Lutheran School, Conroe, Texas. She has served as director for five years.

February 21, 2010 – First Sunday in Lent Thought for the Week: Psalm 91:11-12

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; They will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. (NIV)

He will put you in his angel's charge to guard you wherever you go. They will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone. (Jerusalem Bible)

A year or so ago my angel was asleep or doing something else one day when I went running my four miles. My foot hit against a stone on the ground, I tripped, fell flat on my face, rolled into the gutter, severely scraping my face and hands, and tearing my plantar fascia tendon. It took a month in a cast and almost nine months of therapy before I could get back to running my four miles.

If we quote Psalm 91:11-12 from the New International Version of the Bible, then my angel was **not** doing his job. That version seems to be the one most cited when referring to this beautifully comforting text. However, the Jerusalem Bible gets my angel off the hook by saying that he will support you “in case you hurt your foot against a stone.” He **was** doing his job as he helped me in the healing of my foot.

Too often we assume that God and God's angels are not watching over us when something bad happens to us. We get angry with God. With Job we demand that God give us what we deserve since we have been faithful. We want justice. We want our angel to keep us from striking our foot against **any** stone. But there is a paradoxical richness to this text that we need to understand. God and the angels are with us when we **do not** strike our foot against a stone **and** when we **do**. God and the angels guard you in all your ways and wherever you go, no exceptions!

Questions for the Week:

Where did you **not** hit your foot against a stone this week? Where **did** you hit your foot against a stone this week? Did you see God and God's angels at work both times?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, thank you for your protection in all my ways and wherever I go. Help me to see YOU watching over me both when I do not hit my foot against a stone and when I do. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Hollis Thoms, teacher, principal, and executive director, Lutheran Schools of Southern California and Hawaii and a full-time free lance composer. His second opera, "The Moustache," written to commemorate the Abraham Lincoln bicentennial year, premiered in February 2009.

**February 28, 2010 – Second Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Psalm 27**

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (v. 1)

How true this is. Memories of a child's first days of school come rushing back. The child walks into the classroom for the first time with their parent and they get their final hug, squeeze, and kiss and the parent says "I'll be back." Then the water works start not only for the child but the parent too. We as teachers reassure the parents that the child will be fine and send them on their way. We hold onto the child until they realize this strange place they have been left is not so bad.

God reassures us that we can depend on God in all we do, all we have to do is ask. We can remind ourselves and the children that when in trouble we need to ask the Lord to help and guide us. The Lord is our rock, with God all is possible. Just as we assure the unhappy child that Mom will be back, God is there for us always.

Questions for the Week:

How can you assure children of God's salvation? What is it to be a stronghold?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for being our light and salvation and the stronghold in our lives to pass on to those around us.

This devotion was contributed by Michelle Schaffer, director, Christian Day Nursery, Norwalk, Ohio.

March 7, 2010 – Third Sunday in Lent Thought for the Week: Luke 13:1-9

People of the Second Chance

Everyone wants a second chance. A second chance at bat. A second chance to visit a favorite place. A second chance to take a test. A second chance to formulate the thoughtless or hurtful words that came out of your mouth...to your own surprise! Our God is a God of the second chance. The Christian word for this is repentance, and Jesus calls all of us to practice and offer the opportunity for repentance.

Our need for repentance often eludes us. Like the people who thought that they were better than the “other Galileans” in our text who had experienced disaster, we are often unaware of the guilt we bear and the “disasters” we create. We fail to see or understand the problems that our action or inaction cause. Even when you point out to a child in your classroom (or to a colleague in your school) that their actions, unbeknown to them, have been hurtful to someone, many will respond, “But I didn’t mean it!” Acknowledging guilt and engaging in repentance are hard paths to walk. But when you as a teacher or colleague help another person—or yourself—see things as they truly are, repentance becomes the gift of new life. Repentance is the second chance we all need, leading to the joyful life that we all seek.

Questions for the Week:

How can you help your students begin to understand the reality of “unintended consequences” and their need to accept responsibility for the problems unintentionally caused by their action or inaction? Recall a time when you were surprised to discover that another person was hurt by something you said or did. How did you respond?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for wisdom to discern your own need for repentance. Offer thanks to God for the opportunity of a second chance in God’s eyes.

This devotion was contributed by Mark Wilhelm, associate executive director for educational partnerships, Vocation and Education program unit, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**March 14, 2010 – Fourth Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

There is nothing more exciting than a celebration: a birthday, an anniversary or a holiday. For some children and youth, just coming to school in the morning is a celebration. If we were to peek into the homes of our students, I am afraid we might be greatly saddened by the tension, the stress caused by lack of time, the anger and the shouting. Therefore, I believe it is our calling to make our classrooms to be places of celebration every day.

Several years ago, I came across the re-telling of the “Prodigal Son” story in a rather humorous form, “THE PRODIGAL SON in F-MAJOR.” I apologize to the author...I have no one to give credit to...although I applaud their creativity...and a smile crosses my face each time I read it aloud:

Feeling footloose and frisky, a featherbrained fellow forced his fond father to fork over the farthings, flew far to foreign fields, and frittered his fortune feasting fabulously with faithless friends. Fleeced by his fellows in folly and facing famine, he found himself a food-flinger in a filthy farmyard. Fairly famishing, he fain would have filled his frame with foraged food from fodder fragments.

“Phooey! My father’s flunkies fare far finer,” the frazzled fugitive forlornly fumbled, frankly facing facts. Frustrated by failure and filled with foreboding, he fled forthwith to his family. Falling at his father’s feet, he forlornly fumbled, “Father, I’ve flunked and fruitlessly forfeited family fellowship favor.”

The far-sighted father, forestalling further flinching, frantically flagged the flunkies to fetch a fatling from the flock and fix a feast. The fugitive’s fault-finding fraternal one frowned on fickle forgiveness of former fol-de-rol. But the father figured, “Filial fidelity is fine, but the far-flung fugitive is found! What forbids fervent festivity? Let flags be unfurled! Let fanfares flare!”

The father’s forgiveness formed the foundation for the former fugitive’s future fortitude.

Hopefully, the re-telling of this age-old story in a fun way might re-ignite that sense of celebration and bring a smile to your face and to the face of your students. Each student needs to be celebrated just for who they are and for the potential that is inside them.

Question for the Week:

Can you list something, however small, in each student to be celebrated? Take the time each day to give at least one complimentary word to each child...spoken or written.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O God, how often haven't I been the prodigal son or daughter and you have been there to celebrate my return! Thank you, God! Be with me each day, each hour, each moment, that I might have the wisdom and insight to see the goodness in each student and colleague I meet. Give me the time and the push to share those good words. Thank you God for this incredible calling! Amen!

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Dr. Jean A. Zietlow, senior pastor and supervisor of the Early Learning Center, First Lutheran Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

March 21, 2010 – Fifth Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

My nine-year-old is a distance runner. He enjoys entering 5K races and improving his time at each race. Many of my friends ask if I run next to him during the races, and I have to honestly say no. Not because I couldn't participate in the race, but because he would be so far ahead of me. By the time the third mile rolls around, I'm looking for portable oxygen tanks, a water tank in which to dive, and possibly a pastor, since it feels as if I might meet the Maker during the last lap.

This month seems to be the longest of the school year. There aren't too many parties (St. Patrick's Day, if you're lucky), Spring break seems forever away, and there is always so much to accomplish before the end of the year. March seems to drag on and on and seems to sap a lot of the newfound energy that we found over the Christmas break.

Many of us are probably familiar with the last portion of today's text. It is on many screensavers, printed art, and greeting cards. I want to direct your attention to the text that comes before "pressing on toward the goal." It talks about forgetting what's behind and **straining** forward to what is ahead. It doesn't say strolling forward, easing ahead, or smoothly sailing into tomorrow. It suggests that there will be difficulties, struggles, and even some burdens to bear.

Think about your classroom. You have approximately two and a half months left to go in the school year. I encourage you not to forget your goal of educating the children about academics and our Savior. Will it be easy? Maybe for some, but not for most. Will it be worth it? Absolutely, and it always feels great when we reach our goals.

As we plan to press toward our collective goal of sharing God's love to children, I hope that you will find peace, hope, and a healthy dose of energy as you finish up this school year. I'm hoping to finish the next race with my son as I strain forward to the finish line and desperately try to forget the last few miles.

Questions for the Week:

Are you still attempting to reach your goals you set at the beginning of the year? How are you making sure you will be successful?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for your co-workers this week that their energy would be increased, their joy would be multiplied, and their stress would be taken away.

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

March 28, 2010 – Sunday of the Passion
Thought for the Week: Luke 22:14–23:56

This passage gives many images of hands. I see the hands of Jesus raising the bread and the cup during his last meal. I see the hands of the betrayer as Jesus tells his disciples he is at the table with them. I see the hands of Jesus in the garden praying. I see the hand of one who uses a sword to cut off a soldier's ear. I see the hand of Jesus healing that soldier in the midst of all of this chaos! I see the hands of those who seize Jesus, lead him away, and beat him. I see the hands of Simon of Cyrene forced to carry the cross for Jesus. I see hands nailing hands; nailing Jesus' hands. When it is done, there is one more set of hands. A man, Joseph of Arimathea, asks for Jesus' body. Jesus' body is dirty, with bloodied, torn flesh. Joseph does not hesitate. His strong hands take Jesus off the cross. Joseph brings Jesus down from there but now, with hands that I can only imagine being as gentle and loving as Father God's, he wraps Jesus in a burial cloth. Joseph's hands help get Jesus ready for the grave.

What do I learn from this? Reach out—as though I am putting forth God's hands. Life is messy. Death is messy. In order to cope in the midst of either, my hands must reach in and grasp, the moment they are needed. No hesitation for my own comfort or discomfort.

Question for the Week:

Which set of hands will I present to those around me this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. Help me to reach out with tender, loving hands to all you send my way. Thank you for the examples you give in your Word. Help me to always be mindful of the example I present to the children I teach. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Nola Smith, director, Salem Lutheran Church Preschool, Dalbo, Minnesota, who has served as Salem Preschool's director and teacher since 2002.

April 4, 2010 – Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter Day Thought for the Week: Luke 24:1-2

On the first day of the week, at early dawn [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb.

Easter—a glorious victory celebration. Death conquered; Satan defeated; God’s plan for salvation signed, sealed, and delivered. Beyond our comprehension...but do we really believe?

The women faithfully came to the tomb Easter morning expecting to find a dead body—Jesus’ dead body. The disciples were hiding in a locked room. Mary Magdalene was crying in despair after seeing the empty tomb. These were the followers who had heard Jesus proclaim resurrection three days after death...but before we are too critical of Christ’s followers, let us examine our own situation.

We would all profess to be faithful disciples, but do we really believe all that Christ says to be true? Do we live as though Christ has conquered death, defeated Satan, and is in sovereign reign over all things? When worry, doubt, and fear take hold of us, we are positioning ourselves with Christ’s followers at the resurrection. We are faithful; we love Christ with all our hearts; yet we do not believe God can do all that is proclaimed in Scripture.

The reality is that many children struggle this way as well. Those who have suffered abuse or experienced tragedy will question their self worth and wrestle with forgiveness. They will struggle with some basic beliefs about the presence, sovereignty, and love of God for them.

Our tendency is to stand aghast at such quandaries. Thankfully, Christ’s interaction with his followers sets the tone for our response. Be available. Listen. Be gentle. Don’t criticize. Don’t condemn. Speak the truth. Demonstrate love.

Question for the Week:

Do a heart check—in what areas of life do you struggle with the belief of who God is and what God can do?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to eliminate doubt from your life and pray that you would have the opportunity to proclaim that faithfulness to others.

This devotion was contributed by Joyce Kortze, full-time home-schooling mom. Her husband Donald is principal of Lutheran High School, Rockford, Illinois.

April 11, 2010 – Second Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: John 20:23

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.

We may look at this verse and think of the confessional of our liturgy, especially where the minister responds that “as an ordained minister of the church of Christ and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins.” But at the same time, the prayer we most often use with our children includes the earth shattering reminder of both parts of John 20 (forgiveness and retention) buttressed with the Lord’s Prayer petition to “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

The implicit decree of the prayer Jesus taught us is not so much that our own forgiveness depends on our forgiving others. It’s usually taught that way, granted. But Luther in the *Small Catechism* opens another direction—that we discover the depth and joy of God’s forgiveness for us **when** and **as** we forgive those who have wronged us. The cause-and-effect relationship is not that God withholds forgiveness from us until and unless we forgive others. It is that when we forgive others, we experience the grace which God has already bestowed upon us. And that makes all the difference in the world.

And of course this is a daily lesson as we teach students how to say “I’m sorry,” how to name faults and apologize, and how to forgive each other their social imperfections. In the long run, it does not lead to social perfection, but it leads to a wonderful bonding where our automatic reactions reflect the knowledge that we are indebted to each other for respect and we have a way to overlook each other’s insufficiencies.

But then comes the deeper application where “I’m sorry” just isn’t enough. A teacher may be in a position to be required to withhold forgiveness until the entire lesson is learned, the complete attitude adjusted, or the appropriate repairs made—no forgiveness until the mess is cleaned up!! In our hearts we know that we actually have forgiven already, but we are acting like we haven’t because learning is required.

The thought for the day is a reminder that in our positions as church teachers, we are first and foremost citizens of God’s kingdom along with our charges, and secondly, teachers and dispensers of discipline. The first trumps the second every time, even as we are called to lead those whose faith is still forming to discover the power of forgiveness—from God to them, and from them to others.

Questions for the Week:

Is there a willful child whom I have indulged and need to intercede with more intently for the child's own good? Am I encouraging my fellow teachers as they struggle with the children who wear them out and helping them know they are doing God's work?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, you have shown us that forgiveness is something we experience together as a group. Help me teach my students to participate genuinely in tolerance for each other so that their lives and the world around them may be peaceful.

This devotion was contributed by Theresa Kahle, director of administration and development, Lutheran School of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio.

April 18, 2010 – Third Sunday of Easter Thought for the Week: John 21:1-19

Today's text is a well-known story where Jesus asks the disciples about their fishing success. The disciples tell Jesus that the fish are not biting, and Jesus tells them to try the other side of the boat. I can just picture Simon Peter rolling his eyes a bit and muttering as he hauls the big nets to the other side of the boat. I can also picture the next moment when mountains of fish enter the nets, and Simon Peter is once again reminded with whom he has been traveling.

As educators, it is sometimes easy to get in a rut with our teaching. We keep trying the same side of the boat that is not working, and we forget to try different options. On the other hand, we may have some success with one method, but we don't always utilize other proven teaching techniques. I was once told of an individual who was a first-year teacher with twenty years of experience. Although every student knew what to expect, the teacher was unwilling to change, therefore missing out not just for herself, but for her students as well.

The same thing often happens in our spiritual lives. We get stuck in a pattern of complacency and don't work to grow in our relationship with God. The good news is that Jesus is by our side and is always concerned for us.

Are you stuck in a rut? Do you need a professional, spiritual, or emotional pick-me-up? Jesus is always ready to bless us, but we may have to try throwing our nets on the other side of the boat first.

Question for the Week:

Are you stuck in a rut from which you need some direction?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, thank you for the opportunity to teach your children. Help me to see each blessing and opportunity you send my way, and be grateful for them. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Patricia Morrow, middle school teacher, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Kissimmee, Florida.

April 25, 2010 – Fourth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Acts 9:40

Peter sent them all out of the room then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes and seeing Peter she sat up. (NIV)

It is a challenge in the teaching profession to resurrect good attitudes from poor ones, generate a desire to learn from apathy, or revitalize a successful mindset following failure. An even greater challenge exists to resurrect students’ spiritually dead or apathetic hearts. We have a great opportunity to help students understand what it means to have a faith journey, to open their eyes to the activity of God all around them and to make theology a reality in their lives. How? We can take some lessons from Peter in the passage above.

1. *Peter got down on his knees and prayed.*
Dependence on God’s power is vital to awakening hearts to a spiritual renewal.
2. *Peter turned toward the dead woman.*
It is easy to turn away from challenging students or those who do not exhibit a vibrant faith. Yet it is the challenging student who will need one of mature faith to turn toward them, walk with them, and work to influence them.
3. *Peter said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes.*
How often do we miss the opportunity to speak boldly and clearly to our students about our faith and ways that we have seen God at work in our lives? Peter spoke with confidence through the power of Christ, and Tabitha opened her eyes.

Seem like too large a task—opening the eyes of faith in our students? Remember Peter’s initial action—he got down on his knees and prayed.

Question for the Week:

Do you know someone whose faith needs a resurrection? Is your own theology a reality?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for patience and wisdom that will better enable you to meet the spiritual needs of your students.

This devotion was contributed by Joyce Kortze, full-time home-schooling mom. Her husband Donald is principal of Lutheran High School, Rockford, Illinois.

May 2, 2010 – Fifth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: John 13:34-35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

I do, you watch.

I do, you help.

You do, I help.

You do, I watch.

You do, someone else watches.

This is a well-known model of training someone in a specific skill set. Jesus also used this way of coaching his disciples. Perhaps it was more this way...

I love, you watch.

I love, you help.

You love, I help.

You love, I watch.

You love, someone else learns to love, too.

Just as Jesus has loved us, so we should love one another.

Questions for the Week:

What kinds of skills do you find yourself training or teaching others?

Are you in a position to train others in acts of love or are you still in the watching or helping stages of learning? How can children be our teachers?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for those who have helped you develop as a disciple who shows Christ's love to others. Ask for an open heart to assist others in learning to love as Christ loves.

This devotion was contributed by Lynne Ogren, Associate in Ministry, Oak Harbor Lutheran Church, Oak Harbor, Washington. Lynne has served in the areas of music, and children and family ministries for fourteen years.

May 9, 2010 – Sixth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Acts 16:9-15

When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. (v. 10)

Paul had just seen a vision and at once knew that he should go to help the people of Macedonia. Once there, he went to find a place of prayer on the river bank outside the city gate. Paul spoke to the women gathered there. Luke says that God opened Lydia's heart so that she could listen eagerly to what Paul said. Not only Lydia, but her whole household was baptized that day. In addition, Lydia prevailed on Paul and Luke to stay in her house while they remained in the region. Paul, Luke, and Lydia were all called to do God's work through their own hands. And they did so gladly.

Have you heard God's call? When you are cleaning up after lunch or changing diapers, is God calling? What about when you are helping resolve social issues among children, or when you are preparing for parent conferences, do you hear God's call? How do you feel when a child finally masters a difficult concept? When a four-year-old prays from the heart at circle time, or when a toddler hugs a little friend who is crying, do you sense your calling?

As Christian educators we call dwell on the drudgery or appreciate the small milestones that occur each day. We have all been called to do God's work through our own hands.

Question for the Week:

Can you point to God's work being done in your school?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for calling you. Ask for continued guidance and wisdom to carry out your mission as you work with the children and families that are entrusted to your care.

This devotion was contributed by Dottie Fergus, retired Lutheran early childhood educator for 34 years. A former early childhood facilitator of Lutheran Schools Association of New York, Dottie now serves as director of Christian education, Calvary Lutheran Church, Edina, Minnesota.

May 13, 2010 – Ascension of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Ephesians 1:17-18

I pray that God... may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance...

Like Paul's friends in Ephesus, my eyes were recently enlightened in a spectacular way. The Lasik surgery took just 15 minutes but, when I opened my eyes, I saw a whole new world. Gone were nearly 50 years of thick glasses and irritating contact lenses. Now I'm seeing the world in a whole new light.

Of course, St. Paul was writing about an even more important gift of sight—opening up the “eyes of our hearts” to see the hope, power, and riches of a life lived in close relationship with Jesus Christ. In baptism, we experience something like a “lasik of the heart” and the way we see the world is changed forever.

Seeing the world in this whole new way is an opportunity we have every day in Lutheran schools. What a privilege to have a vocation where we can teach children to open up the eyes of their hearts to know Jesus! And what about the opportunity we have to enlighten the adults in our schools, too—teachers, staff, parents, congregational members and the world outside our doors.

In the ups-and downs of this week, I pray that St. Paul's words will inspire you in your high calling as a Lutheran educator—to witness to your faith and open hearts so that your students and all around you are enlightened by God's hope, power, and riches.

Question for the Week:

Amid the hustle and bustle of this week, what specific things will you do to “open the eyes of the heart” for your students and co-workers?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for God to use you mightily in transforming the lives of all connected with your school. Take heart—God has promised to bless your efforts!

This devotion was contributed by Dr. David Hahn, head of school, Long Island Lutheran Middle and High School, Brookville, New York.

May 16, 2010 – Seventh Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: John 17:20-26

It's Preschool Sunday and the children are scrubbed, and ready to go. Hair ribbons in place and shirttails tucked in. The wiggling settles slightly and parents anxiously hold their collective breath to see what happens next. The music begins; teachers wave their arms on the downbeat.

*Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red, brown, yellow, black, and white,
They are precious in his sight;
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

And

*Jesus loves me this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.*

How would you feel, knowing that you had mighty armies, advisors, leaders, loyal and loving family and friends firmly at your back, ready to extol your goodness, and intercede on your behalf? What power, freedom, and self-assuredness, would fill your heart and spawn your desires for love and action with such support.

Well, that would be wonderful, fantastic, and heart warming you answer, but—I think you are talking about someone else.

In the Bible, it tells how Jesus knelt before his Father in prayer, and pled on behalf of those who followed him so faithfully, that they might be one with him as he is one with the Father. Jesus didn't stop there, he said, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." Jesus interceded on **your** behalf asking that, "...the glory which you have given me I have given them; so that they may be one, as we are one."

Questions for the Week:

We teach our children and they sing Jesus' praise, but do YOU know how much Jesus loves you? Do you know what being one with the Father means, what security and power it holds?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Jesus, how simple it sounds, yet how powerful it is to know that you love us so much that you would intercede with the power of all heaven on behalf of those who love you. Help me, Lord, to accept what I teach, that “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

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

May 23, 2010 – Day of Pentecost Thought for the Week: Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

At a time of prevalent brokenness in personal relationships, an unsustainable environment, and with unstable economic structures, it is natural that we are somewhat fearful of what lies ahead. While striving for closeness with others we tend to be fearful to commit. The children in our classrooms also pick up on these fears. In addition to these fears some will make religion something to be feared with an emphasis on laws which cannot be fully kept. A spirit of fear too often abounds.

The epistle reading for Pentecost Sunday points to the great blessings that are ours because of God's gift to us of the Holy Spirit; one of the greatest of these blessings is a spirit of adoption. We are adopted by a God who loved us so much that this God sent Jesus to be our Savior. The gift of the Holy Spirit makes this gift of adoption our very own. The spirit of adoption is complemented with other gifts from our gracious God—we are now children of God, heirs, even joint heirs with Christ, and finally we will be glorified.

The Holy Spirit mingles with our spirit to bring us close to God and makes these gifts of God real for us. It is our privilege to be the channel through which the Holy Spirit now brings these gifts of God to those in our classrooms. Where there is fear we can bring hope because of a loving God who wants to adopt us. In a broken world we bring to those in our care the gift of the Holy Spirit who replaces fear with the assurance of adoption. What contrasting spirits!

Questions for the Week:

What spirit dominates my classroom—a spirit of fear or a spirit of adoption? How can I create a spirit of adoption? Name the fears that intrude into the classroom.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and all the gifts that come to us through this gift. Pray for those who are beset by the fears that we have named. Pray that those in our care have a real sense of the spirit of adoption.

This devotion was contributed by Dr Adrienne Jericho, executive director of Lutheran Education Australia.

**May 30, 2010 – The Holy Trinity / First Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Romans 5:1-5**

Do you rejoice about dealing with a cranky child, an irate parent, or a picky government inspector? Have you felt the sleepless nights you have suffered worrying about a child, family, or co-worker have been in vain?

Paul tells us to “... rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Romans 5:3-4, NIV) How can we rejoice in our sufferings? We can, with the faith and peace we have in Jesus and the knowledge of God’s love.

God brings us sufferings to help us learn to persevere, which builds character, then ultimately hope. God helps us build perseverance, character, and hope so we can better serve the children and families placed in our care. We can share with them the love and peace that we know so well through our faith in Jesus.

So next time you feel like a situation is causing you to suffer, stop, reflect, and rejoice in what God has given you and how you can grow from the gifts God has given.

Questions for the Week:

Reflect on a time when you felt that you were overwhelmed and suffered needlessly. In retrospect, how did you grow from the event? How did the people involved in the event grow? Did you grow in character and hope? Did God’s love support and guide you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, thank you for the peace we have through Jesus. Help us to joyously see all that we have been given. Help us to grow stronger in hope and love; then help us to share that love with others. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Madelyn Speagle, principal, Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran School, a ministry of Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, Florida.

June 6, 2010 – Second Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Galatians 1:11-24

In this scripture reading, Paul tells of his incredible conversion to Christianity. He tells us how, after his conversion, God worked through him to bring many others to Christ.

God works through us as well. While our story of coming to faith in Christ may not be as dramatic as Paul's (or maybe it is!), God uses each of us in our schools and classrooms everyday to bring God's love and saving grace to the students we encounter.

Several years ago, the church in which my family worshipped was involved in companion ministry with the Lutheran church in Guyana in South America. Many congregational members visited Guyana to do ministry, help build a youth center, and spend time with our Lutheran friends in that country. In addition, some church members hosted visitors that came to Florida from Guyana. One such visitor was the pastor of the Lutheran church in Guyana, the church that we worked closely with. At the end of his visit, he thanked us for our hospitality and said, "You have been like Christ to me." I was struck by that comment then, and I continue to be challenged by it. I wonder—is Christ's presence in me evident in my everyday life? Am I "like Christ" to the people I encounter each day?

Questions for the Week:

How are we "like Christ" for our students? How can we be more Christ-like, not just in our schools and classrooms, but in every place we visit?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you, Lord, for the ways that you use us to teach children about you. Thank you for allowing us to serve you, especially in our schools. Help us to see more clearly how we can be "like Christ" for our students, and for all that cross our paths this day. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Barbara Kovar, teacher and preschool site director, Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran Church and School, Jacksonville Florida.

June 13, 2010 – Third Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 2 Samuel 12:13 and Luke 7:48, 50

David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan said to David, “Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.”

Then [Jesus] said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”... “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” –

God sent Nathan to hold David accountable for committing adultery with Bathsheba and arranging for the death of her husband. David, the absolute monarch of Israel, does not laugh Nathan out of court, deny his sins, make excuses, blame the woman—or kill the messenger! Instead he acknowledges, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

The sinful woman in Luke 7 does not cover up her sin, hide herself from Jesus, or even beg for forgiveness. Instead she goes to Jesus at the home of a Pharisee where she knows Jesus will be eating, she kneels at Jesus’ feet, bathes Jesus’ feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. She then kisses Jesus’ feet and anoints them with oil.

And God forgives each of them. Not because of their positions in the world, but because they are willing to humble themselves before God.

As teachers, as students, we are neither too great nor too lowly to sin. We are neither too great nor too lowly to humble ourselves before God, acknowledge our sin, and have faith in God’s forgiveness. It is not our position in the world that saves us—it is God’s grace.

Questions for the Week:

What lessons of faith can you learn from your students? How can you model humility for your students?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to help you remain humble, to use your authority in the classroom to God’s glory. Pray that those with power and authority over others will remain humble before God.

This devotion was contributed by Elaine Chapin. Elaine is a wife, mother, grandmother, and former secondary school teacher. She has served as the Sunday school superintendent, Messiah Lutheran Church, Ralston, Nebraska, for fifteen years.

**June 20, 2010 – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Luke 8:39**

“Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.”

The demoniac, having been healed, wants to remain in the safe company of Jesus. But Jesus sends him away to release the good news of his transformation. After a year of learning, students, too, have been transformed. Now it is time for everyone to return home and tell of this good news.

Think back to the beginning of the school year. What changes and transformations have taken place in your students? Each student, as a unique child of God, brings their own set of struggles and joys to the classroom. The changes that take place in each one may not always be visible, but rest assured that God has been at work in each child. And this work does not end as they return home. The school year may have ended, but God’s work continues.

And your work will continue, too, with new students in the next school year. Consider how your teaching transforms and prepares the children of God to share the good news. Your work as an educator is an important one for the whole people of God!

Question for the Week:

What are the messages that you hope students will carry with them from the classroom to their home?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for all children who need to hear the good news of what has been done for us in Christ.

This devotion was contributed by Kim Eighmy, Associate in Ministry, Verona, Wisconsin. Kim serves as a Christian educator and chaplain for the Lutheran Association of Christian Educators (LACE).

June 27, 2010 – The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21 and Luke
9:51-62

Teaching is a job that requires significant commitment. A teacher who comes to class unprepared pays a price with distracted students. Anyone who has faced a room full of preschoolers knows that without careful planning little ones are soon scurrying around like ants at a picnic. All teachers are familiar with the long hours of paper grading, parent conferences and lesson planning. Teachers are also accustomed to evenings at their child's ballgames and concerts with a pile of papers on their lap. Education is not a 40-hour-a-week job.

Two of the lessons for today address the issue of commitment to following the call of the Lord. When Elisha is tapped by Elijah to be his successor, he breaks with his past in a stark way: he kills his oxen and uses the wood from the plow to cook the meat. For Elisha, there was no going back to his old way of life. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus confronts two men who wanted to join his fellowship, but wanted to do it on their timetable.

The need for commitment and urgency is as important today as it was in biblical times. The mission field is ripe for the harvest and for some students, the teacher they have in their Lutheran school may be the only opportunity they have to see Jesus at work in a life.

Question of the Week:

What have you ever given up to be a follower of Jesus?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray this week that God continues to raise up workers for the harvest.

This devotion was contributed by Kevin Dunning, executive director, Faith Lutheran Jr/Sr High School, Las Vegas, Nevada.

July 4, 2010 – Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Isaiah 66:10-13

Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her...for you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Whenever we are hurt, don't we want a kiss for our "boo-boo"? When we have to change schools or towns, don't we need a hug of reassurance that we'll make new friends?

Three times in verse 13 we hear the word "comfort." God comforts us like a mother comforts her child. God lifts up Jerusalem as a safe place, a special place to feel close to God.

I remember when I was a child my special safe place was sitting on my mother's lap in the rocking chair. Every night she would gather me in her strong arms and hold me close. It was easy to fall asleep. And then my father would come and carry me to bed.

Now that I am having my first child I bought a rocking chair like the one my parents had. And I look forward to holding my child close, comforting them, as we rock back and forth, before their daddy takes them off to bed.

God's people had been kept from this special safe place, but now they are coming home to rock in the comforting arms of a loving God. As Lutheran churches and schools we are called to be special safe places for people to grow in faith and find comfort in their relationship with God; with integrity and prayer, may our ministries do just this.

Questions for the Week:

What are we doing well to make our children feel safe? What can we do better? Do they see church/school as a second-home?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God, our Mother, thank you for comforting us when we need it. Help us to be a comfort to others with a hug or a smile. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Janelle Rozek Hooper, pastor of spiritual formation, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois. Pastor Janelle also serves as pastor of Children's Chapel at the Children's Center Preschool.

July 11, 2010 – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost **Thought for the Week: Colossians 1:1-14**

What a wonderful text for teachers! It can serve well as a prayer model for congregations with preschools, too.

In our prayers for you, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.

Know that your families, your congregation, and the larger church throughout the world hold you in their prayers. Know that many are grateful for the work you do.

...we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Invite your congregation to include your teachers and students in the prayers of the church during Sunday worship services.

...so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.

Consider asking the people of your congregation to be prayer partners with the students. Pair students with individual volunteers. Let their prayers support your students as the seed of God's word takes root in their hearts and begins to grow.

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father.

Remember that unending strength comes not from your efforts, your knowledge, or your determination, but from the greater, glorious power of God. And, give thanks to God, as others give thanks for you. God bless you.

Questions for the Week:

Are our students and faculty aware of our prayers for them? Have we thanked people for keeping us in their prayers?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God in heaven, for Jesus' sake, renew and increase in us your gift of the Holy Spirit.

This devotion was contributed by Julie M. Young, board member, Good Shepherd's Little Friends Preschool, Polson, Montana.

July 18, 2010 – Eighth Sunday after Pentecost Thought for the Week: Luke 10:38-42

The story of Jesus visiting Martha and Mary has always been one of my favorites to teach and it seems quite appropriate that it is the Gospel lesson for this week. I love that in verse 38, Martha welcomes Jesus into her home; that verse reminds me of the many people I know who freely share the gift of hospitality.

In the next two verses, we hear that Mary sits and listens to Jesus while Martha is “distracted by her many tasks.” In true sibling fashion, Martha gets angry at Mary, complains to Jesus, and asks him to “Tell her then to help me.” Jesus’ answer probably makes Martha even angrier, but the text doesn’t tell us that; it simply tells us that Jesus tells Martha that Mary has “chosen the better part.”

In today’s language, Jesus is probably telling Martha to “relax” or “chill;” the work will be there tomorrow, but for now enjoy the moment and listen. This reminds me of one of my favorite Bible verses, “Be still, and know that I am God!” (Psalm 46:10.) Both the story of Jesus visiting Martha and Mary and the words of the psalmist are wonderful reminders during the middle of this July, during the middle of what for many of us is summer vacation, and throughout the year, that we have to take time from those tasks that worry and distract us and listen to God.

Questions for the Week:

Who has shared the gift of hospitality with you? How can you prepare to share the gift of hospitality with the students, parents, staff, and others in your school in the upcoming school year? What tasks are worrying you and distracting you? When have you taken time to listen to God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for those who have shared the gift of hospitality with you; ask God for guidance for those difficult and worrisome tasks in your life; and spend some time in quiet reflection listening to God.

This devotion was contributed by Rebecca Pebbles Cloninger who worships with her family at Philadelphia Lutheran Church, Dallas, North Carolina. She has served as Christian educator for congregations in North Carolina, youth ministry for the Florida-Bahamas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, worked for Augsburg Fortress Publishers for 14 years, and has served on the board of directors for a Lutheran school.

**July 25, 2010 – Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19)**

The text in short tells us how to live. I've always thought it would be great to have a handbook on how to live life. I mean appliances come with instructions, why not life? In some respects our handbook is scripture and for certain this text. It tells us to live in Christ. What does that mean? It continues to tell us to be rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith, abounding in thanksgiving.

Think, as an educator, what a tremendous witness our lives must be for children. To be "rooted in Christ," I believe, means practically to be a person of prayer, daily soaking in Christ through the Word. To be "built up in Christ" is that maturity process of letting God into our lives. To be "established in the faith" is being steadfast and firm in our belief. "Abounding in thanksgiving" is tough when we have so many distractions and daily irritants. Sometimes even children we work with can drive us away from thanksgiving. That's where our maturity piece must drive us to return.

Reflect for a moment on your own life. Where are you strong in Christ and where do you need to grow? Where are you in need of more thanksgiving? Where are you genuinely thankful? Think of the challenge of education in today's world and how vital it is for children to see people of faith.

Questions for the Week:

What seven people am I thankful for? Lift up one each day thanking God they are in your life. What seven children am I thankful for? Lift up one each day as well.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, sometimes I forget what a privilege it is to teach and what a responsibility it is to love those in my care. Help me to be abounding in thanksgiving, established in the faith, and rooted in Christ. Let my faith be contagious to those around me. Amen

This devotion was written by Rev. Marcia M. Thompson, Zion Lutheran Church and Pre School, Flourtown, Pennsylvania. She works weekly with pre-schoolers, using puppets, stories, and songs for chapel with them.

The ELCA Vocation and Education program unit wishes to thank all of those who took time out from their busy schedules to provide devotions for the 2009-2010 ELCA Devotion Guide for our early childhood education centers, elementary schools and junior and senior high schools.

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