

# ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Fall 2009

Vol. 43, No. 1



How DCE Ministry Expands  
the Church's Mission

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# ISSUES

## IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A PUBLICATION OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, SEWARD, NEBRASKA

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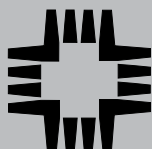
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CIRCULATION POLICY — *ISSUES . . . in Christian Education* (ISSN0278-0216) is published three times a year by the faculty of Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska 68434. *ISSUES* is sent free to each church, school, district and synodical office in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Copies are also sent to high schools, colleges and universities affiliated with the Synod.

Individuals wishing personal copies may obtain them as follows: Single copy @\$5.00 each; Subscription @\$12.50; 10 or more copies mailed to the same address @\$2.50 per copy. Call 800 535-5494 ext. 7279 or email hmatzke@cune.edu

Readers are invited to reprint portions of *ISSUES* materials provided that the following credit line appears: "Reprinted from *ISSUES in Christian Education*, Volume 43, No. 1, Fall 2009, a publication of Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska." This edition is on Concordia University's Web site at [www.cune.edu/issues](http://www.cune.edu/issues).

# reflections



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A Student + Faculty Design Collaborative

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director of the CONCORDESIGN Studio of  
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The year is 1959. Dwight Eisenhower is president of the United States of America. Alaska and Hawaii are admitted as the 49th and 50th states. Fidel Castro assumes power in Cuba. A first class postage stamp sells for \$.04. Unemployment is 6.8 percent. The Los Angeles Dodgers win the World Series. Cecil B. De Mille and Frank Lloyd Wright die. The Barbie Doll is invented, and Frank Sinatra wins his first Grammy award.

Lost on most lists that chronicle the events of 1959 is the birth of the Director of Christian Education (DCE) ministry in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. This edition of *Issues in Christian Education* celebrates fifty years of the DCE ministry. In it we recount the dynamic history of the DCE ministry, note the contributions DCEs have made and continue to make within and beyond our church body, detail the challenges and opportunities facing DCEs, and articulate the past, present and future vision and purpose of DCE ministry.

Through this edition, Concordia University, Nebraska, one of the first universities of the LCMS to prepare and equip DCEs, pauses to praise God for the 1,700 DCEs who have been certified in this ministry. We celebrate the 630 DCEs actively serving LCMS congregations today. We thank God for the visionary, faith-filled servants who birthed and pioneered the Director of Christian Education ministry. And we seek to encourage those who continue to lead the preparation of candidates for this crucial role today.

Some years ago Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, founder of Crossways International, observed that "the church teaches children and plays with adults while Jesus taught adults and played with children." Dr. Wendt was suggesting that we would do better to follow the pattern of Jesus. However, I wonder if we might do better by doing "both/and" rather than "either/or." I thank God for DCEs in the LCMS who do both, and do both extremely well. The role and ministry of the director of Christian education in the life of the parish and its people are even more important, critical and necessary today than fifty years ago.

May the Lord of the church continue to raise up women and men who have a passion for equipping, teaching, leading and serving those of every age the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as DCEs in our congregations and communities!

Happy 50th Anniversary, Director of Christian Education ministry!

Brian L. Friedrich, President



## The Value in Giving "C's"

Teachers give grades. We choose the curriculum, deliver the instruction, and mentor our learners through the process. We give them practice, anticipate trouble spots, and vary our techniques. We assess progress with verbal and written quizzes. Ultimately, we give them a test to see if they've really learned what we taught. Then we score the test and give our learners a grade on a report card.

This fiftieth anniversary of the launching of the DCE program is a good time to present a report card to the hundreds of individuals in Christian education ministries who have impacted the church. The ultimate goal of our ministry is that the children, youth and adults with whom we minister will know Jesus. That goal will be reached in eternity.

Yet there is a human element in the DCE teaching ministry. DCEs are teachers. My observations of dozens of DCEs bring me to the conclusion that DCEs have given many "C's" to their learners. While getting all "C's" on a report card might seem just average, be advised that the twelve "C's" on this half-century report card reveal excellence of the hundreds of professional church workers who have served.

This report card is not addressed to the learners, but to the Directors of Christian Education and teachers of the faith who have served our Lutheran congregations and schools over the decades.

1. You set high expectations for yourself.  
You carry out what you promise to do.  
You are fair in your judgments and decisions.  
You have established patterns others can count on.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Consistency**.
2. You take time to listen to others.  
You ask about a family member you know has been sick.  
You pause to pray with individuals for their unique situation.  
You plan servant events to give firsthand experiences.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Compassion**.

3. You tell your learners how proud you are of their accomplishments.  
You demonstrate your faith in what you say and do.  
You cheer on volunteers to serve faithfully and effectively.  
You give a pat on the back to those who need encouragement.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Confidence**.

4. You say "Please" and "Thank you" as a normal part of your communication.  
You apologize when you've made a mistake.  
You refer to other people with titles of respect.  
You never make derogatory comments about adults, teens, or children.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Courtesy**.

5. You keep helping others, even those who don't seem to want your help.  
You take on tasks that no one else is willing to do.  
You go one-on-one with a challenging situation.  
You propose valuable changes, even when change is not well received.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Courage**.

6. You work and plan with adults, teens, and children.  
You team with someone else to do a task neither of you could do alone.  
You volunteer to help above and beyond the call of duty.  
You do your part so everyone benefits.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Cooperation**.

7. You smile a lot, even when your smile is the only sunshine around.  
You are pleasant with kids, volunteers and fellow church workers.  
You find joy in the journey of life, displaying a positive outlook.  
You accept all people as redeemed children of God.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Contentment**.

8. You challenge others to solve problems that have no easy solution.  
You give them opportunities to find out things for themselves.  
You guide kids, teens, or adults to resources so they discover a new concept.  
You tell them the personal thrill you get from learning something new.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Curiosity**.

9. You present a situation and brainstorm possible solutions.  
You allow alternate ways for your learners to show what they've learned.  
You vary your teaching techniques to keep the environment invigorated.  
You surprise them with novel ideas and personal ingenuity.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Creativity**.

10. You don't back down from good, although unpopular, decisions.  
You allow your learners to fail without calling them failures.  
You tell your own stories of personal failures as well as successes.  
You carry through with appropriate promises and threats.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned **Consequences**.

11. You are well prepared for every class and every event.  
You struggle with, but manage, the balance between family and ministry.  
You honor your call as a Teacher of the Faith.  
You show up anyway, even if one of your wings is in a cast.  
"C" what you've done?  
You've taught them **Commitment**.

12. You tell your learners what Jesus means in your life.  
You are a student of the Scriptures and consistent in personal daily devotions.  
You forgive those who hurt you, as Christ has forgiven you.  
You pray with and for your learners and their families.  
"C" what they've learned?  
They've learned what it means to be a **Christian**.

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## The I.R.S. of DCE Ministry

It was the summer before my junior year in high school when I knew I wanted to become a Director of Christian Education. Yet, I had never known or even met a single DCE until the DCE Program Director passed my parents and me as we were touring a Concordia campus. He smiled. He stopped to visit with us. He called me by name. He laughed. We laughed. I was hooked.

Throughout my years in college, my DCE Program Director became a mentor figure for me. He made fun of my use of acronyms in college papers (he ought to love this reflection!). He pronounced my last name as if he were a cartoon character. He came up with a crazy idea for the DCE program to buy sweatshirts that imitated FBI apparel. He told funny stories about life in the parish, and he used random quotes in class that could probably sell books some day.

I quickly learned from both DCE professors and students alike that God has given His people many different gifts. One such gift God gives is a strong ability in the field of I.R.S., that is, **I**ntentional **R**elationship **S**tuff. Maybe "stuff" seems too juvenile a word for a Christian education publication such as this. I disagree. DCEs have been gifted by God to help expand His kingdom, and many of them are pretty amazing at I.R.S. DCEs help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom because they are called to be intentional. Directors of Christian Education are called to direct one or more specific educational ministries of a congregation or in other settings such as a camp. I am convinced that DCEs are most effective when they *intentionally* involve others in whatever ministries they are leading. DCEs do not and should not fly solo. Instead, they are called to direct others. Directors

of Christian Education must be intentional about finding the "others" they are called to direct. Sometimes, congregations have programs and systems in place that provide a seamless transition to a DCE's leadership. In other situations, DCEs are the catalyst for creating and building such programs and systems to help a congregation move forward in mission. Directing Christian education involves intentional leadership focused on others.

DCEs help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom because they are called to foster relationships. I would be remiss to say that DCEs are more relational than pastors, teachers, or any other person serving in a church-work profession. Certainly, any church worker must foster relationships to carry out the Great Commission of our Savior. However, DCE ministry is unique in that DCEs are often called to help lead and direct multiple different ministries. Multiple ministries means multiple people, many of whom do not necessarily know what the role of the DCE is supposed to be in their church.

A DCE does not have the same type of immediate credibility that a pastor or teacher receives. Instead, a DCE's effectiveness and leadership credibility are formed through his/her ability to form authentic relationships. People may continue to worship in pews and listen to a pastor preach God's Word even if they do not have a relationship with that pastor. Students usually continue attending class with a teacher, even if that same teacher has not worked at building any kind of caring relationship for such students. In my experience, people will not choose to be directed (at least not for very long) by a

DCE with whom they do not have (or sense they will have) much of a relationship. For DCEs, intentional relationships fit together like steak and potatoes.

DCEs help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom because they are called to "stuff." I could probably list at least ten "stuffs" that any of a variety of Directors of Christian Education regularly lead within their specific ministry settings. Whatever "stuff" a DCE does, the effectiveness of one's directing is more significantly impacted by his or her intentional relationships than the actual program area itself. Read that sentence again. Soak it in.

I remember some of what my DCE Program Director taught me at college. I remember more about how he welcomed me to campus as a 16-year-old. I remember more about how he trusted me with a leadership opportunity within the DCE program. I remember more about his care and concern for my friendships and involvement in campus activities. I remember more about his hug when I came back for the mid-year gathering during my internship year.

May God richly bless your growth in I.R.S. as you help expand the mission of the church and Christ's kingdom, whether you are a DCE or not.

*"My purpose is that they (Intentional) may be encouraged in heart and united in love (Relationship), so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Stuff)" (Colossians 2:2-3).*

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## "Christian education is a gift of a life. Eternal life!"

*Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*  
(Psalm 119:105)

The ministry of the director of Christian education is a wonderful supporting role that is mission-critical to the church. As noted in Dr. Mark Blanke's article in this edition, the role of quality Christian education is essential not only for the individual but for the health and vitality of the Christian community. The Synod in 1959 understood the importance of education and the need to place an emphasis on building up the people of God through intentional educational programs in the local parish. Since this time, the DCE profession has developed its true niche within the structure and work of the Synod.

One of the most challenging efforts in shaping the profession of the DCE has been the process of helping parishes and the ranks of clergy to truly understand what it is that a DCE does and can do to enhance the educational life of a congregation. In the early days of the ministry, the role and function of the DCE was that of a generalist helping the pastor in any and all areas of ministry within the congregation. While the intent of the position was to focus primarily on the educational efforts for the church, DCEs often found themselves assuming many roles, including, at times, preaching. This often has brought about confusion in the role of the DCE and has distorted the identity of the DCE position and its relationship to the pastoral office.

Over the years, members of the profession have had much discussion and study in the formation of a formal definition that would clearly identify the position and function of the director of Christian education. A number of efforts to define the DCE can be found in the literature. In 1981, a formal definition was published by The Board for Parish Services of the LCMS (Griffin, 1981):

A director of Christian education is a professionally trained educator called by a congregation to plan, organize, coordinate, administer and promote the congregation's ministry of Christian education. As a member of the congregation's team of called ministers, the director works in close cooperation with the pastor particularly in the congregation's educational ministry. The work of the director of Christian education is in the ministry of God's people to build one another in the Christian faith and life. (Cf., Eph. 4:7-16). (Griffin, 1981, p.2).

While this definition was utilized by the program directors as a discussion piece in preparing DCE students, Keyne (1995) points out that it was not widely accepted as an official definition. "Only two of those interviewed in her research used this as the 'official' definition of DCE" (p. 186). A group comprised of the current and former program directors, synodical leadership and national DCE leadership (DCE Summit) met in 1995 to revise the previous definition so that it would better reflect the current understanding of DCE ministry.

Drawing from feedback gleaned from districts and field DCEs, along with research done by the DCE program directors, the group revised the definition in 1999 and included a mission statement and important values for DCEs. The definition reads: "A Director of Christian Education is a synodically certified, called and commissioned lifespan educational leader prepared for team ministry in a congregational setting" (LEA, 2000 p. 1). The mission statement is: "Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Director of Christian Education plans, administers, and assesses ministry that nurtures and equips people as the body of Christ for

spiritual maturity, service, and witness in home, job, congregation, community and the world" (p. 1). Important values for DCEs are: "Exhibit Christian character; Display a spiritually maturing faith; Relate well with people of all ages; Express a passion for teaching and learning; Possess a servant heart; Manage personal and professional life effectively; Seek to work in team relationships; Strive for excellence; Operate in a self-directed manner" (p.1).

This definition stands as the official definition of the DCE and is used in all formal publications and training institutions of the church. While the DCE still may find that one's work in a team ministry involves helping in other roles that are assumed by the pastor or other commissioned workers, the DCE finds identity and purpose in the educational roles of the church. DCEs are trained to facilitate the educational agencies of the church, and when utilized in this focused capacity, they can best serve the church and the profession.

Our Synod is blessed with six training schools that prepare quality folks for the ministry of serving as directors of Christian education. There are currently more than 300 students preparing to serve our church body as DCEs. The preparation of these students is strong, firmly grounded in Lutheran theology and sound educational methodology that utilizes current approaches in meeting the needs of congregations to effectively communicate the Gospel.

The profession has come a long way in fifty plus years and is more ready than ever to face the challenges of our culture. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few..." (Luke 10:2) There is clearly a need for quality Christian education in our congregations, and the DCE profession is prepared to meet these needs.



I challenge you, the reader, to be active in making a difference for the kingdom by being an advocate for Christian education, even if only by raising the question, "What are we doing in our local parish to enhance Christian education in our congregation?" Be active in evaluating the educational needs of your parish and ask: "Are adults active in Bible study and educational activities? Is your children's ministry preparing biblically literate young people? Are the youth of your congregation actively involved in the Word? Is the congregation providing training for parents to be partners in the faith formation of their children?"

Don't be afraid to challenge the youth in your congregation to consider a career in being a DCE. If you see the values and characteristics mentioned earlier in a youth, ask him or her to see if this might be an option in serving our Lord and Savior. Consider the service of a DCE as your congregation considers future staffing.

Directors of Christian education have found their niche! Christian education is a gift of a life. Eternal life! *Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* (Psalm 119:105)

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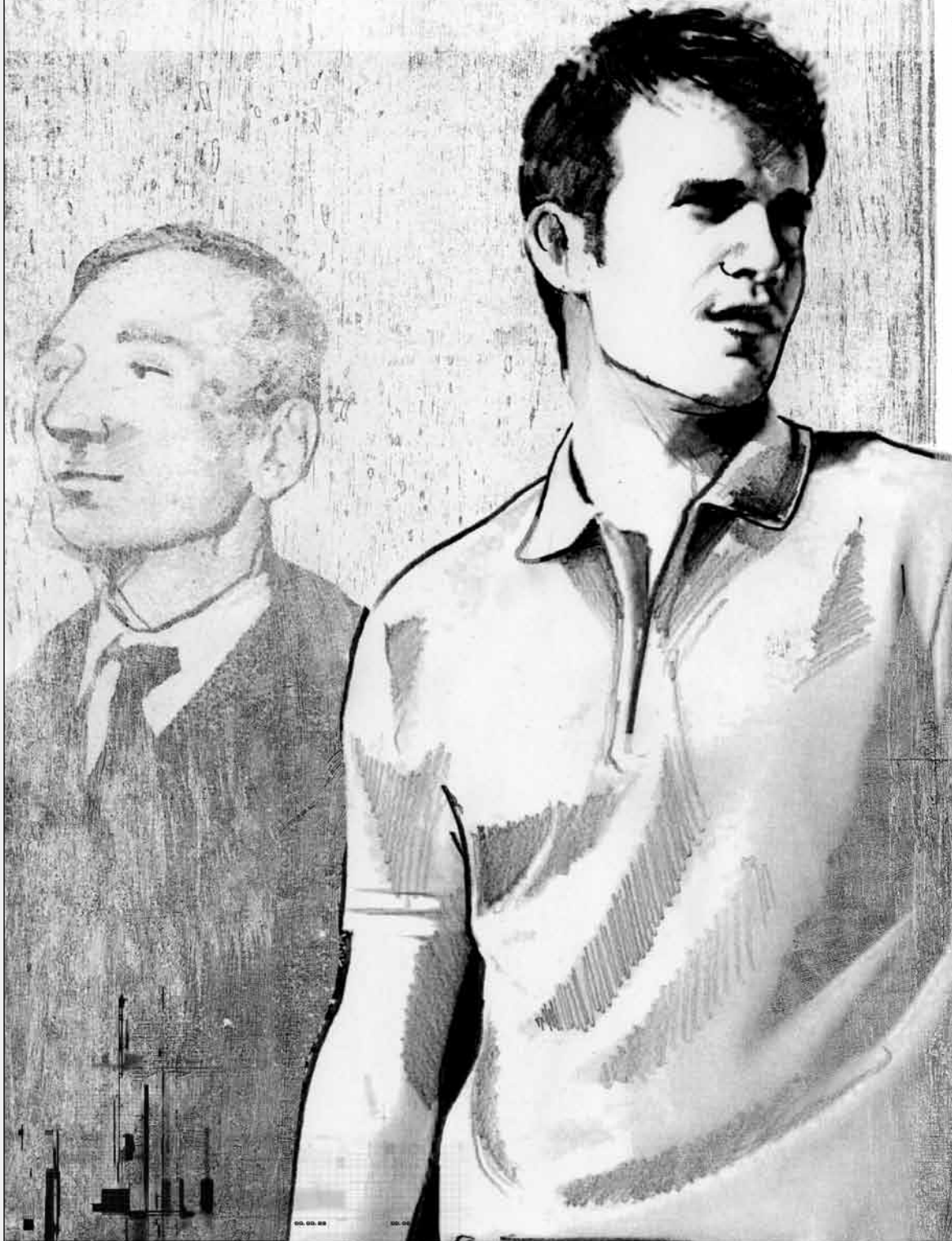
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DR. LEROY WILKE

## **From Yesterday to Today: A Historical Perspective of DCE Ministry Contributions to the Church's Mission**





Anniversaries are universal; they mark important events or milestones in most cultures around the world. Here in American culture, we often observe anniversaries based on years as they relate to high school and college graduation, an engagement, years of marriage, years of service in the work force, and on it goes. In some cases, reunion events are held to pay tribute to anniversaries marking a significant number of years. While the same can be said in terms of recognizing significant anniversaries acknowledging accumulated years of service for either a professional worker in the church or even an institution, it is not often we pause to recognize the anniversary of an office of professional ministry in the church. But, we do so in 2009 as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the office of Director of Christian Education (DCE) in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS).

Space does not allow for a complete review of the history of the DCE profession. (An article is cited at the conclusion of this article for reference.) Instead, this article seeks to highlight significant contributions of DCE ministry to the larger mission of the church. Reflections and observations have been gathered from a number of long-time serving DCEs and from Rev. Dr. Dale Griffin. In his 25 years of service with the former LCMS Board for Parish Education (BPE), Dale served as advisor to the DCE department of the Lutheran Education Association (TEAM, now DCenet) and edited the DCE Bulletin. He has been a significant advocate and champion in shaping DCE ministry.

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We can trace the birthing of the DCE office in the LCMS to 1912 when a congregation in the English District, St. Mark in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, called teacher A. W. Kowert to become their "teacher, organist and choir director." The 1935 and 1938 Synod conventions resolved to study the matter of the office of a Christian education director. In 1938 the LCMS convention accepted and defined the office of "director of religious education." Prior to 1940, six congregations called a teacher to function as a DCE with music as a primary responsibility in addition to supervising the education agencies. Five of the six congregations previously had a day school.

In 1956, Valparaiso University instituted the Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP) which would eventually provide the Synod with such outstanding DCEs as Rich Bimler, Bill Karpenko and Rich Soeken. It was at the 1959 Synod convention that action resulted in the rapid development of the DCE office. A resolve of an overture which was adopted stated: "That congregations be encouraged to analyze their parish education program and, where needed, to establish the office of 'director of Christian education' in order to provide additional leadership for the educational program of the congregation" (*Reports and Memorials*, p 283; *Proceedings*, p. 224). Dr. Griffin joined the BPE staff in 1961, and by this time considerable attention was being given to promoting the office of DCE. Between the YLTP program and renewed efforts toward DCE development within the official synodical structure, DCE training and shaping the professional office began in earnest.

Another significant year is 1983. Prior to that year DCEs were listed in The Lutheran Annual, but not rostered. Only those DCEs eligible for classroom teaching in a Lutheran school had official recognition. In response to an overture, the 1983 convention resolved that "the word 'teacher' in the Constitution of the Synod be interpreted to include directors of Christian education who have been trained and certified by the Synod; that such directors of Christian education

be eligible to apply for membership in the Synod; and that all noncertified directors of Christian education be encouraged to seek the certification of the Synod.”

With this resolution, the office of DCE attained full maturity as an officially recognized ministry of the Synod in its own right by inclusion on the official roster of the Synod. Through the efforts of many people, the DCE became recognized as a commissioned minister along with classroom teachers. Associated with this effort were college DCE professors who helped to characterize the office of DCE more definitively. Through these efforts, the office of DCE became defined, with a colloquy route for certification adding to the recognition of this ministry.

Numerous contributions to the mission of the church have been made throughout the past fifty years. Here are some contributions noted by DCEs serving throughout the Synod. While duplications might occur, the heart and spirit of the impact of this multi-generational ministry shine through the various responses.

### **Significant Contributions of DCE Ministry**

- Expansion of vision and focus on mission. Examples include new and innovative programs for children’s and youth ministry, reaching out to the unchurched, equipping congregation leaders to see a greater vision of what the church is about, and developing servant leaders.
- The development of local, district, and national youth gatherings along with servant events. These gatherings and servant events have impacted several generations in terms of hands-on missional activity by the baptized people of God.
- New opportunities for congregational growth. That well-prepared and entrepreneurial DCEs can impact the growth of a congregation is seen, for example, in congregations who have called a DCE when they believed they were on the edge of growth.



- Entrepreneurial trend settings in the areas of parish education, curriculum development, leadership development, youth ministry, and other facets of the church's mission.
- A focus on outreach. DCE ministry at its best does not merely serve the existing flock, but broadens the focus as the mission of Jesus.
- A team focus on discipleship. In effective teams, everyone is focused on discipleship from seeker to new believer to being part of a ministry team.
- Service and leadership in various executive staff positions at the district, synodical and other Lutheran agency staff levels. Many DCEs have moved from the parish into roles such as district education executives, mission and ministry facilitators, LCMS president's office, youth ministry, district and congregational services, mission services, outdoors ministry, Concordia campuses, Concordia Publishing House, Lutheran Hour Ministries, Wheat Ridge, international missions, chaplaincy, and institutional settings.
- Service and leadership at the district and higher education levels and other Lutheran agencies as members of boards of directors and boards of regents.
- KINDLE, (The Karpenko Institute for Nurturing and Developing Leadership Excellence) whose mission is to enhance the Church by fostering and multiplying servant leaders, focuses on equipping experienced DCEs in the formation of congregational servant leaders.
- Injecting creativity, energy, and leadership into the total ministry of a congregation. A variety of new ministry activities can be pursued when more than one called worker leads a congregation.
- Increased awareness of, sensitivity to, and actualization of the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 4:11-13), with DCEs increasingly equipping laity for the work of ministry.
- An increased focus on sound educational theory of a developmental nature, especially since developmental perspectives are increasingly being utilized in the parish.



- Increased expertise in the area of children's ministry, helping it to grow outside and beyond a school arena.
- The advice and counsel given by education leaders and pioneer DCEs to new DCEs, sharing of wisdom "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."

### **Examples of the Impact of DCE Ministry in Congregations, Districts and Synod**

- Fluidity of role. Most early DCEs were focused on youth ministry and parish education, while some with music abilities were asked to serve in their congregational music ministry programs. Some DCEs shifted to outreach and human care, while others served as camp directors, congregational volunteer coordinators, and even as parish administrators. The fluid role of a DCE became a great blessing for multiple ministries.
- Strengthening of programs. Examples include new and energized educational programs in the areas of children's ministry (for example, Sunday school and VBS programs), expansion of youth ministry beyond a high school youth group by involving middle and upper elementary grades, and the development of strong adult education through regular Bible studies and small group experiences.
- Servant events, from local to national to an international level for both youth and adults.



- Creative ways to reach children and families, such as through children's messages in worship, ministry to the Christian home, Lent and Easter programs, and expanding the role of parents in confirmation.
- A focus on mission. Missional DCEs have had great impact in starting new churches.
- Expansion of vision for Christian education. DCEs have taken the lead in establishing Christian education as a "womb to tomb" journey.
- Emphasizing that children and youth are part of the church today, not just the church of the future.
- Support of children, youth, and their families as they grow in their faith journey as disciples of Jesus Christ who emulate their love for the Lord in their relationships with God and others. One result is the development of ministries across the life span.
- Stronger connections of people's gifts and ministries. Lay leadership formation, teacher development, new and expanded ministries, a systemic approach to educational, youth, and other ministries, and small group development are examples of such connections.
- Providing/leading a process of strategic planning for congregations, districts, and synodical agencies.
- Recruitment of church workers and an increasing number of qualified and trained lay workers.

### **How the Presence of DCEs Serves to Expand Team Ministries in Congregations**

- Creating a new culture. As lifespan Christian educators, DCEs multiply the ministry of parish pastors and lay leaders by working collaboratively with various groups by bringing an educator's perspective to these tasks and processes. This fosters a culture of shared gifts, mutual edification, and conflict resolution that is unique in the church.

- New models of team ministry. An increased number of congregations have teams consisting of multiple DCEs who serve with one senior pastor.
- Expanding outreach. Examples include the training of congregation lay people to serve as youth leaders and leaders for cross-cultural mission trips, organizing service in a local prison, coordinating Stephen Ministry, and teaching classes in the Lutheran elementary school.
- A new focus on strengthening the team by placing more emphasis on working together for the greater good of the Kingdom through regular staff meetings, position descriptions that identify boundaries and accountability, setting common goals, and developing strategies for ministry.
- Fostering a culture of trust. Effective multiple staffs have enabled laity to navigate ministry with greater confidence when team members experience a climate of trust and are encouraged to openly express ideas, opinions, discouragement, and disagreements. Multiple staffs who spend significant time together in prayer and study of God's Word are energized to engage in the practice of open and honest communication.
- An emphasis on support. DCEs have been equipped to serve in a multiple staff, with most having interests in various ministries. In a multiple staff, team members acknowledge their different areas of expertise and interests while affirming one another in those gift areas. Such support is reflected in ministry programs and in the service of volunteers.





- A focus on leadership with a servant heart. As a team works together, respects, and encourages one another (publicly and privately), they model a servant leader heart for Christ and others, helping to shape how the congregation can function as a healthy family system.

### **Examples of the Contributions of DCES to Children's, Youth, Adult, and Family Ministries**

- Broader perspectives on what a congregational approach to discipleship should be for professional staff and congregation members fostered through small groups, retreats, servant events, prayer ministries, and online social networking.
- Creative ways to reach children and youth, such as children's messages, seeing youth ministry in both relational and programmatic ways, and seeking to walk with young people during their adolescent journey.
- Reshaping of youth ministry in cultural contexts through a more in-depth focus and breadth in planning and implementation based on sound theoretical and theological foundations, the use of quality resources, and well-designed events,
- An expansion of focus. As DCE ministry has matured over the years, many have moved from a focus on youth to a focus on adults and families which have led to the creation of dynamic adult and family education, service, and social services, including ministry among seniors.
- Innovative methods of teaching and the development of curriculum for all age levels.
- Proactive responses to needs, such as equipping and training leaders in life-span ministries in response to the decline and disintegration of the family.
- New involvement for children, youth, adults and families. Some have memories of growing up when congregational life

meant worship on Sunday (with the choir singing) and classes in a Lutheran school for children K-8 during the week. There was no Sunday school for children, youth or adults, no VBS; no mission trips/servant events/service projects (except to send mission offerings). There were no opportunities to be a part of the worship service through drama, dance, or song, and family education experiences did not exist except for watching one's parents or grandparents. Such gaps in congregational ministries now have been filled through ministries that edify members of all generations.

### **During the Next Ten Years, Which Opportunities For Ministry Can be Seized by DCE Ministry?**

- A growing number of DCEs will serve larger parishes and other institutions as specialists in settings where leaders have identified critical targets for growth, such as junior high ministry, spiritual directors in institutional chaplaincy settings, and Christian education consultants on a national scale. A larger number of medium/smaller size congregations will engage a generalist DCE.
- Depending on economic conditions, DCEs could have important roles in serving congregations that are no longer able to call multiple pastors.
- DCEs will continue to take leadership roles in expanding mission/servant events and activities locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally (long and short term) as "organizers" of such events.
- To develop a greater mission awareness, DCEs will take on specialty roles with district and national offices, including work with RSOs, that focus on exploring mission opportunities, providing support, and helping with personnel development.
- DCEs will explore new vehicles for ministry, such as utilizing the technological tools that are available and finding alternatives to district and national youth gatherings.
- Stretching the thinking of the Church to be missional in accord with biblical teachings and the Lutheran Confessions can be another focus. Pastor and DCE teams will be called upon to cultivate imagination in seeing the possibilities of what the Spirit wants to do with and among the people they are called to lead, including equipping others for mission and ministry, domestically and globally.
- Understanding and developing the capacity to innovate a new culture within congregations that will lead to thinking with a missional focus.
- Expanding ministry with children and their families who are in need of the love of God and solid instruction in living with and for Christ in a turbulent culture. Possibilities include sports ministries for children, marriage preparation and enrichment, mentoring blended families, parenting classes, curriculum series for new Christians, and a greater use of online instruction.
- An increasing sensitivity to changing circumstances in church and society and preparing how to make the most of the opportunities.





- Seizing the "age wave" of seniors who are a rapidly expanding mission field.
- Focusing individuals on mission and ministry opportunities that exist rather than being pulled away by external forces. DCEs will continue to assist individuals to look for ways to be involved in significant hands-on ministry opportunities that make a difference.

As one can see, the ministry of the DCE has grown and has made significant contributions to the mission and ministry of the church. Through it all, God has richly blessed the Concordia University DCE training programs, their directors and those who helped to shape this professional ministry, congregations and agencies of the church who have engaged DCEs, and the 630 certified DCEs who are now serving Christ and His church. As we prepare for an unpredictable and changing future, uncertain of what it may hold, the next fifty years will be filled with numerous challenges and exciting opportunities. While this anniversary is a special chapter in the history of the DCE ministry, more will be written.

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DAVID WEIDNER

## Challenges Facing DCE Ministry



The word “challenge” is a fitting description for the ministry of Directors of Christian Education during the first fifty years of its existence within The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. From its earliest struggles to establish a ministry identity and role beyond that of “pastor” or “teacher” to its current challenge to present itself as a viable long-term career for those who feel called to serve as Directors of Christian Education, this ministry has experienced numerous challenges along the way. These challenges have shaped and refined it into a vital member of the group of recognized professional positions within the church that seek to equip the saints for greater service to the Lord.

### **Beginnings of DCE Ministry**

DCE ministry had a somewhat haphazard birth in the waning days of the tremendously successful Walther League movement which had been the jewel of the LCMS effort to minister to youth since the latter part of the 19th Century. Walther League did two things with great success. First, it trained young men and young women in the rules of engagement for participation in the structural organizations of the church; and second, it prepared them for the church leadership roles they would assume as they matured into adulthood. The rubrics of organizational activity, that is, the election of officers, the function of working committees, and the decisive planning strategies for developing programs and activities were skills that were well honed among those who participated in this youth organization. The adult leaders for the Walther League were mainly older adults who had already gone through the indoctrination of the organization and served as chaperones

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for activities planned by the younger participants. Consequently, there wasn’t a perceived need for professional leaders similar to what DCEs would provide in later years.

As the Walther League movement came to a grinding halt in the late 1960s, a new day of youth ministry was born—the youth group. This new phenomenon was not so different from its predecessor; it just no longer bore that awkward name and long-term organizational identity. Larger congregations began to realize that to keep their teenagers engaged in the life of the congregation there needed to be a focused programmatic effort, preferably led by someone who could be held accountable, such as a professional youth ministry leader. For many years teachers from Lutheran day schools had often served in this capacity, and they were paid an extra stipend for this added responsibility. In some cases youth ministry was assigned to a vicar from the seminary, and he would do his best to keep the youth involved during his one-year stint in the congregation as a pastoral intern. Often the primary skill qualifying him to serve in this capacity was his own youthfulness.

The distraction of the emerging drug culture, the discontent with the war in Vietnam, and the general “loosening” of social mores were just a few of the factors that made the teenagers of the late 1960s and early 1970s just a bit frightening to the local congregational leadership. If a professional leader could be trained to keep the youth “safe” and “connected” to the congregation, and at the same time bring new enthusiasm and organization to the parish institutions of Sunday school, adult education and Vacation Bible School, there would certainly be hope for the future.

The earliest candidates for serving in this new role, which was not quite yet defined as Director of Christian Education, were sometimes day school principals or other mature teachers, most of whom were male and possessed effective relational skills. Their training had not been specific to the role, but the feeling was that the classroom



management skills they possessed, their knowledge of Scripture and the doctrines of the church and grasp of theories of Christian education best equipped them for this new role as a Director of Christian Education and Youth Ministry. Soon, a title was coined (DCE), and it became apparent that the Concordia colleges could begin to train individuals to serve in this new role which was still being defined by those pioneers of ministry who were engaged in it daily.

This somewhat "evolutionary" beginning of DCE ministry laid a fertile groundwork for the early challenges of the ministry, specifically, definition and identity. Who were these DCEs that were popping up in congregations across the Synod, and what were they to do? They were not teachers necessarily, but the core of their training was in Christian education. Youth ministry and sometimes music ministry quickly became primary specialties that separated them from the role of classroom teachers. For those with more maturity and experience in ministry, there was sometimes confusion with the pastoral role. They would be called upon to assist the pastor in a variety of functions, such as assisting in worship leadership and filling in on the shut-in visitation schedule. Their days were not spent in a classroom like a teacher, and they didn't spend significant hours in their offices preparing a weekly sermon like the pastor. What exactly did they do? Their office hours were sporadic and unpredictable. They spent extensive time with junior high and senior high school students engaged in relational activities and sports. They went to the after-school sporting events that involved their students, led weekend retreats, met with the Board of Christian Education to strategize for Sunday school and adult Bible classes, took youth on trips to the ski slopes or the beach, reviewed curriculum choices, became involved in district youth ministry committees, and engaged in a host of other activities that filled their calendars.



## Identity and Role

In the early days of DCE ministry the number one question was, "What is a DCE?" followed closely by, "What does he/she do all day?" Mark Borcharding (Carmel Lutheran Church, Carmel, Indiana), a seasoned DCE, shared the following observations concerning challenges in the first two decades of DCE ministry. "In my first decade (30 years ago), the challenges were helping people understand what a DCE is and expanding the role beyond 'Youth Director.' In my second decade the issue was defining and expanding my role as a 'minister' in the church." This sentiment is likely to be echoed by countless DCEs who were a part of those early days of DCE ministry.

Identity and successful job performance are highly connected to the perceptions of the people in the pew. To the average parishioner the hallmarks of job performance that were so well established for pastors and teachers were not present for the DCE. If the pastor baptized, married, buried, delivered a reasonably good sermon, etc., most members were confident that he was doing his job. If a teacher was in the classroom five days a week during school hours teaching his or her students the curriculum of the grade, and was involved in church activities, then there would be no question about job performance. The DCE, however, was a different commodity. Office hours were varied, and the only reliable marks of job performance seemed to be the quantity of youth that were regularly involved in the youth group and its calendar of endless activities. Measuring how well he or she related to the students to whom he or she ministered or developing a planned strategy for life-long Christian education opportunities in the parish were benchmarks of success that were far from the mind of the members and their leaders in those first two decades of DCE ministry's existence.

Outside the congregation the challenges of identity and role were even more pronounced. Should the DCE participate with the pastors in their monthly circuit meetings, or should they gather occasionally at educators' conferences with the teachers who served in

the day schools of the district congregations? For many DCEs forging into those already established professional support groups was daunting. Where did the DCEs seek ongoing professional development and support, and what did that look like? Some DCEs chose to isolate themselves and seek support among other youth workers from non-Lutheran churches in their communities. Others helped shape district-wide conference groups for DCEs and monthly cluster meetings where the issues they faced in ministry could be discussed with confidentiality and understanding.

At the same time, youth ministry was changing across American Protestantism. The youth group was at the core of successful practice, and para-church organizations like Youth Specialties, Young Life, and Campus Crusade for Christ were designing and influencing the focus of youth ministry. Within the LCMS the fathers of post-Walther League youth ministry (Ben Eggers, Leo Symmank, Eldor Kaiser, Dean Dammann, and Rich Bimler) were responding to the times by creating resources for Bible study, group activities, and folk worship. They traveled around the country leading seminars and workshops on youth ministry. In the informal after-hours of these conferences they began to shape, influence, and create an identity and a sense of camaraderie among those who were serving as DCEs.

DCEs sought each other out for support, encouragement and the shaping of a sense of solidarity that they could not find in gatherings of other church professionals. Often these moments of coming together as DCEs would be marked by long discussions of the role of the DCE, misunderstanding by coworkers, and the incessant cry of "How can I get my pastor to be in team ministry with me?" No one had trod this ground before, so there were no directional signs along the way to lead these young church professionals forward.

The early pioneers of the ministry who served as directors of the DCE training programs at the Concordia colleges that offered this training were creating it as they

moved forward. Dr. William Karpenko, Dr. Lyle Kurth, and Dr. LeRoy Wilke were courageous innovators who tested the patience of college deans and department chairs as they gave birth to these new programs. Dr. Wilke shares his reflection on those early days:

In the early development of DCE training, congregations that were experiencing numerical growth in the area of children, youth and young adults were expressing a strong need for individuals to work in the areas of youth ministry, part-time Christian education agencies, such as the Sunday school, VBS, and after-school programs, and mobilization of volunteers. By and large, the early (1960s and 70s) DCE training curriculum and field work experiences reflected this need.

DCE ministry had been created in response to a critical need that had developed because of the increasing numbers of children and youth among the congregations of the LCMS, but exactly what was it and how would it continue to grow and evolve in its effort of serving the Christian educational needs of the congregations were questions. Wilke goes on to say,

Professional identity and formation were centered on shaping the DCE as a teacher of the faith for all age levels—child through adult. A DCE would be the 'educator' in the congregation who equipped and nurtured individuals in their faith walk to serve others. As a member of the congregation's professional staff, the DCE was to teach, recruit, and equip others (volunteers) to serve in leadership roles, especially the congregation's ministry of Christian education.

Time moved on and so did DCE ministry. With each passing year, the profession became better established as more and more congregations called DCEs and reaped the many benefits of their leadership and service. Significant changes took place in how the Synod recognized and certified those who

chose to serve in this role. Roster status for the earliest DCEs was achieved with dual certification as a teacher and DCE. The LCMS established the office of DCE by convention resolution in 1959, but it wasn't until 1983 when DCEs were rostered as "Commissioned Ministers of Religion" along with teachers, deaconesses, and lay ministers that the sense of a clearly authorized role in the Church was realized.

## Current Challenges

In these last ten years many of the same challenges continue to exist, especially among churches that have never experienced a DCE before. The question still comes to the surface, "What is a DCE and what can he or she do for our congregation?" It is, once again, a matter of educating the congregations about this vital role.

The DCE training programs at the six Concordia universities which offer these programs have done a great deal to advance DCE ministry. The internship programs have afforded many congregations the opportunity to experience DCE ministry, albeit through the efforts and learning experience of a student intern. The cost of bringing on an intern is considerably less than calling a DCE from the field, so for many congregations this becomes a stepping stone to bringing on a full-time DCE after the internship year. The program directors have worked diligently to prepare their students for these experiences and have provided appropriate supervision of the students along with support systems for the congregations as they host the student intern for a year. Five of the six programs enable the DCE intern to consider a placement call to the congregation in which he or she interned following the completion of his or her internship. Dr. Mark Blanke, current Director of the DCE Program at Concordia University, Nebraska, notes, "About 60 percent of our interns elect to receive a placement call from the congregation where they served their internship."

Some of the other challenges that are being faced in these latest years of DCE ministry include a discussion of the long-





term viability of the profession. Can an individual continue to be effective as a parish DCE as he or she ages? This concern comes out of the reality that most DCEs are responsible for Youth Ministry in their positions, and there is a common misconception that at some point they are no longer able to effectively relate to middle school and high school students or that they even want to relate because of the rigors of the various activities involved in Youth Ministry. This view may be more prominent in situations where the DCE's ministry has been more focused on "doing" the ministry rather than "directing" the ministry. In those congregations where the DCE has responded to the changing needs of the congregation, sought out ongoing professional development in order to be better equipped to meet those needs, and established himself or herself as a professionally competent Christian educator, this concern has not been so great. Training and empowering other congregational members to "do" the ministry is the ultimate goal of an effective DCE.

Another phenomenon impacting the question of longevity is the movement of individuals out of congregationally-based DCE ministry. According to 2008 statistics reported in the *DCE Directory*, of the 1,700-plus individuals that have been certified as DCEs, only 630 remain serving as DCEs in a congregation (*Concordia University System*, 2008, p. 2). There is, of course, natural attrition by retirement and death, but a greater number of DCEs have moved on from the ministry for a variety of reasons. Some have entered the halls of higher education to serve, others have moved on to district and national church office positions, some male DCEs have gone on to seminary to become pastors, a significant number of female DCEs have withdrawn from service to raise a family, and a number have left the ministry entirely to pursue other professions. The DCE Career Path Study that is currently being conducted is an excellent resource for reviewing these trends in the longevity and career movement of DCEs. Dr. Bill Karpenko, lead researcher in the study, shares the following observations:

Among the 800 DCEs who responded to the first phase of the DCE Career Path Project, diversity of career patterns and types was wonderfully evident. Even so, three major findings emerged: 1) 97 percent of these certified DCEs entered some form of full-time church work; 2) congregational ministry was a life-long career for a growing numbers of DCEs; and 3) when individuals left congregational ministry as a DCE it was primarily because they felt pulled (called) to another form of service, whether within or outside the church, rather than pushed out of their ministry.

In this current economic downturn a major challenge facing numerous DCEs is job security. The concept of having a Call to a congregation is no longer a guarantee of employment for the life of the Call. As congregational members face severe financial challenges in their personal lives, the impact is felt in dynamic ways in the congregational budget as members decrease or stop giving their tithes. When money is tight congregational leaders begin to seek out ways to cut costs. In some cases, the solution that is often suggested is to reduce staff.

In many instances the DCE position is one of the first positions to be eliminated in an effort to trim costs and meet the budget. The DCE is dismissed on the grounds that the congregation can no longer afford to fund his or her position. This action is within the rights of the congregation, although some would argue that it severely violates the integrity of the Call. Be that as it may, congregations are making these decisions on a regular basis and are doing it with little outside guidance or direction. The district presidents and their staff members are the most likely source of help and guidance both for the congregation and for the worker in dealing with these situations. Some helpful resources can be made available to congregations that address these issues, including resources for developing effective position descriptions, practices for regular performance review and clarification



of expectations, commitment to regular communication and utilization of resources, guidelines for appropriate severance packages, encouragement for personal and professional counseling, and ongoing support for the worker in the process of seeking another Call or work situation. This challenge has always been present in DCE ministry. However, it seems more pronounced in recent times with the very critical economic challenges being faced worldwide.

When we look to the DCE practicing within the congregation we see more practical challenges of everyday ministry. Master DCE for 2009, Jill Hasstedt (Zion Lutheran Church and School, Belleville, Illinois) shared a list of "nuts and bolts" challenges that she sees as unique to the current times in which she serves as a parish DCE. She points to the growing impact of technology on the lives of families and teens, and learning to use it effectively as a church and as a Christian for Jesus' sake as an important challenge in today's DCE ministry. She notes key areas of focus, including the development and maintenance of an effective website, the explosive use of Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter among the students with whom she ministers, the instant communication connection with cell phones and texting, and

the abuse of these technologies (addiction to gaming, pornography, bullying, sexting, etc.).

Beyond the cyberspace challenges, Jill raises concerns for working within new congregational governance structures, and trying to help members become disciples of Christ who are focused on reaching out to their communities with the Gospel rather than just taking care of the Body of Christ within the walls of the church building. These challenges are not necessarily unique to DCE ministry, and for that reason they may provide a bridge to working more effectively in team ministry with other church professionals who are facing similar challenges.

Team ministry has been a consistent challenge for DCEs throughout the history of their ministry. DCEs are trained and oriented toward working with others in an effective team. They clearly recognize the ecclesiastical authority of the pastoral office and see their role as supporting and enhancing the total ministry as led by the pastor. They seek to be in a supportive and collegial relationship with the pastor and the others on staff through shared Bible study, prayer and collaboration in their ministry focus and plan. When they are faced with a lack of commitment to team ministry or the lack of skills to make it happen, there are often great frustration and discontent which may lead to the DCE moving on to seek a stronger team ministry opportunity elsewhere. Some DCEs manage to adjust their expectations, their work patterns and how they respond to the work style of their team partners much like a husband and wife adjust to each other within marriage. In these situations ministry can become a delightful tapestry of unique gifts and talents being woven together for ministry that God blesses and uses for the building up of His people.

### **Responding to Changing Needs**

DCE ministry, despite its fifty-year history, continues to be on the leading edge of ministry within the church. The DCE brings to the congregational setting a unique

experience in training and preparation for ministry that equips him or her to be responsive to the changing needs of the members and those that the members would reach out to in the community. This flexibility has served DCE ministry well in its brief history by equipping the DCE to respond quickly to new ideas, shifts in the culture, and changing needs of the people he or she serves. At the same time, the DCE's grounding in Scripture, theology, doctrine and Christian education theory and practice allows him or her to maintain the appropriate focus on sharing the Gospel so that more and more people will come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus.

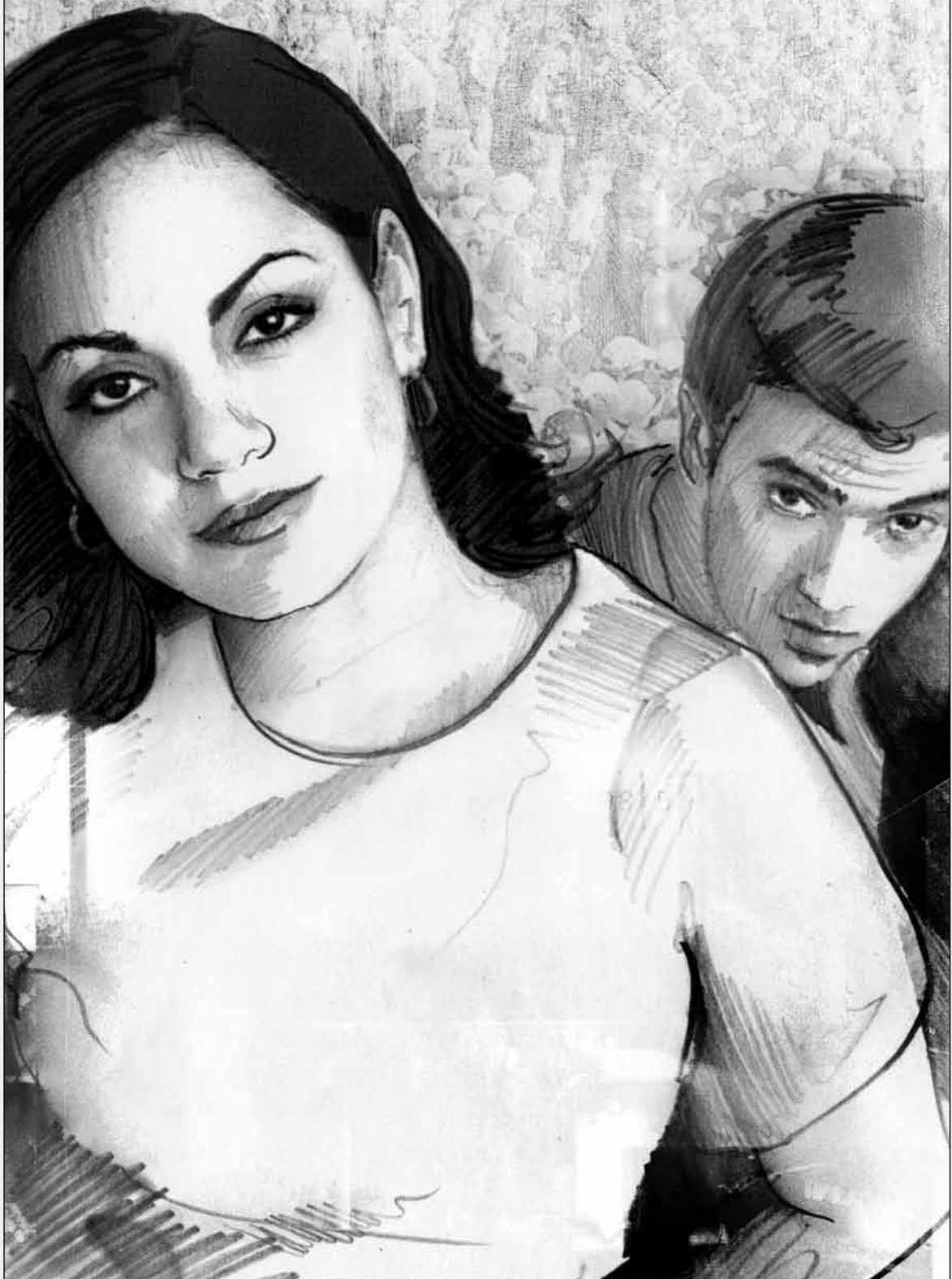
In my role as a district education executive, I have the privilege to work with and support a group of approximately fifty men and women who serve as DCEs or function like DCEs in the parish. From the "greenest" DCE intern to the most "seasoned" veteran, I never cease to be amazed at the quality of service, the commitment to ministry, and the persevering faith that these servant leaders exhibit each and every day. At a recent district high school youth gathering, I watched a young female DCE intern manage the mass events for over 400 youth with a level of maturity and professionalism far beyond her years and experience. Working with amazing confidence and insight into how to create an experience that would be relevant to the high school students in the audience, she tapped the talents of the volunteers working with her and utilized the technical resources available to her to produce a series of events that were truly outstanding as they sought to connect students with God's love and power in their lives.

The future is bright for DCEs. They are staged and ready for the coming waves of ministry in the church, and they are in strategic positions to influence others, both professional and lay leaders, in their view and practice of ministry. Changes in DCE ministry will continue to occur along with new challenges, but these have been foundational for this unique and dynamic role in the Body of Christ!



MARK BLANKE

## DCE Ministry: A Catalyst for Advancing the Church's Mission



"Catalyst" is defined as "somebody or something that makes change happen or brings about an event." What is it, then, about a fifty-year-old profession in our church that can suddenly effect change, and what is the event that we are seeking to bring about?

In 1959, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) established the position of Director of Christian Education (DCE). The resolution passed by convention reads as follows:

Whereas, The development of an organized and systematic program of Christian education is a necessity in every congregation; and

Whereas, Many congregations would benefit from the services of a director of Christian education who would assist the pastor in providing the professional leadership for the Sunday school, Saturday classes, and other educational activities of the congregation; therefore be it

Resolved, That congregations be encouraged to analyze their parish education program and, where needed, to establish the office of 'director of Christian education' in order to provide additional leadership for the educational program of the congregation. (*Proceedings*, p. 224)

In 1962, the Synod designated that two teacher preparatory colleges develop and deliver DCE preparation programs, further aligning the role of the DCE with that of Christian educator.

In 2008, there were 630 certified DCEs serving congregations in the LCMS, or about one DCE for every ten congregations in the Synod. Another 330 individuals who

have been certified as DCEs are now serving in other LCMS ministries, such as classroom teachers, pastors, professors, and district executives.

These individuals have been a gift to God's church, but one would be hard-pressed to identify how parish education in the church has been changed significantly by the influence of DCEs in our church body. In fact, a recent study showed that 75 percent of LCMS pastors felt that parish education effectiveness had either declined or stayed the same in the past fifteen years. (IRE, 2007)

If DCEs are responsible for providing "additional leadership for the educational program of the congregation," and yet there is the sense that educational effectiveness is declining despite the fact that capable DCEs exist in the LCMS, what is the hope of DCEs serving as catalysts for any significant change? Is it possible that we have been aiming our efforts towards an agenda that hasn't yielded the results of which we are capable? What might be the needs that exist now in the LCMS that are DCE-specific and which, if accomplished more effectively, would benefit the church achieving its mission more fully?

Most simply stated, the mission of the church is aligned with the Great Commission of our Lord, to make disciples of all nations through baptizing and teaching them to obey God's commands. As directors of Christian education, one can assume that we serve this mission by teaching others to obey God's commands, but perhaps we have been misguided in the way we have carried out this task. Specifically, there are two tasks related to our responsibilities that may have been overlooked, and which just might be the catalytic ingredient in better helping our church to achieve its mission: advocacy and goal-orientation.

### **DCEs as Advocates**

Because of the clarity that the Scriptures provide regarding the need for education in the church, many DCEs may have become complacent in their assumption that church leaders and laity would all embrace the importance of education for all members.

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Data seem to indicate, however, that instead of firmly embracing the importance of congregational religious education, many laity and leaders portray a passive and even a dismissive attitude towards religious education in the church. For example, while most research indicates that only 11 to 14 percent of our adults participate in religious educational opportunities, pastors rated the effectiveness of their congregational adult educational experiences as moderately high, especially in relation to their other educational efforts (IRE, 2007). If leaders are not holding up high standards and expectations for education in the church, DCEs must focus significant resources on elevating the perception of the importance of education in the church.

In addition to the biblical and Reformational mandates for prioritizing education in the church, DCEs must advocate that a comprehensive and well-implemented education program will benefit the church. Research clearly shows the importance of the role of religious education in developing healthy disciples and congregations. While there is significant research beyond the following resources, these three citations are based on significant research efforts which summarize much of the other related data.

1. In his books, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* and *High Expectations*, Thom Rainer's research showed that an effective Sunday educational ministry was one of the most important and consistent predictors of a congregation's "success" (identified by Rainer as growing at a consistent rate, having a high percentage of members in worship, and retaining new members at a high rate). These studies were consistent within the Southern Baptist churches which Rainer studied as well as in 500 non-Southern Baptist churches.

2. In a 1990 study of 12,000 people from six different mainline denominations, Search Institute studied aspects of congregational life that may influence the development of faith maturity within congregations. The study, *Effective Christian Education*, found that:

- a. Only two factors had a strong relationship in predicting faith maturity of youth: "family religiousness over a lifetime" and "Christian education involvement over a lifetime."
- b. There were only two factors which showed a strong correlation with the faith maturity of adults: "church involvement over one's lifetime" and "Christian education involvement over a lifetime."
- c. In assessing the role certain congregational qualities had in predicting faith growth and the development of congregational and denominational loyalty, only one characteristic within congregations showed a strong relationship: the quality of formal Christian education.

An oversimplified summary of this extensive research indicates that *an effective and intentional religious educational experience is the one congregationally controlled factor that has the greatest potential impact in the development of faith among youth and adults as well as the enhancement of congregational and denominational loyalty.*

3. As a response to the Search Institute study, the LCMS engaged some of the same researchers to conduct a study of the congregational characteristics related to the development of faith maturity within members of the LCMS. The study was called "Congregations at Crossroads" and was completed in 1995. The study was conducted among active members of the congregation, and some of the findings related to the quality of religious education in our churches were:

- a. Only 46 percent of the active adults who participated in the study indicated that "the congregation helps members apply faith to daily life."
- b. Among the regular worship attendees in the church, only 38 percent of the adults and 19 percent of the youth had an "integrated faith," that is, a faith that expressed itself in a dedication to God and a focus on service to one's fellow man.
- c. Only 22 percent of the adult respondents agreed with the statement: "The congregation has a thinking climate





that encourages questions and expects learning.”

- d. One conclusion of the study was that “Among LCMS members, little correlation exists between faith maturity and leader-centered, one-way communication in Christian education. That is to say that, in and of itself, knowledge imparted by a teacher has little impact on a person’s growth in faith. By contrast, learning processes that engage people in interaction with the leader and with each other have a significant impact on faith. In these settings, people talk about their understanding of God and help each other apply their faith to issues and concerns in their lives. **Few youth or adults report frequently experiencing this kind of interactive educational environment.**” (Pages 19-20 — emphasis added)

The same study found that educational experiences were not as much a factor in faith growth and congregational vitality as was effective education that followed specific parameters of educational methodology.

The research findings clearly point to the important role that quality Christian education plays in helping the church to carry out the Great Commission. Still, many churches (and DCEs) don’t treat educational programming with the focused dedication that it deserves.

Our first step towards serving as catalysts in the church is to continually advocate increased intentionality and effectiveness in Christian educational efforts throughout the church and not just in our home congregations. DCEs need to see themselves as the key advocates for Christian education for the church as a whole. The LCMS has over 6,100 congregations, and only about 10 percent of those churches are served by a DCE. DCEs need to see their advocate role as extending beyond their home congregation. They need to take every opportunity to make the case for enhanced efforts in religious education throughout the church. More than any other church profession, DCEs should understand the degree to which an intentional educational ministry can impact

the church's ability to fulfill God's plan. Along with this understanding comes the charge to provide leadership in promoting intentional education for the good of the church.

## Goal-Orientation

One of the central tenets of all educators is to have clear goals and objectives for educational efforts. Perhaps DCEs have been less than effective as catalysts because we have not clearly stated the goals at which we are aiming. It seems clear from the directive of the Great Commission that we should be educating towards the goal of preparing disciples. Ephesians 4:10-12 says that the public ministry of the church exists to "prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ [the church] may be built up." Second Timothy 3:16-17 states that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Our goal is clear: our educational efforts are to be aimed at preparing and equipping Christ's disciples so that they are better able to help in carrying out the work of the church.

How often, over the past fifty years of the existence of the DCE profession in our church, have DCEs failed to adequately identify this central goal? How often have we focused on delivering programs that entertained or created enthusiasm but didn't determine how well the experience aimed at building an individual so she could follow her Lord? How many of us have been content to accept the praise that we receive for delivering an appealing adult Bible class without ever considering how that class fits into a scope and sequence aimed at building capable disciples? Lack of clarity of purpose is always detrimental to achieving organizational goals, but it is especially debilitating in education.

If our goal is to be transformational, that is, raising up a devoted disciple through enhanced learning processes, we need to

ask "why now?" What is it about this time in history that might stir us to be more intentional in this area? The answer may lie in the unique historical crossroads in which we find ourselves.

Loren Mead, in his book, *The Once and Future Church*, noted a societal and ecclesiastical shift that has taken place starting about the time that DCE ministry appeared on the scene in the LCMS. Mead believes that the church had been operating within a "Christendom Paradigm" until the 1950s and 1960s. This paradigm encouraged conceptualization of the church and nation (empire) as one. Arising from the time of Constantine, this model exhibited itself in the United States through a misguided perception of the U.S. as a "Christian nation." In this paradigm, mission work happened far away in other "unchristian" nations. While we still believed that all had the task of evangelizing, the bulk of that work could be handled only by those professionals who chose to serve in the foreign mission field. In the Christendom Paradigm, the role of the average believer was to support ministry professionals, not to do it themselves. Loyalty and obedience were the primary virtues.

Mead said that we are now in the "Time Between the Paradigms" or the "Post-Christendom Paradigm" (I appreciate



that Mead doesn't say that this is the new paradigm, but only that a shift has happened, and we are no longer in the Christendom Paradigm.) Among other changes, Mead wrote that the mission field is no longer only in a far away country, accessible only to specially trained professionals. The mission field is now right outside (and even inside) the church doors. "Average" believers have the need to be prepared to give witness because they will encounter unbelievers in daily life. The goal of impacting others' lives for Christ so that they will see Him through our actions and words is the purview of every believer. Societal shifts have made it imperative that we prepare believers for this important work. Our religious educational programs need to be deliberately aimed at helping believers to interact with the increasingly non-Christian environment in which we find ourselves.

If one feels that the goal of transforming believers into disciples is too broad and all-encompassing, perhaps DCEs' goal-orientation can be narrowed further. Studies have shown that 70 percent of youth leave the church by the time they reach age 22 (Rainer). Barna has found that 80 percent of those reared in the church will be disengaged by the time they are age 29. The DCE profession in the Lutheran church made youth ministry its focus when the Baby Boomers were filling our churches as teens. Maybe we need to shift our goal today towards reaching a population that is less and less likely to see the need for church involvement.

Perhaps we should aim our goal-orientation towards the ever-growing aging population. Retirees are a larger and larger part of our congregational population and can make a unique contribution to the work of the church. Discipling doesn't end when one retires, and the needs of this important population are unique enough to require intense, focused goal setting in Christian education.

One could identify many other trends and challenges that the church will be facing in the near future. Our task is not diminishing;

it is expanding. DCEs need to be responsive to these opportunities in a way that will serve to "make change happen" in our church and world. As catalysts, the change we are seeking is the move from a passive, recipient-oriented laity to an engaged laity who see themselves as resources to be used for the work of the church in the world. Our method for making this change happen is the same one that DCEs were called to fifty years ago and the same one that Christ directed his church to be about some 2,000 years ago: making disciples through the art and science of teaching.

DCEs have a high calling that requires expertise and dedication. Expertise and dedication, when blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit, will benefit the church in ways we can't imagine. Through God's power found in learning His Word and the truth that is found in Jesus Christ, DCEs will be catalysts indeed!

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## book reviews

### **Unchristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity ... And Why It Matters.**

**David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons.**

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.

Those of us who have spent more than a few years in the church world may quickly find ourselves losing touch with the outside. This dangerous trend leaves us struggling to meet the needs of people we can't quite relate to anymore. Authors David Kinnaman, of The Barna Group, and Gabe Lyons took on a research study based on the belief that "God wants us to pay attention to outsiders because he cares about them." The result is *Unchristian*.

There are so many books out there written for those of us in the trenches of ministry. This one stands out. Rather than talking down to the reader from an expert position, *Unchristian* meets me right where I'm at, right on the front lines. I was challenged by what I read and impressed by authors who were well researched, well read, passionate, and admirably curious. It is Kinnaman's and Lyons' curiosity, concern and passionate desire to spread the Gospel that come through the pages of *Unchristian*.

"Christianity has an image problem." These simple words sum up the thrust of this book. The authors seek to define this image problem, to understand "the outsiders" who hold this negative view, and to consider solutions to change those perceptions for the sake of the Gospel. In particular the book concentrates on those in the 16-29-year-old age category, asking: "What do they think of Christianity? What do they think of the church? How do we reach out to them in effective ways?"

Kinnaman's research, in true Barna Group style, provides some painful information with which the reader must grapple. In short, Christians have a bad reputation. Some of that reputation we have earned ourselves, some has been earned for us by other Christians, some has been pasted on us by secular media, and some is simply a result of the sinful world in which we live. The authors share the research in a straightforward way and then take aim at six broad themes which were the "most common points of skepticism and objections raised by outsiders."

1. Hypocritical
2. Too focused on getting converts
3. Antihomosexual
4. Sheltered
5. Too political
6. Judgmental

The authors remind us that while we may not agree with the perceptions of outsiders, we should not ignore them. What people think about Christianity influences how they respond to us. "As you interact with your friends, the labels...are welded to what many people think about you. You do not have to like this, but it's a fact of our complex world." With this, the reader is reminded that it is not our reputations that are at stake here, but God's.

So the question is: "Should you bother reading it?" Absolutely. *Unchristian* is a book that provides quality research and facts as well as commentary that is productive—not just in forcing us to be honest about the "failures" of the Church—but in facilitating a conversation to look for answers, new directions, and opportunities. The authors detail the current perceptions and then offer a "new perception" for consideration in a well thought-out chapter-by-chapter approach.

The research is solid; the authors are earnest. The book is sprinkled with a few well-placed anecdotes which remind us that these "outsiders" are real people who had encounters with Christianity that shaped their perceptions and therefore their reactions to the Gospel. Each chapter includes a section called "Changing Perceptions" which includes insights and experiences from a wide variety of pastors, Christian leaders, authors, and speakers who are dealing day-to-day with the negative perceptions that plague Christianity. These "real life" examples of those attempting to change perceptions provide valuable encouragement and application.

*Unchristian* is a book well worth any reader's time. It is a book which contains hard facts that we need to hear to better reach out to our current culture. This is a book written not just to "the church," but also to the individual. It is written to ask us to examine our role in forming and facilitating the existing unchristian perception. It is written to challenge us to get outside the doors of our churches, our classrooms, or our offices and truly get to know those who are still on the outside. *Unchristian* challenges the reader to do all of these things because there is a God that we represent and a world that needs to meet Him.

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### **Disconnected.**

**Chap Clark and Dee Clark.**

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.

The intended audience for this book is the parent of today's postmodern adolescent. It serves as a practical, follow-up guide to the author's published research (Hurt, 2002). The Clarks have subtitled this book *Parenting Teens in a MySpace® World*. To underscore the rapidity of change in our world, when the Clarks were preparing their manuscript in late 2006, MySpace® was the most used networking site at that time. As this review is being written, MySpace® has fallen in popularity to social networking sites such as FaceBook®, BlogSpot® and Twitter®.

The Clarks combine their research findings with personal stories written in the first person, as they have raised three children through adolescence to emerging adulthood. The book is well organized in two major parts. The first deals with the fast changing world of childhood and adolescence. The second part, more pragmatic, outlines why and how parents should respond to their child in this changing culture.

The authors launch into the body of the book by describing the total call of life training which includes spiritual, psychological and social development. These are not three individual components but are the major parts of a single process. This portion of the book is informative and is good preparation for parents raising their first child. The Clarks use a writing style that is encouraging and motivating.

The authors shape their viewpoint on parenting by stating "your child isn't a problem to be solved, but a creative, talented and unique gift to be understood, embraced, and ultimately set free." The world in which the reader of this review grew up is long gone. This now is a MySpace® world that is increasingly superficial, politicized and performance-driven. Change is our kids' one constant in life.

The Clarks challenge the reader to examine their ultimate goal of parenting by answering the question, "Is how I parent providing my child with the very best chance to see and experience the Jesus who died to redeem them?" Most teens in America would agree that their parents "care" for them. That is not true when the same teens are asked if their parents "love" them.

The book introduces a new term to those who study the processes involved in adolescence. The new term, individuation, is used to define the path toward becoming a unique individual. Chapter 6 introduces the thesis of this volume. The authors assert that there has been a systemic abandonment of the young as they experience individuation, and that this phenomenon has appeared over the last several decades. Three basic interrelated tasks are taken on in this time of individuation: the discovery of identity, the acceptance of healthy autonomy, and the ability and willingness to connect to others in community.

The second part of the book introduces "The Five Tasks of Parenting." They are:

- Understanding
- Showing compassion
- Boundarying
- Charting/guiding
- Launching into adulthood

This discussion is followed by a chapter on parenting in each of four seasons: childhood, early adolescence, mid-adolescence and late adolescence. The authors assert that as the season of childhood has been compressed, the period of mid-adolescence has been lengthened.

This reviewer would invite the reader to picture the parents your ministry touches on a regular basis. Then think of all the technological changes that have happened since those parents were teens. Even "sexting" is so new that people haven't found their moral compass when dealing with this latest mid-adolescent activity.

The conclusion of the book begins with a discussion of what the authors call the "6 Longings of Mid-Adolescence." A chapter is devoted to the three levels of partnership parents provide. The book closes with the authors explaining their "Circles of Relationship" model that they present in their ParentTeen™ Seminars.

This book can serve as a great resource for church workers who haven't updated their knowledge base of today's adolescent in the last five years. It could also serve as a good text for a parenting class. The authors come from a Reformed theology tradition that the class leader would need to address (there is no mention of the daily drowning of the Old Adam by remembering our Baptism or the faith strengthening received through regular reception of the Lord's Supper). This writer also can recommend its reading to parents for individual use without many reservations.

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## **Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church.**

**Michael Horton.**

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008.

In Michael Horton's newest book, the author, seminary professor, and radio host poses a challenge to ministry leaders to examine the methods and mindsets we use when presenting the Gospel message. He believes that the efforts to be relevant and practical in ministry have taken us away from a "grace alone, Christ as a Savior of sinners" message to a "try harder, Christ as an example for our lives" message.

In the first chapter, he lays out the concern he has for the church and the objectives he hopes to accomplish in writing this book. Most are excellent points and good things for all of us to ponder. However, in the closing paragraphs of this first chapter, he makes a statement that really threw this reader off. Professor Horton states: "I do not expect to get everything right....I admit from the outset that on balance it is not a cheerful missive. I am counting on the indulgence of readers to wait for this book's more constructive sequel. If this book will have only raised questions that provoke us to deeper analysis of our witness in the world today, it will be sufficient" (27). At that point I was a bit confused about Horton's motivation in writing this book, and what he wanted to accomplish.

In the next chapters, "Naming Our Captivity," "Smooth Talking and Christless Christianity," "How We Turn Good News into Good Advice," "Your Own Personal Jesus," and "Delivering Christ," the author uses published research, personal experience, and others' experiences to walk us through the struggles he sees in American churches. Issues he identifies in the book are: moralism, therapeutic deism, the lack of use of the law in preaching, the reduction of Christianity to the best methods of self-improvement, modern Gnosticism, and a role confusion of the American church. Like the first chapter, each of these chapters contained excellent points, but they also included what I would describe as some long-winded diatribes and ill-placed personal attacks on certain public ministry leaders.

In the final chapter, "A Call to the Resistance," Dr. Horton exhorts his

readers to return to expository preaching, regular celebration and observation of the sacraments, and a ministry of both law and gospel. These practices will return God to the place and role of the main speaker in the church. These are excellent points which provide a pretty good finish to the author's original intentions for the book.

However, having reflected on the totality of the thoughts and ideas presented, I would make the following recommendation: take the time you might have invested in reading this book and apply it in the continuation of your own faith and ministry journey through Scripture reading, a study of the Lutheran Confessions, and the reading of classic Christian apologists such as Bonhoeffer and Lewis. This approach will ground us in Scripture and theology so that we can make applications to our congregations, ministries, and vocations.

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