

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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TRANSFORMING CONGREGATIONAL EDUCATION



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IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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reflections

RECENT CONVERSATIONS with Christian educators from across the country have both inspired and discouraged me regarding the state of Christian education in our LCMS congregations and schools. In some congregations Christian education ministries are flourishing; in others they are languishing. As I reflect on those conversations it occurred to me that the *teacher* is a significant yet, at times, overlooked ingredient in the process of transforming congregational education.

A case in point: In March during the Veterans of the Cross Retreat in Leesburg, Florida, I enjoyed a wonderful conversation with a Concordia University, Nebraska alumna, Class of 1964. Herself a teacher, she told me the story of the teacher who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, had inspired her to become a teacher. She wanted to know if “her teacher” (an alumna who is retired and living in Seward) was still living. When I told her “yes” she told me that for some time she had wanted to thank “her teacher” for the impact she had on her life.

To my surprise a few days later I received an envelope with a letter enclosed. Our alumna asked me if I would hand deliver the letter of thanks with a big hug. Our alumna said she had not sealed the envelope and if I chose to read the letter she had written, I was welcome to do so. With permission I share a portion of our alumna’s letter to “her teacher.”

“It all started with the school year 1950–51! You were my third grade teacher at St. Paul’s in Ute, Iowa . . . I no longer remember how many others were in our one-room school that year. What I do remember is that you were my only lady teacher for all of my elementary years. You also allowed me to sit on your lap during some story times. It was that school year that I learned love, and, it was that school year that I knew I wanted to be a teacher—just like you!

Many good teachers impacted my life in very positive ways—spiritually, musically and academically—but YOU ‘started the ball rolling’ according to His will and His Spirit’s guidance. Hopefully this letter is a blessing to you and a simple but huge THANK YOU, GOD, for putting you into my life’s journey!”

The first step in transforming congregational education happens when the God of the universe transforms the hearts, lives and minds of His daughters and sons through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. The next step in transforming congregational education happens when God uses the gifts, talents and abilities He gives his daughters and sons to teach, model and witness to the faith that fills them. Through these steps God first transforms the minds, hearts and lives of His sons and daughters so they might, in turn, teach others the Good News about Jesus and, in so doing, continue to fulfill the Great Commission imperative to teach God’s people to obey everything He has commanded us to teach.

May God continue through Word and Spirit to enlighten the minds and sanctify the lives of the *teachers* He draws to His service. May He bless those who teach and those who learn that all the baptized may apply themselves with ready diligence to their tasks and faithfully fulfill their service according to God’s will. (LSB, p. 306 paraphrased)

Brian L. Friedrich
President



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editorials



Educating All of God's People: What Can Help?

SOME YEARS AGO, a very wise, experienced pastor friend (Dr. Charles Mueller, Sr.) gave me some questions to ask when parishes were examining their "systems" — past, present, and future. They included: "What day is it? Where are we? Why are we here? How's it going? Could we improve? How? When? Who could help us?"

On the basis of nearly 50 years of ordained service in the Church, including 13 years in each of two parishes and 11 years on a district staff, I offer some items to consider as *your team of leaders* examines how the "system" of continually educating all of God's people for witness and service could be strengthened in your parish.

People have asked, "*What helps in the continuing Christian education of God's people?*" We begin by remembering *Whose and Who we are: God's baptized children, disciples, stewards, witnesses, agents, trustees, distributors and dispensers of His love and life!* Christian education, on every level, has that as its biblical, Christ-centered focus.

Please Consider the Following Ideas and Insights into "What Can Help?"

Remembering that the *very purpose of life* is to be God's steward, disciple, manager—to let our lives be a contribution to others in the *Name of Christ!* We are developing people of purpose!

Keeping the meaning and the message of Christ's cross, **the Gospel**, in the center of everything!

Praying with "discipleship, servant, steward" vocabulary (e.g., offering prayers, requests, etc.)

Singing hymns about serving, loving, blessing, strengthening, caring and always being stewards.

Using bulletin/screen items that highlight the on-going service of God's stewards—who is doing what, where, why it is done, and what happens because of this.

Saying "Thank you" often, regularly, in a variety of ways and occasions.

Helping people see the good that is being done in the name of Christ as one of God's stewards and as a group of God's baptized, commissioned and sent disciples.

Providing monthly/quarterly statements showing participation and financial support in areas of service, worship, communion participation . . . **and** their impact on peoples' lives in the community.

Sharing biblically-based testimonials by lay leaders who tell of the blessings that come from being God's steward in a variety of areas of life: at school, at work, in the community, **and** reporting them on the websites, in the newsletters, and bulletins.

Offering resources, materials, inserts, screen notes and other media that help "raise the sights" of the members of the congregation to look beyond themselves and the local property lines.

Praying regularly for the blessing of the Holy Spirit to open the lives of God's stewards to fulfill His purposes while asking, "To whom is God calling us?"

Offering Bible studies that examine the familiar and the not-so-familiar portions of Scripture that illustrate the life of God's serving and witnessing agents, His stewards in action.

Raising up Sunday school, Bible class, VBS, and small group leaders who regularly apply the meaning of the Gospel to fellow stewards, of every age group, in the lessons they teach.

Regularly publicizing information about the total ministry of the congregation that interprets and applies what we are doing together **and why!** The Gospel is our motivation!

Providing biblical discipleship training in all new member classes and in periodic re-orientation classes for long-time members. How are we helping stewards in and for all of life?

Emphasizing outreach to the lost, the searching, the drifting people—people loved by God!

Using a variety of ways to tell the story of the work of the Church in other places so that the view of our common mission does not stop with "our church." We are partners with others in the area, district, synod, and beyond!

Providing attractive materials, mailings, DVD's, videos and other media in teaching God's stewards.

Including stories about being God's stewards in website updates, mailings, etc.

Conducting periodic every-member visits to ask members for suggestions and counsel about the ministry and programs of the parish (visit #1) and then a visit (#2) to enlist talent and financial support to carry out the ideas.

Praying regularly for the leaders of the congregation, so that they can be good stewards of the leadership positions entrusted to them.

Asking other congregations as well as area, regional or national leaders for insights and suggestions.

NOW . . . What do you think helps to educate all of God's people as you re-examine the systems, organization, approaches, emphases, and mission of your congregation?

God bless your partnership as His people, baptized, commissioned and sent—stewards of the Gospel! (Matthew 28:18–20; 1 Corinthians 4:1–2; 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; 2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

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An Educational Paradigm that Will Truly Transform

IT IS AN EXPERIENCE that is common to every educator. You meticulously prepared your lesson, polishing particular pearls of wisdom to a brilliant sheen. You labored to create learning strategies that will enable the students to take these truths to heart. With a mixture of pride and trepidation, you handed the life-changing truth over to your students and then it happened ... the disquieting realization that no one was listening. The only sound that you heard was that of those precious spheres of truth hitting the floor and rolling unceremoniously under the desk. This sound has been heard for as long as there have been teachers.

While students have never been as receptive as their teachers may want, there seems to be a growing disconnect between the parish educator and congregational members. Many of the adults and young people in the congregation are disengaged from the educational ministries of the church. They simply are not participating in the educational programs that have been put in place. When they are, they often have difficulty internalizing the information that is presented to them. The problem isn't necessarily rooted in ineffective teaching methods or a deficiency on the part of the learners.

The problem is rooted in how their minds have been formed: the way they have been

trained to think. The minds of our people have been formed with epistemological assumptions that are radically different from those required by the Christian faith. The result is that Christian educators are faced with the impossible task of inserting the square peg of faith into the round holes of the minds of Christians.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Enlightenment educators like Heinrich Pestalozzi, Johann Herbart, and Friedrich Fröbel challenged the model of education that had been used by the church for centuries. That model, based on the ancient liberal arts, was found to be ideal for the purpose of preparing minds that would be receptive to the truths of the Christian faith.

For these educators and the many who followed them, this ancient model of education was seen to be detrimental to the development of the individual. They believed that minds should be formed according to a different pattern that would predispose them to reject orthodox Christianity and instead look instead within themselves for truth and wisdom. It took a long time, but eventually they succeeded. The proof of their success can be found in the minds of the men and women who occupy the pews of our congregations and the chairs of our classrooms today. They believe that they have been taught to think critically. Instead, they are the products of an educational philosophy that was expressly designed to turn them away from the very things that we, as Christian educators, are trying to teach.

I believe that there needs to be a paradigmatic shift in our educational endeavors. Content and methodology—those things which occupy most of our attention—are certainly important, but we need to think carefully about how minds can be shaped so they are receptive to the Christian faith. We must consider what tools can be used to prepare true critical thinkers so that when they are presented with the eternal truths that have been revealed by God, they will recognize them as truth and receive them with glad and sincere hearts. In short, we need to teach people—especially the young—to think like Christians. Then we can teach them what a Christian thinks.

The good news is that the time has never been better to make this shift. Modernity, with its progressive, optimistic views of

mankind, is increasingly seen as bankrupt. The old ways of doing education—the very ways which mitigated against the cultivation of a Christian mind—are being questioned. I am convinced that there is an audience for a credible alternative, and I am equally convinced that there is nobody better to present that alternative than we Lutherans. We possess the double blessing of an unparalleled confessional clarity and rich educational history. The confessional clarity enables us to understand why the Christian mind must be formed to think in such a way, and our education heritage gives us the answers to how that formation can be accomplished. If we draw on those two deep wells, then we can boldly step forward and put forth an educational paradigm that will truly transform congregational education.

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Mark Blanke

The State of Education in Congregations of The LCMS

WITH THIS EDITION focusing on transforming congregational education, the question must then be asked, "Why do we need transformation?" Several themes emerge when one looks at the rationale for transforming or changing something. First, one must ask which deficiencies exist that need to be rectified. Second, one must consider the institutional and societal trends that will likely impact what we are now doing and determine changes that can respond to those trends.

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Deficiencies

EXPLORING the first theme, responding to deficiencies, requires that one identify the gap between a preferred condition and the present realities. This first step in the transformation process is made somewhat complicated by the simple fact that one finds little or no mention in district or synodical judicatories of what constitutes a "preferred condition" in congregational education. In fact, the past 20 years within the LCMS have seen a significant decrease in the guidance being provided by district and synodical sources on issues related to parish Christian education.

Some of this decrease likely can be linked to reduced resources available to judicatories (not just within the LCMS.) At one point, our synodical offices had individuals serving in positions with significant responsibilities in youth, children, family and adult educational ministries. Today, personnel cuts have left only youth ministry with designated staff, and much of that staff has to be externally funded. Twenty years ago,

districts started to reduce the staff members with specific expertise and responsibilities in parish educational ministries, choosing instead Mission and Ministry Facilitators (MMFs) who as generalists were assigned responsibilities for geographical regions of the district and perhaps given some component of responsibility for parish education.

The lack of designated individuals and resources at the judicatory level has reduced the advocacy that once existed for parish education within our synod. While this reduction of resources was not done for any malicious reasons, and there is truly good intent within the judicatories for excellent Christian education in our congregations, the result of the cuts has been extremely detrimental to the overall health of our synod's parish educational ministries. For example, our ability to determine any standardized goals or priorities in educational ministries for congregations throughout the synod has been diminished.

The last major synodically funded research on parish education was the *Congregations at Crossroads* study in 1994 (results were published in 1995). The study was partially based upon the *Effective Christian Education* study completed by Search Institute in 1990. Among other things, the Search study found that participation in Christian education was one of two factors that had a strong relationship to the development of faith maturity in adults and youth. The quality of formal Christian education (yes, there are degrees of quality to be considered in Christian education programming) within the congregation also had a strong relationship to the level of growth in faith maturity among members (this was the only congregational variable that showed a strong relationship to faith maturity). The quality of a congregation's educational ministry also had a strong relationship to the level of congregational and denominational loyalty.

The Crossroads study also sought to look at congregational factors influencing faith maturity. Thirty congregational qualities were assessed and compared with responses to questions that pointed to nine indices

of the faith maturity of members. Though responses were from the most active members of the congregation (70 percent of the respondents said that they worshipped regularly), the authors noted that:

"We find it sobering that, even among the most active people who responded, the data still point to serious issues that must be faced by congregations." (59)

Among those "serious issues," the researchers noted among their eleven recommendations that, "Nowhere is the need for a culture shift more evident than in the findings on Christian education." (34)

They found that practices in 1994 focused on "right beliefs" which led to a passive learning experience that didn't engage parishioners.

The study concluded that "Indeed, one reason many people may not be active is that the education that is offered is neither relevant to their lives nor engaging in content and process. Most youth and adults experience primary education that is leader-centered and passive." (34)

While no specific studies on the same scale as the *Congregations at Crossroads* study have been done within the synod since 1994, there is some statistical evidence that little has been done to respond to the recommendations of the study. Statistical reports within the LCMS provide a consistent stream of data from congregations. While there are many flaws in the reporting, one can reasonably assume that any flaws that were present in 1994 are still present today.

Statistics from 1994 indicated that a maximum of 27 percent of members attended Sunday and midweek studies. (This includes children and adult participants and does not take into account those individuals who attend on Sundays as well as midweek studies. So, actual participation is likely to have been much lower.)

Data from 2008 show that overall attendance has dropped to 23 percent of total baptized members.

Analysis of this data sent to the LCMS office in the form of congregational reports also shows that 7.6 percent of communicant members attended a Sunday class or Bible study group and an additional 4.8 percent of communicant members attended a weekday religion class. Assuming that none of the Sunday attendees also attends midweek classes (an unlikely assumption), attendance of adults in an educational experience sponsored by their congregations is no higher than 12.4 percent of the communicant membership.

If the Crossroads researchers were correct in connecting participation levels with educational relevance and engaging methodologies, one could assume that participation rates might be declining because churches haven't made significant strides in increasing relevance or changing methodologies to be more engaging since 1994.

Although the synod as a whole has not carried out extensive education-related research since 1994, there has been some research conducted by other entities, both within and outside the LCMS, which provides glimpses into various aspects of education in the church. One such piece is a 2006 study completed by the Institute for Religious Education (IRE) at Concordia, Nebraska. The intent of this research was to gain a better understanding of the current educational practices of churches within the LCMS.

The IRE study received responses from 200 congregations, providing an overview of their educational practices.

Within the 95 percent of churches that offer adult Bible study opportunities, the study showed that approximately 11 percent of the confirmed membership attended a church-sponsored adult Bible study in the previous week.

Of the 187 (94 percent) of churches that offered Sunday school for children, approximately 32 percent of the non-communicant membership were in attendance in the previous week (the

survey was completed by churches in the Fall of the year).

About one-third of churches offered mid-week educational programs for children (not counting confirmation).

About two-thirds of congregations offered educational programming aimed specifically at senior high youth.

Senior pastors were asked to complete one section of the survey which asked for their perceptions on the quality of the educational ministries.

Asked to rate their current educational ministries (on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being high), the pastors rated their church's children's educational programs a "6," the youth (7th-12th grades) a "5," and the adult Christian education programs a "6." Twenty-seven percent believed that the youth ministry area was the area most in need of improvement compared to 23 percent for children's education and 15 percent for adult education.

The majority of respondents (52 percent) believed that the amount the church budgeted for the educational ministries of the congregation was too low.

Interestingly, these pastors estimated that they spent approximately 23 percent of their time working on the Christian education ministry (teaching, planning, preparation). A majority (57 percent) never had college coursework outside a seminary that focused on educational methods (most seminarians are only required to take one seminary course which focuses on congregational education.) Another majority (56 percent) had never participated in any continuing educational experience that focused on educational methods since becoming pastors.

When asked to describe the central purpose of the education ministry of congregations, 20 percent said that the purpose was "primarily cognitive," four percent said "primarily affective," 13 percent named "primarily lifestyle," and 52 percent responded "other." Seventy percent of the respondents indicated that there are no written goals for the congregation's educational efforts.

Pastors were asked whether they believed that educational effectiveness had changed within the LCMS as a whole in the past 15 years. Seventeen percent felt that effectiveness had improved, 30 percent felt it had stayed the same, 45 percent felt it had diminished, and eight percent were unsure.

When the IRE research data is taken as a whole, one gets a view of Christian education in our churches that shows the following:

Many churches are offering a variety of educational opportunities being attended by a minority of congregational members;

These programs are led by individuals with few chances to develop educational expertise through formal learning experiences, despite the need to spend a large portion of their time involved in leading educational ministries;

The programs themselves are perceived as adequate despite poor attendance, and the program with the lowest attendance (adult) is perceived to be the healthiest.

There seems to be little intentionality in articulating a clear purpose for the educational ministries of the congregation. In fact, there doesn't seem to be a unified concept of the purpose of educational efforts within the synod as a whole.

By almost a three-to-one ratio, more pastors felt that the synod's overall effectiveness in parish Christian educational efforts had diminished compared with those who felt that it had improved.

While it is hard to define what constitutes a specific deficiency in congregational education when preferred characteristics haven't been lifted up within the synod, it would be difficult to review the data from the IRE research and not assume that deficiencies exist within our congregations.

Another significant study related to congregationally based education within the LCMS was a study on confirmation practices by Dr. Marv Bergman in 2010. This study was the most comprehensive study on confirmation in the Lutheran church since the work done by a pan-Lutheran study

group in the mid to late 1960s. Bergman's study was especially interesting in that the samples included confirmation leaders, parents of confirmands, and confirmands. He also asked district education leaders to identify those congregations that they felt had exemplary confirmation programs. Bergman then compared the practices of the exemplary programs with those of the other congregations.

Bergman's study provides an overview of the practices of churches in a seminal educational program that is common to most congregations throughout our synod. The overview is extensive, but one of the more telling components allows us to compare instructor goals with participant outcomes. When responding to the question of "How much attention is given to the following topics?" Ninety-seven percent of the confirmation leaders said that "prepare to receive Holy Communion" receives "major" attention, along with Holy Baptism and The Apostles' Creed as the highest of 18 topics within their confirmation program.

Leaders also rated the importance of the goal of preparing the confirmands to receive Holy Communion as "very important" as the fifth highest of 20 goals. Yet, despite the level of attention and the importance of this single subject in the minds of the leaders, responses by confirmands to the statement "In Holy Communion, one receives . . . " were:

Twenty-four percent responded "bread and wine as symbols of Christ's presence;" Thirty-eight percent said "Christ's body and blood which replace bread and wine;" Thirty-six responded with "Christ's body and blood and bread and wine."

Obviously, leaders were unable to effectively help learners to recognize the correct Lutheran response on this important topic, even though it was a priority in the development of their program.

On a related note, a majority (54 percent) of the confirmands' parents were also unable to complete the sentence correctly. Additionally, 61 percent of the confirmands

agreed (20 percent strongly agreed and 41 percent agreed) with the statement that "In order to be saved, I must obey God's rules and commandments."

The data from Bergman's study should alert all of us to the fact that the efforts being made in confirmation programs throughout the LCMS are not having the desired outcomes. Data do not provide us with a reason for this inadequacy, whether it is the methodologies being used, the curriculum, the lack of reinforcement in the home, the timing of the confirmation experience, or some other factor causing the disconnect. But one cannot look at this data and not conclude that there is a gap between the preferred condition and the present realities.

So, despite the dearth of standards being set for educational ministries of the LCMS, the research does provide us with enough data to determine that:

Our educational ministries are reaching a small portion of our membership, and that portion is getting smaller;
There are few, if any, written goals set for our educational efforts;
Where goals are articulated, we have evidence that we are ineffective in teaching to those goals, at least in one of the priority educational programs of our church.

I believe that this data provided evidence that we are not achieving a preferred condition when it comes to the educational efforts of the LCMS.

Trends

WHEN CONSIDERING how certain trends may necessitate transformation of our educational ministries, the difficulty is in choosing from the myriad of possible trends and influences. Societal shifts ranging from social media to declining marriage rates are seminal in nature and are influencing how we carry out the work of the church (although they do not change our message—the proclamation of the saving work of Jesus Christ in our lives!). At the risk of minimalizing the depth of changes affecting society and the church, I'd

like to focus on one trend and look at how our educational programs are responding to that trend.

The trend I'd like to look at is that of a growing apathy in the church and a decrease in religious practices in general within the U.S. Research conducted by the National Study of Youth and Religion, the American Religious Identification Survey, Barna, Gallup, and LifeWay all point to a decrease in the importance Americans place on religion in their lives. Recent books such as *Unchristian*, *Almost Christian*, *Growing an Engaged Church*, *Souls in Transition*, *Soul Searching* and others provide insight and suggest many implications for congregational education.

According to this growing body of research, a relativistic American society and the diminished importance of religion have negatively impacted the church and how others perceive the church. This trend raises a number of questions, such as: Is a transformation of the educational ministries of congregations necessary in order to respond to this insidious trend? Are there any indicators of how well we are doing in responding to this trend?

One often sees the effects of this trend in a declining participation in activities in congregations, which is evident in the LCMS and in many churches. As religious importance wanes in the eyes of members, responding to church activities becomes less important than other commitments. For example, the *Faith Communities Today* research found that work, school, and sports schedules were the highest rated events that make it "difficult for people to regularly participate in the congregation." This data comes as no surprise to the individuals who are planning and implementing educational ministry of a congregation. Managing schedule conflicts and the apathy of some members have been a constant challenge for the parish educator. Yet, despite years of concerted effort on the part of the leadership of the church to respond to the apathy they are encountering, we are seeing telltale signs of increased apathy in many churches.

Perhaps our responses are not adequately addressing the real cause of the trend.

Transformative Actions

IN HIS BOOK, *High Expectations*, Thom Rainer researched those factors that influenced assimilation of new members. He found that only 16 percent of new members who participated in worship only were active five years after joining the church. Of those who attended worship and went to Sunday school and Bible class, 83 percent were still active after five years. He goes on to say, "The research is clear, if not overwhelming. Sunday School [and adult Bible class] is *the* [emphasis in original] most effective assimilation method in evangelistic churches today." (47) Despite these and other data, few churches are choosing to put increased resources into their Sunday morning educational ministries.

Here's where one must step away from strict statistical analysis and make some interpretations of transformative actions that may make our educational programs more responsive to the growing trend of apathy. A maturing faith is one which exhibits itself in a growing desire to participate in Word and Sacrament ministry as well as ongoing study of the scriptures. The 1995 *Congregations at Crossroads* study found that a minority of our active members had what was defined as an "integrated faith," that is, one which demonstrated a focus on horizontal (relationships with people) and vertical (relationship with God) dimensions. The earlier Search Institute study found a high correlation between the development of an integrated faith and a quality educational ministry. The *Congregations at Crossroads* study found that much of what passes for educational programming for adults consisted of leader-centered methodology and concluded 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 alone has little impact on a person's growth in faith." (19–20) This

report added that few youth or adults in the LCMS experienced an interactive educational environment where "people talk about their understanding of God and help each other apply their faith to issues and concerns in their lives." (20)

Could it be that the transformation most needed within the LCMS is to reshape our educational efforts so that they strive to show a connectedness between learning of Christ and learning how His work of salvation for all should be impacting one's life? Do our members see the impact of how being a believer impacts their daily lives? Do our members (and leaders) understand that the church exists, not just to provide in Word and Sacraments the means to bring them into a justified relationship with God, but to provide members with guidance in how they should live in this new relationship with Christ? Have our members been made aware of what a sanctified life looks like?

Almost 70 percent of LCMS congregations in the IRE research reported that they had no written goals for the congregation's educational ministries. Research shows that adult learners participate in those learning experiences that relate to their current life situations and content that is immediately applicable (Knowles). Could it be that we have assumed that people "just know" why they need to be involved in educational ministries in our churches, and that we have not spent the time or the energy to think through or articulate to our learners how the subjects we address and the methods we use will better equip them for a life of service to God and people? Have we become complacent in our view of educational efforts which is somehow immune from the operational principles that shape educational practices in other venues?

If we answer "yes" to the questions posed in the previous paragraph, then we need to begin looking at the very foundational understandings of our educational ministries in order to do real transformation. We need to see our churches as open systems, with a distinctive mission but still influenced by the realities and

nuances of the society outside the church doors. We can no longer ascribe a marginal effort to education in the church. We can no longer disregard the research that shows the importance of effective educational ministries. Too much is at stake.

C.S. Lewis said, "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." Apathy is an unacceptable trend, and the directive of our Lord is clear when He says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you [emphasis added.] And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19–20)

We have His command, and we have the assurance of His divine guidance and participation. All we need do is to make intentionality and effectiveness a priority again in our educational ministries so we are able to transform those ministries into tools to "prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Ephesians 4:12)

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John W. Oberdeck

The Critical Role of Education in a Congregation's Mission: Congregation and Family Together

SOMETHING ABOUT EDUCATION in our congregations needs to change. At least, that's the implication of the theme of this edition. But what needs to change? And why should it be transformed? Other articles in this issues no doubt are tackling the why and what questions. I want to address the "Who" question. Who needs to change in the critical role of education in a congregation's mission?

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Education is critical to a congregation's mission; otherwise we would not bother with that tricky business we call catechesis. But to whom does the responsibility primarily belong? This is not an easy question to answer. Tension exists, and has existed for some time, over the locus of Christian education. Is the responsibility rooted in the home or the parish? The dining room or the classroom? The priesthood of all believers or the office of the public ministry?

Of course, this is a false dichotomy, and the obligation is a shared one. Nevertheless, questions remain. Is the congregation the center for Christian education supported by the family? Or is Christian education located in the family and supported by the

congregation? Which is primary and which is secondary? As congregational education is transformed, how are these responsibilities to be shared? What needs to change, and what needs to stay the same?

Navigating through transformational times is never easy for those called to serve God's people in his church. That's why I look for guidance to those who have traversed similar rough seas before us. In this article I want to share with you three principles to guide us through transformational times. But before I do, I want to take us back to a time even more transitional and tension-filled than our own—the early 16th Century.

Who is Going to Do It?

IN 1524 LUTHER WROTE, "Today we are living in a different world, and things are being done differently" (Luther, "To the Councilmen of All cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," 370). I suspect that in 1524 when Luther wrote these words, he was understating the case. The development of moveable type was transforming communication, and the challenge to the Roman Catholic Church brought forward by the Reformation was transforming the world. As pertinent as they were in his own day, Luther's words are just as appropriate today, and all the more so when we realize the source of the quote comes from a treatise on the subject of education—specifically who should be doing it!

It Is the Family's Responsibility

I ASSUME that most who read this article are familiar with the thesis of Ben Freudenburg in his book, *The Family Friendly Church*.

Parents are the primary Christian educators in the church, and the family is the God-ordained institution for faith-building in children and youth and for the passing of faith from one generation to the next. (Freudenburg 21).

A number of Bible passages come immediately to mind in support of parental responsibility for instruction in the faith.

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children..." (Deuteronomy 6:6–7 ESV). The word translated "teach diligently" (למד) in Hebrew comes from a word describing the sharpening of swords and arrows, which gives us a sense of the seriousness with which education is to be done. Not only should there be an edge to education, but the learning experience should leave a mark. A second root of the word means "repeat" and several Bible translations (Jerusalem, New English) use this root in translation (Harris 943). Regardless of which root we choose, education by impression through sharp teaching or education through rote repetition is the responsibility of parents.

Many other Scripture passages can be cited. The responsibility of one generation for the next is amply attested to in the Psalms. "He [God] established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children . . ." (Psalm 78:5–6 ESV). Ephesians 6:4 (ESV) states, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

In *The Large Catechism*, we find Luther, after spending many paragraphs on the responsibility of children toward parents, addressing the responsibility of parents toward their children.

Therefore let all people know that it is their chief duty—at the risk of losing divine grace—first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, and, then, if they are so gifted, also to have them engage in formal study and learn so that they may be of service wherever they are needed (Luther, *Large Catechism* 410:174).

The words spoken to sponsors in the Baptismal Service in *Lutheran Service Book* provide a more subtle description of the relationship between church and home.

After the sponsors have accepted their charge to assist in bringing up the child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, the pastor responds, "God enable you both to will and to do this faithful and loving work and with His grace fulfill what we are unable to do" (*Lutheran Service Book* 269). What is the congregation unable to do? The congregation can't tuck the child into bed at night with bedtime prayers, establish the practice of family devotions, or faithfully bring the child for worship. The congregation can encourage, exhort, and urge, but the parents and/or extended family must do what the congregation is unable to do.

The Small Catechism may also be enlisted in support of the role of the family, inasmuch as the headings of each chief part begin with "As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household" (Luther, *The Small Catechism with Explanation* 11). However, Luther actually has his foot on both bases. The quote above is from the German edition, while the Latin edition of 1529 couches the introduction in terms of schoolteachers and students (Luther, *The Small Catechism*, 351, note 24). It appears that Luther did not want to leave either the home or the school (church) out of the all-encompassing task of guiding the next generation into the living faith received in baptism.

It is the Community's Responsibility

BEFORE PASSING THE RESPONSIBILITY for Christian nurture and education solely to the family, there is a word of caution, however, and it comes from none other than Luther. In his 1524 essay, "To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that they Establish Christian Schools," Luther doesn't deny parental responsibility, but he does establish parental shortcomings that make reliance on the family alone an inadequate strategy for Christian education.

Luther begins his argument by pointing out that the largely ineffective monastery schools are closed in evangelical territories, and many parents are simply sending their

children into the workplace rather than seeing to their education. While one might think, Luther argues, that the princes ought to be concerned and remedy the situation, the reality is that they are more interested in "sleigh riding" than attending to the educational needs of their people. Since society absolutely must have an educated people for the clergy and for the professions, someone must provide adequate schools. Luther's answer is for the city councils to establish schools for their communities.

In case the councils respond by saying the parents ought to provide the education, Luther presents three reasons why that's a poor solution.

In the first place, there are some who lack the goodness and decency to do it, even if they had the ability. Instead, like the ostrich [Job 39:14–16], they deal cruelly with their young. They are content to have laid the eggs and brought children into the world; beyond this they will do nothing more. . . .

In the second place, the great majority of parents unfortunately are wholly unfitted for this task. They do not know how children should be brought up and taught, for they themselves have learned nothing but how to care for their bellies. It takes extraordinary people to bring children up right and teach them well.

In the third place, even if parents had the ability and desire to do it themselves, they have neither the time nor the opportunity for it, what with their other duties and the care of the household . . . (Luther, "To the Councilmen of All cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" 354–355).

Before going further, there are some limitations on how we can apply the three areas of concern expressed by Luther. First, Luther is addressing education in the liberal arts, not just the catechizing of the young; it's the whole education package

that Luther is talking about. Second, when Luther puts education of the young into the hands of the community, he is assuming a Christian community that openly supports Christian values and Christian teaching. Such an assumption is not tenable today. (I wonder what Luther would think of the contemporary educational scene in which any vestiges of religion are suppressed in the public square?) Third, when Luther describes the challenges presented by parents, he is describing the community as a whole, not the circumstances found within a given Christian congregation.

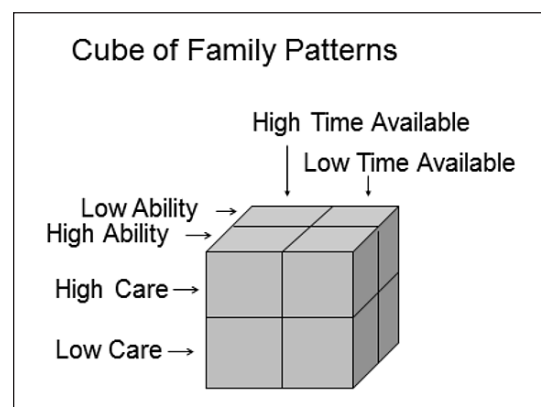
Though these limitations present sizable hurdles for application today, I'm going to jump them anyway and suggest that the three concerns expressed by Luther can guide how we transform the educational mission of congregation in our own day.

Understanding Family is Essential for Transformation

THINK about these three concerns of Luther as if each is a bipolar category. The first deals with care. How much does a given family unit care about faith? How committed are they? We can on the one hand imagine with some ease families that show up periodically or not at all, except for Christmas and Easter. On the other hand, we know of families who have devotions, attend every Sunday, and are fully engaged in the life and ministry of the congregation. The second concern deals with ability. How well is the family unit equipped to be the primary education provider for the child? Have parents absorbed for themselves an understanding of what it means to be justified by grace through faith? Can they apply Law and Gospel in ways that divide them rightly? Some households will be able, while others won't. The third category is time and opportunity. Many family units today are struggling as they attempt to balance job responsibilities in a struggling economy, childcare needs, and the added responsibilities if it is a single parent home. Other families do have time and opportunity to be a center for feeding the growing faith

of children in the home. In each bipolar category we can imagine families all along the continuum, from high to low.

Now let's consider what it would mean if we take care, ability and time and think about them three dimensionally—crossing the bipolar categories by height, length and depth, thereby creating a “cube” of family patterns. We then arrive at eight different possible family patterns. [See illustration below] Let's take a look at those patterns, starting with the four that form the upper story.



Families that Care

High Care – High Ability – High Time My immediate reaction to this pattern is that it's the pastors' and teachers' families in the congregation. The commitment is present, the skills are all there, and while the schedules can be quite hectic, time will be taken. There are lay families in our congregations who have the same pattern, and called workers give thanks when they encounter these faithful families. I call these “Foundational Families.”

High Care – High Ability – Low Time Imagine the level of concern that exists when the ultimate importance of faith is known, and there is knowledge to be shared, but never any time to do it. The transformation needed for this family involves priorities and scheduling. Are there resources available that can help relieve the workload? Or, is it possible to say “No” to time-consuming habits? These are the “Busy-Busy” families.

High Care – Low Ability – Low Time Here, we have not only the challenge of schedules, but also the challenge of little knowledge of the faith or of Scripture. This is the home that is looking for maximum support from the congregation's education ministries. The care is there and parents are looking for assistance. Parents' schedules may prohibit them from active involvement themselves, but they want it for their children. A transformational education program will attempt to address the parents' needs as well as the children's for these "Frustrated Families."

High Care – Low Ability – High Time I suspect that families that care and have time but don't have the background in the faith are a relatively small group. But they do exist. Because they care and have the time, they can become the bridges between learning in the home and learning at church. When parents ask if they can attend confirmation with their child, I know that I have come across a "Sponge Family" that's ready to soak up the Good News.

A careful reflection on the cube of family patterns reveals that the upper story has a distinct advantage over the lower story. All four patterns in the upper story care about faith in Jesus Christ, whereas *Low Care* is the common denominator for the lower story. As a result, any consideration of transforming Christian education on the congregation level will at some point need to address the circumstances of families that could not care less about the Christian faith and who are living in a culture that increasingly agrees with them. These are families that we just don't see. We are not on their radar screen.

Families that Do not Care

Low Care – High Ability – High Time Of all the family patterns, this is one that causes me the greatest unease. Do such families exist? Are there homes in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been present, but is now slipping away through every nook and cranny? I'm afraid that there are. Only consider the number of older adults in our congregations who are daily praying for their adult children

to return to the faith of their childhood for the sake of their grandchildren. This is a generation who think they know the story and have the time to invest, but do not value faith. "Falling Families" would make a good name for this category.

Low Care – Low Ability – High Time This pattern matches much of the description of the Falling Family, except for adding that there is no real knowledge of the Gospel. Perhaps a good way to characterize this pattern is the "Secular Family." They are engaged in many of the active pursuits of life in North America and have resources to spend, and so they do—on themselves. I know this sounds judgmental and harsh. It is, and that is part of the challenge the church has in reaching out to the disaffiliated.

Low Care – Low Ability – Low Time What can one say? "Strike three, you're out?" This pattern describes the "Lost Family" that not only doesn't know or care, but also doesn't have time in its stressed-out existence to find out or respond. Perhaps this pattern links most closely to Luther's comments about general education in the third decade of the 16th Century. Somebody—the city councils—had better intervene because the family can't do it, won't do it, and doesn't know what to do anyway.

Low Care – High Ability – Low Time By now this practice of crossing bipolar categories in order to create two- or three-dimensional typologies has grown pretty thin. Nevertheless, for the sake of closure, something should be said about the pattern that I refer to as the "Agnostic Family." The faith is known, perhaps even studied at a high level, but in their eyes, the faith fails to meet their needs. The seed of the Gospel has fallen on rocky soil, and the weeds have choked it out.

A lot has been assumed in the construction of these eight family patterns. I have simply, and perhaps naively, trusted in Luther's observation of his world in 1524. Would the constructs of care, ability and time withstand the rigor of research analysis in the 21st Century? Without actually doing the research, the best I can

say is that the patterns have a high degree of “face validity” with significant support from personal experience.

On a Limb with Martin Luther

WITH THESE CAVEATS in place, let me share guiding principles for transforming congregational education. The first three are drawn from my analysis of family patterns and focus on the irreplaceable role of families.

Nothing will be transformed in congregational education without the participation of the congregation’s families. Families are that important! And, let’s use as broad a definition of family as we can. This is about adults as much as it is about children.

Transforming congregational education will happen within a context where the family itself is under transformation. The cultural pressure on families is enormous.

The target for transforming Christian education within families centers on care. Do families care about Christian education, or don’t they? We bring the Gospel to families that may be losing it!

The next three guiding principles for transforming congregational education recognize that the congregation itself is under transformation and are intended for leaders.

Leadership in the congregation will be transformational for Christian education when it doesn’t come across as judgmental toward family deficits. Most families have some awareness of their shortcomings. Encouragement and hope for the family journey is the atmosphere to create.

Transformational leadership will nevertheless recognize the pressures on families today and consciously refrain from programming that further erodes family cohesion.

Transformational leadership in the congregation will firmly ground itself in the message of God’s grace for Jesus’ sake; there is forgiveness for family failure to announce, and there is the promise of renewed life in Jesus Christ to proclaim.

To summarize, transforming congregational education is not an option, it is a necessity. Accomplishing transformation is a shared responsibility between congregations and families. To succeed, pastors and professional church workers will benefit from taking into account the family patterns of the families they are called to serve.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
Romans 12:2.

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Dean Hansen

Restructuring Congregational Education

IN HIS BOOK, *Retrofuture*, Gerard Kelly tells the parable of the “Unbreakable Coffeepot.” It is a delightful story with many applications. When viewed in terms of the future of Christian Education, it becomes particularly poignant. Allow me to retell, summarize and possibly embellish the parable.

Joe, while fighting in a war, finds a coffeepot in a farmhouse destroyed by bombs. While the house was in ruin, the enameled coffeepot was unbroken, and Joe carried it with him for the duration of the war. Upon returning home, Joe used the pot daily. It was soon passed on to Joe’s son Tom. The legend of the coffeepot grew as family members told stories of the pot being dropped with never a scratch to show for it. Soon the legend grew as stories of the pot blocking bullets and saving Joe’s life emerged. The coffeepot was placed on a high shelf so children couldn’t touch it. It was shined and began to look better to observers than ever before. Tom loved to tell his children and grandchildren of the wonders of the unbreakable coffeepot which brought back many memories of Joe. When Tom reached old age, the family gathered to celebrate his 75th birthday. As one of the great-grandchildren listened to the stories, he asked why it sat on a shelf if it was unbreakable and why no one was allowed to touch it. Then it happened. Just as everyone was leaving, one of the relatives gasped in horror as the great-grandchild appeared at the attic window near the edge of the roof with the coffeepot. Nearly in one motion, the entire group ran in an effort

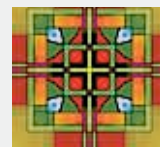
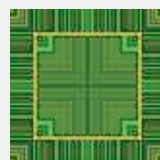
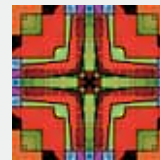
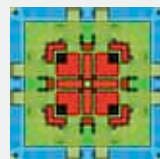
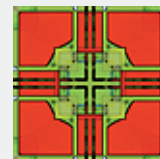
to catch the unbreakable pot, knowing it would be too late. Tom watched as the pot floated through the air toward the concrete driveway below. He thought of his father and could only smile.

We, who serve in Christian Education, are entrusted with a treasure. The treasure is not ornamental, but rather functional. It has endured for many generations. As we look at restructuring Christian Education in our congregations, we will look at the facts, strip away the myths and offer suggestions for testing the methods we use.

The Coffeepot

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US to strip away everything but the facts as we start to look at the treasure we call Christian Education. Obviously, God’s Word taught in its truth and purity is the basis for all Christian Education. As we look historically at the LCMS, we can be proud of all that has been accomplished. Our Lutheran schools are award-winning. Our Sunday schools have been a significant part of our church’s effort to teach God’s Word to children. Our youth ministry efforts have been exemplary. Our Concordia universities and seminaries have grown remarkably. Our ordained and commissioned ministers are among the most highly trained anywhere. We have maintained our own publishing company for more than 100 years. We have truly been blessed. The Holy Spirit has and continues to work mightily among us. Our heritage is one of which we can be proud and for which we should continually praise God.

However, in recent years, the number of Lutheran schools which are closing is out-numbering those that are opening. Enrollments in our Sunday Schools are declining. Youth ministry is struggling in many areas. The number of church-work students entering ministry is decreasing,



and the outlook for engaging enough commissioned and ordained workers sometimes looks dim. So what has happened, and what can we do about it?

Myth and Reality

WE SEEM to have placed Christian Education on a high shelf to admire, shined it up so it looks better than it possibly is, and let it stand on its own merits. Here's what I mean.

Over the years we have adopted the public education model as our own. We have divided people into age groups, assigned them to classrooms and used public school expectations for Christian Education. Many educators would agree that this model is not effective in the public school setting, let alone Christian Education. Even our classrooms reflect an aging model of tables, chairs, and lecterns, resembling a public school classroom rather than a welcoming place for interaction.

Second, we seem to have adopted secular approaches to encouraging attendance. We give perfect attendance awards. We put information in bulletins which reach only those already attending. We put lists of classes in our newsletter which is read only by members. On occasion we will place information on an outdoor information board for those driving by. Yours truly has never read such an advertisement and then dropped into a church to attend the class. To my knowledge, very few people have been drawn into a class by reading an outdoor marquee. Indeed, these approaches have worked a few times, and when one does, we celebrate, shine it up, and praise its worth and wait for months for it to happen again.

In his article, "Missing the Signs," Bradley N. Hill discusses such signage. The final question for Hill is, "For whom does the church exist?" What is our mission?" Is it to bring people into the church or is it to take God's Word into the community? Continued study of the Word is unquestionably important to congregational life; the question is, "How can that study lead us into the community?"

Third, we have excused our decreasing numbers and less effectiveness by buying into popular myths. For example, how often have you heard the comment, "There just aren't as many children as there used to be, so our Sunday school is decreasing in numbers"? While the percentage of our population that is in the three to 18 age bracket is smaller, the actual number of children in our country is larger. Another example is, "People are just too busy to attend regularly." Actually, the number of hours parents are working is somewhat unchanged, though fewer on weekends. (Neil MacQueen) The number of hours spent in athletics is lower. The number of hours spent by teens in homework is lower than ten years ago.

It is a reality that we live in a changing culture while serving a God who never changes. We teach from a book we hold as true and inerrant to a culture that feels that there is no absolute truth, with truth being only that which you choose to be true.

It is a reality that Christianity remains the fastest growing religion in the world, followed by Islam. When we examine growth in the United States, we see that the Church of Latter Day Saints is growing rapidly. Among Christian denominations, conservative Protestant churches have grown very significantly over the past 40 years. It is my opinion that even though younger generations struggle with absolute truth, they are very much reaching out to religions and denominations that provide structure. There is a desire for direction in a chaotic world. The Lutheran church stands in a unique position to offer both the direction that is desired and the message of God's amazing grace. A proper balance of Law and Gospel remains our greatest strength. It is the message of the ages, and it is the message that is essential to today's generations.

Another reality within the Church is that during the 1960s and 1970s, the church experienced a period of great growth. We now have one church building (operating congregation) for every 351 people in our country. (Neil MacQueen) Thirty-five percent of worshipping

Christians hold membership in more than one congregation. Only 42 percent of Protestant men attend church. Now is the time to evaluate our Christian Education ministry in a day of changing demographics and consider the options.

Testing the Coffeepot: Restructuring Christian Education by Improving Current Structures

THERE ARE MANY THINGS we do in Christian Education that are good. This may lead one to think that there is no reason to change. A favorite saying in the South, where I served for 34 years, is, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." I would agree, but take a good hard look at the goals of your congregation's educational ministry and then evaluate. If you feel that there is room for improvement, you may want to take a look at some of the following suggestions. Realizing that no one approach is right for every situation, one can test and hold on to what is good.

Drop the idea of developing program after program. Programs have a beginning and an ending point. Christian Education is an ongoing process. If Confirmation is a program, it begins at a certain age and ends at the Rite of Confirmation. If it is a process of renewing our baptismal vows, it begins at our baptism and continues throughout our lives.

Is Christian Education really education? Is the focus on the presentation of information, or is it Christian formation, that is, a process of nurturing and developing spiritual growth, of reflecting on Scripture and putting faith into practice?

Do we take time to teach others the Christian language? I am painfully aware of adults who seem uncomfortable with speaking the name of Jesus Christ among their own children. Some choose to talk about the "man upstairs" or the "big guy" or even "you know who." You can't assume people who come into your church know the books of the Bible, or for that matter how the Bible is divided into books, chapters, and verses. Words like sanctification and justification need explanation. I am sure you have heard of

the young confirmation student who couldn't keep all the "a-t-i-o-n" words straight. After waiting for a definition of one of those words, the instructor finally asked the young man if he knew what procrastination meant. He replied, "Not exactly, but I'm sure we Lutherans believe in it."

Forming relationships is key to having a positive learning community. Sharing, questioning, and praying, all done in comfort with each other, are essential to making Christian Education a process. Not being in a large church may be an asset. Many strong relationships already exist in small congregations; larger congregations may need to be more intentional. The life of the church is all about relationships. Jesus talked about relationships when he answered questions about the most important laws. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" (our relationship with God) and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (relationships with self and others). Being intentional about relationships by giving individuals the opportunity to share, by doing ice breakers or other group building activities, may meet the perceived need of a sense of belonging.

A great start to restructuring Christian Education is going back to an older idea and updating. The old idea is having a mission statement that will guide educational programs. Too many Christian Education programs are exactly that, programs. It is easy to pick up the most recent Bible study or most recent DVD and feel like one is meeting the needs of people. A well-conceptualized mission statement gives the congregation a sense of identity, telling others who you are. Such a mission statement names and directs what a congregation needs to be doing. We live in an era of short, five-word, easy-to-remember mission statements such as "Share Jesus with all people." Not a bad statement, but it is possibly lacking in both identity and direction. Deserving careful thought are such questions as: "What is our identity? Are we a loving, caring community? Are we a congregation committed to teaching God's Word in truth and purity? Are we a

congregation that is worshipping, learning from the Scriptures, and being transformed by our relationship with Jesus? Who are we?"

What do you do? Be specific! Do you simply worship, study and grow together, or do you nurture spiritual growth across the life span to help people mature in their relationship with God and others by offering situations to learn at differing points of their own development? The last statement is not intended to be a perfect mission statement, but as you can see, it may give more direction. Writing a mission statement is slow, tedious work, but ever so important.

As you continue to formulate a mission statement, one can evaluate how time is being invested. We seem to be stuck on the idea that Sunday morning is the best time for educational ministry. But, take another look. Are there people who are absent from educational opportunities because they have other commitments, perhaps involving other church activities? Do some people scramble to pick up children? Does the worship service sometimes go longer than usual and take away part of the study time? Are there times when people might be more focused, more relaxed, and have more time to develop relationships with others in educational settings?

Perhaps the next step is to look at settings and styles of the learning community. For example, most educators would agree that the typical approach to teaching which involves an expert lecturing to a group is among the least effective methods for reaching people and changing lives.

One also can ask questions about where groups meet. Is there a feeling that groups need to meet on church property? Can studies in the home be effective? How about meeting at a local coffee house? Do you utilize retreat settings?

If you understand Christian Education as more than just having classes by also involving putting your faith into action, you may choose to approach family issues such as parenting, hospitality, or care ministry. You might choose to offer a service component in homeless shelters, soup kitchens, retirement

homes, or plan a servant event. Support groups are an excellent way of learning to walk through life's journey. You can offer such things as groups for cancer survivors, young mothers, and the newly married. Learning opportunities can be formal or informal. As you look at your mission statement in the light of your community, you are apt to find particular needs. Assess the true needs. (I once formed a singles group, only to discover that there were very few truly single people who were not attending college. There was, however, a large number of individuals who were single again in the church, a true need.)

We live in a highly technological world. Learning opportunities, devotions, and conversations online all are possibilities and especially important to those who travel, work long hours, or are homebound. Be creative in communications! The signboards out front will seldom bring in people who are in the community. The bulletin only reaches congregational members. The great commission is not to "bring 'em in;" it is to go and tell. Be sure your mission statement goes beyond the walls of the church. Person-to-person communication is no doubt the most effective way to connect, but we now have many other options for getting the Word out into the community, such as print, the computer, and social media. It takes an intentional effort; we cannot rely on a "If we build it, they will come" mentality.

In considering these educational opportunities possibilities, we have tossed the coffeepot to see what happens. It is good to test and hold on to what is good. There is another option: What if we completely change the approach?

A Family Approach

DURING THE TIME of the Reformation, Luther encouraged taking an active role in the education of children. At that time, the church had exclusive responsibility to educate. Luther wrote *The Small Catechism* so fathers could instruct their children in the faith. However, with the development of current structures, parents have abdicated

responsibility to the church. We now take children to the experts to learn. This is quite a reversal; perhaps it is time to reclaim some turf.

Christian Education may be well served to adopt a Family Ministry approach. One such approach is referred to as an asset model. There are ten assets of a strong family which seem to be generally accepted. Those ten assets are:

1. Quality Time
2. Open Communication
3. Affirmation and Respect
4. Family Tradition
5. Faith Life Together
6. Strong Marriage/United Front
7. Loving Discipline/Good Boundaries
8. Conflict Resolution
9. Service to Others
10. Network of Support (Balswick and Balswick)

Developing intergenerational learning communities made up of families dedicated to strengthening these assets would be helpful in equipping families to be centers for faith formation. Parents, after all, are the most important influence in the lives of children. By providing intergenerational settings that are educational in intent, one is assuring families of quality time together rather than separating family members into age groups. Providing discussion questions encourages good communication. The potential for affirming others exists as conversations take place. Reading Scripture together and praying together builds important family traditions and faith lives. A service component easily can be added. Connecting families with other families can build a network of support and unity within the church. Singles, widows, and those with no extended family can be adopted into families or form their own church families. The potential is great!

The shift from age divisions to family meetings is going to be met with some resistance. We have become comfortable sending our families in several directions on Sunday mornings, dropping off youth on Sunday evenings, bringing pre-teens

on Saturday mornings for confirmation instruction, and our children to Wednesday night programs. Adults may meet at various times during the week. Unfortunately, we have become comfortable with others teaching our children those things that we value most in our lives. In doing so, we have become somewhat inept at speaking God's Word with our own children.

A good investment of time can be made in watching the documentary, "Divided," which studies the impact of separating families at church on our ability to retain members during a life-time. One of the findings is that we never teach our children to interact with individuals of other life stages. While I certainly do not agree with everything presented in this documentary, it does raise interesting questions. (I have noted how to access this film on your computer on the resource page.)

Back to the Future— Christian Faith Formation

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION in the future may look very different from Christian Education in the past. It may move from Christian Education with a focus on a presentation of knowledge to Christian formation as a process. It may move from a classroom and teacher to a congregation and mentors, from mission statements based on numbers and attendance to identifying the desired outcomes of living the faith.

David Anderson, author of *Vibrant Faith in the Congregation*, lists five principles for moving from education to faith formation.

1. Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit in relationships rather than by paper curriculum. We are the curriculum.
2. Effective faith formation ministry partners home and congregations as a vital team instead of employing a hierarchical model that places parents and other caring adults in a subservient role.
3. Home life makes an incredible difference in a child's ability to be inspired by the faith (Then, as an adult, this child inspires the next generation.)

4. A child (or adult) catches the values and faith of those around them by word and deed, not simply by lesson plans and data that are dispensed.
5. To ignite and motivate the young with the Christian faith, surround the young with adults who live that faith and wake up hungering for it.

Faith formation does not exclude preaching and teaching. These are essential. It does involve the entire congregation in focusing on developing individual maturity in one's faith life. Members of the younger generations are open to the Christian faith, but they are not huge fans of the established church. Their primary question is not what we believe, but they are asking, "So What? What difference does it make to be a Christian? Can you help me discover why it is important to my everyday life?" There is a need for these generations to belong and be accepted. There is a great desire to do what is best for their children.

In a congregation which knocks down the walls of age-groups, these questions may be more easily answered. Milestones in the lives of individuals can be celebrated together. Christian faith formation is a process that covers the life span. Individuals learn from each other and serve as mentors, not in a particular mentor program, but as people who interact across the ages. A high emphasis is placed on building relationships among people. Fellowship for all ages is a key component. Service together offers unique opportunities to learn from each other. Food and meals are part of fellowship. Members can embody the three A's: be authentic, be available, and be affirming. (David Anderson) Bible studies can implement these three A's as one learns from others, and applications of faith in everyday life situations are made by sharing experiences throughout the study of Scripture.

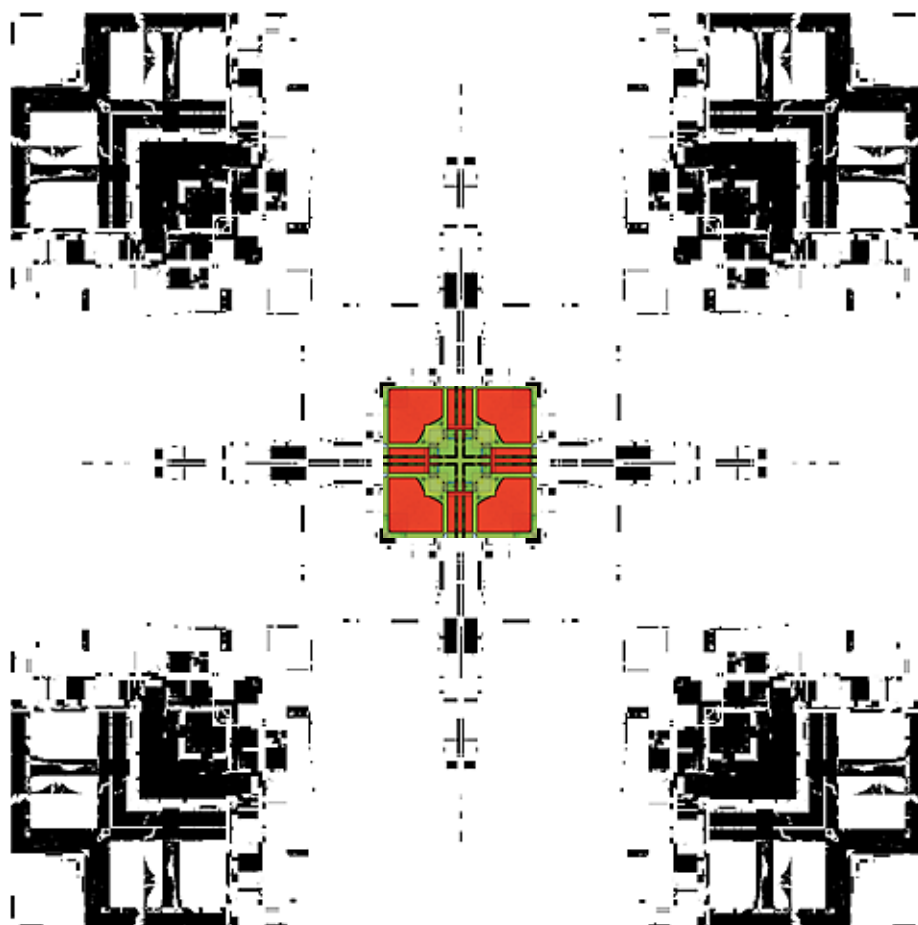
A focus on this process is not a threat to the ministries of a DCE, Lutheran teacher, DCO, deaconess, or pastor. Rather, this approach gives them the opportunity to equip the most influential people in the lives of the next generation, their parents.

One of the most positive aspects of the Christian Faith Formation Approach is that there are no ending points. Too often Confirmation is seen as having an ending point in Christian Education. High school graduation and going to college are seen as other ending points. Because Christian Faith formation is considered an on-going process, events like Confirmation and graduation are celebrated as milestones that lead to the next milestone. Members will be more likely to continue to be faithful to the church because they understand their involvement as a lifelong learning experience. Obviously, this is not a new approach but rather an ancient approach that goes back to the times of Luther and the early church.

Review the mission statement and make adjustments in timing, setting, identity and procedures. Develop a family ministry and an intergenerational approach. Focus on faith formation involving members of all ages in the congregation. Try this approach that just may work. Pray and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Be intentional about what you do. Learn from your mistakes. Do what you do with passion. Toss the coffeepot. Evaluate. Move forward.

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Joel Heck

Transformations in Congregations through Bible Study

HOW CAN WE MAKE the study of Scripture a more important part of the local congregation's life? How can we change the study of Scripture from something we do during our confirmation years, and then set aside because we think we know all that we need to know, into a valuable, lifelong

habit? How can the Word of God become something we delight in, something that we meditate on day and night (Psalm 1:2)? It won't happen easily, but it can be done. One of the best ways to do this is to visit churches where Bible study is an active and integral part of the total ministry. That's a case study approach to learning about ministry. But since you're reading these words, perhaps a few things can be said here to get a head start on transforming the study of God's Word in the local church. The Gospel is not tired and worn. It's more like a caged tiger that only needs to be let loose in order for its impact to be powerfully felt.

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A Leadership Challenge

THE FIRST THING that needs to happen to transform congregational education is for the congregational leadership, both pastor(s) and laypeople, to be serious about education. This applies to the congregation without a school just as much as the congregation with a school. It typically starts with the pastor and, where there is a school, the principal, but it doesn't end there. Most pastors and principals are already on-board with this idea, but most of the rest of the congregation is not, although they would never say so. The key is understanding how they vote with their feet, that is, what they do with their time, when they could be part of a Bible class.

What message do we send to our young people, especially the teenagers, if on any given Sunday only about 10 percent of the adult membership of the congregation is in Bible class? I'll answer that question. It tells young people that, in spite of what most parents say, in spite of what most lay leaders say, in spite of what our called staff say, confirmation truly is graduation. The behavior of most confirmed members of the congregation shouts loudly that you know all you need to know when you are confirmed, that study of the Bible is for young children and not for adults. If, on a given Sunday, half of our young people are in Sunday School and only about one in ten adults is in Bible class, we are sending the wrong message.

How is it possible to "obey everything I [Jesus] have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20) with a few years of studying the Scriptures one hour a week, and all of those years are preteen years? While the fundamental teachings of Scripture, Law and Gospel, sin and grace, can be taught and understood in a short amount of time, God gave us much more than a few summary paragraphs in His Word. Let me also say that I realize that people can study the Bible on other days of the week and in different settings. However, it is most visibly on Sunday that we send a message to the rest of the church by our participation in the study of God's Word.

So how does this translate into congregational activity? First, we have to ask ourselves several questions. What percentage of the Board of Elders attends a weekly Bible class? What percentage of congregational officers, President, Vice President(s), Board chairs, and Board members, attends a weekly Bible class? How many choir members, communion assistants, ushers, volunteers and other lay leaders are studying the Word of God weekly? What about the staff? Are the administrative assistants, lay ministers, Directors of Christian Education, Directors of Christian Outreach, youth ministers, and other staff regularly studying the Bible? And, if there is a school, the teachers need to be involved in Bible study as well, even though they are educational professionals. They do not need to be leading the Bible classes, except on occasion, but they do need to participate.

All of these people mentioned in the previous paragraph are the people who set the pace. They are visible to the rest of the congregation, so they deliver a message almost as much with their actions as with their words. We can say all we want that we don't want our young people to drop out. However, if we are setting an example of laying aside the study of the Word of God once we are confirmed, we are telling them that Bible study is not all that important. We are sending the wrong message.

This, of course, means that the pastor must be an advocate for the study of Scripture. And, of course, it's very rare that he isn't. He must be both a teacher of Scripture and a learner from Scripture. If the spiritual leader of the congregation finds the need to learn at the feet of Jesus, then who can say, "Well, I don't need it"? For those congregations with schools, the example of the principal will be very important as well.

But more on this at the end of this article, particularly on how to motivate a much higher percentage of adults to be involved regularly in the study of God's Word. I want to affirm that each Christian needs spiritual growth at three levels—at the corporate level

in worship, at the group level in Bible class, and at the personal level in a devotional life. This article addresses the group level of our spiritual growth rather than the corporate or personal level.

Experiential Learning

ANOTHER KEY to transforming our congregations through Bible study is by applying experience to our learning. Too often we study the Word of God and then go our separate ways. We don't typically seek to apply the messages of Scripture to our daily lives. Perhaps we are afraid that somehow we might communicate that our lives of obedience help us to earn God's favor. Lutherans are very careful not to compromise the material principle of our theology, i.e., justification by grace through faith.

This is, of course, good. But we must continue to read in Ephesians 2 after we have read about grace in verses eight and nine. We must also read verse ten: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Good works follow faith in Christ. Good works are the natural result of faith in Christ, even while they do not contribute one iota towards our salvation. Good works are an opportunity to live out our faith in lives of service to the God who has redeemed us at the cross of Calvary.

There are many opportunities to live out our faith, and I don't need to enumerate all of them. Mission trips, youth services, involvement in feeding the hungry, and almost any opportunity to live out one's faith can turn abstract teachings into genuine life experiences that reflect what we believe. In higher education, we are emphasizing service learning, that is, academic instruction that has real life applications in carefully selected experiences that are arranged for the student and connected to course content.

Part of me would like to tell every reader that one solution is to read *Learning at the Foot of the Cross* (Edited by Angus J.L. Menuge and Joel D. Heck, Concordia University Press, 2011) and put its ideas into action. That

will help, but the truth is that reading a particular book is not the panacea. The basic thing that needs to happen is to adopt (or reaffirm) an attitude, one that is rooted in the Gospel itself, and one that builds on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by grounding ourselves in the full teaching of the Word of God.

While Bible classes are not typically understood as experiential learning, there are at least two ways in which they can become such. One of them is somewhat minor, but the other somewhat major.

The minor way to make the Bible class experiential is by making it also a social time, a time when people interact with one another, discuss with one another, enjoy a cup of coffee and a donut, laugh, celebrate, tell stories, and recognize the accomplishments of one another. Another way of saying this is that we need to make our Bible class times into body of Christ times where interaction between participants is built into the Bible Class time. We are social creatures, and Bible class leaders need to recognize that relating to one another is almost as important as relating to God. Well, that's an exaggeration, but I trust that you understand my point.

The other way to make Bible classes experiential is by involving people in ministry outside the classroom as a direct result of what is taught in the class. By this I mean far more than taking an offering on a Sunday when we talk about world hunger and donating that offering to Lutheran World Relief. The old Mission Festivals came close to experiential learning when a former or current missionary came to speak, an offering was taken, people were invited to consider mission work, and so forth. Our study of Scripture needs to look for ways in which we can put into practice during the week the lessons that we learn on Sunday. Or, the lessons we learn in our small group home Bible study on another day of the week. Or, the lessons that we learn whenever and wherever we come together to study God's inspired Word.

It's not easy to find those lessons, but they are there. A study of Ephesians could lead to the development of a mission statement for the congregation, expressing in writing the unity about which Paul writes (e.g., Ephesians 4:1–6). A study of 1 Peter 3 could lead to a more active Christian witness, and a study of 1 Corinthians 9 could spur some innovative ministry that focuses on a special ministry, whether it's ESL classes for local Hispanics, a motorcycle ministry to bikers, or a Bible study ministry to truckers who are on the road. We don't want to become living examples of what the half-brother of Jesus writes about in James 1:22–24 and become hearers of the Word and not doers.

The Full Council of God

GOD DIDN'T GIVE US a creed that concisely summarizes all of Christian belief. He gave us a multi-volume book whose name, "Bible," means, literally, "the book." It is the best-selling book of all time because hundreds of millions have seen its value. Instinctively, we realize that if God took the time and effort to inspire apostles and prophets to record historical events and theological teachings in 66 books over two millennia of human history, that must say something about the importance of the Word of God. There must be a reason why God put material in the Bible, even those parts that are seldom studied, whether it's the legislation of Leviticus or the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9. Those sections are not simply God's cure for the occasional insomniac (smile); they are expressions of the need for sacrifice and forgiveness in anticipation of Christ's ultimate sacrifice (Leviticus) and affirmations of the historicity of the Old Testament narrative (1 Chronicles 1–9; genealogies are always indicators of the historicity of the books in which they appear).

After all, reading the Bible will save us some embarrassment one day. Most Christians have never read the entire Bible from cover to cover, even though they say that the Bible is inspired by God and is "useful

for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Not only can the Bible make us wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15); it can also give us guidance for each day on how to express our worship and thanks to the God who gave His all for us.

So how will reading the entire Bible save us some embarrassment? One day we will die. While walking the streets of heaven, we will meet lots of people. We will meet the saints of old, ancestors from the recent or distant past, famous historical figures, and even the apostles and prophets who wrote the books of the Old and New Testaments. That will include people like Nahum and Habakkuk. I can imagine getting acquainted with those people, learning about their families, their living conditions, their work and ministry. They would also learn the same about us. Sooner or later in the conversation, Nahum is going to ask, "So, how did you like my book?" "Book, what book? Did you write a book?" He will reply, "Well, yes, I did. It was one of the 66 inspired books of the Bible, part of the Word of God, just three chapters long, a mere 47 verses. You're a Christian, a person of the book, someone who prizes the Scriptures highly. Surely you have read my book!" If I haven't read his book, then I will have to say, "No." How embarrassing that would be to admit that I never took the time to read the book of Nahum, even though I had lived many decades as a Christian who believed in the importance of the Word of God!

Okay, that was tongue in cheek. Embarrassment is probably part of our fallen world, and in eternity, in heaven, there will be no sorrow, no sin, no death, no sadness. Probably not even any embarrassment or regret. But my point is that God wants us to know Him, and we best come to know Him by reading His Word. And even those parts, which are so seldom read, have been put there for a variety of purposes, especially for making us wise unto salvation, but also "for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

Casting the Vision

WE RETURN to the leadership challenge of the opening paragraphs, one that involves careful strategic planning. Most of the reading one can do in the field of leadership will bear fruit for the educator. While leadership begins with the character of the leader, and for the Christian it starts with the character of our Savior before it shifts its focus to us, it also includes developing a vision for where the leader hopes that a group of people will be at some future date and a strategy for making that vision a shared vision. In the local congregation, this means that pastor and lay leaders brainstorm together and set goals for the involvement of the members of the congregation in education. It also means that this brainstorming includes a representative from every group that exists in the congregation, from the LWML to each board or committee to the softball team. As they work together to determine where the congregation should go, they consult the Word of God and read passages such as Deuteronomy. 6:4–7, with its emphasis on passing on the commandments of the Lord to one's children.

Having developed that educational vision, including the number of people they hope, by the grace of God, will be involved in the study of God's Word, they need to cast this vision, that is, to describe where they hope the congregation will be some years hence. Let's say that they want to increase attendance in Bible Study to 50 percent of the worship attendance. Let's also say that they want to impact the community by sending people into the community to meet needs at least once a quarter.

In this hypothetical scenario, let's say that this latter goal will send people out on a Sunday morning during the Bible class hour once a quarter to take personal hygiene kits to homeless people, carry food stuffs to a community food pantry, conduct worship services in nursing homes, and provide home repair for the elderly. (Many more ideas can be gleaned from Steve Sjogren's books

on servant evangelism, *101 Ways to Reach Your Community*, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, *101 Ways to Help People in Need*, *Seeing Beyond Church Walls*, and others.) In these ways, members of a Bible class are expressing with their hands and feet what they talk about in Bible classes and sermons.

One of the best ways, however, to build participation in Bible study is to start with the most visible people in the congregation (Board of Elders, officers, board chairs), and ask them to invest in young people by attending a weekly Bible study. Talk to them face-to-face. Visit them in their homes or at church or over a cup of coffee at Starbucks. As they agree to join you in Bible study, others notice. Then you approach the next most visible group of people (Board members, various volunteers, participants in women's ministry, men's ministry, sports teams, etc.) and invite them to set an example for the young people. After that, you will begin to see some people attending who weren't attending previously, merely because they saw the example of other adults and have noticed the increased attendance. As you work your way through the leaders of the congregation, from the most visible to the least visible, you will build attendance in Bible study and say to the entire congregation, but especially to the young people, that the study of God's Word is a lifelong endeavor and not just something for your younger years.

God's Word is our connection to God Himself. We prize that Word of God, and leaders in this kind of congregation demonstrate that by their active participation in spending time with that Word. You will be amazed how that level of participation will result in various other transformations in the life of your congregation!

book reviews

Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation

John Roberto

Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2010

In the mid 90's, I distinctly remember my initial exposure to the concept of systems theory in connection with family ministry and the development of lifespan education ministries. During the coursework for my DCE certification and masters degree in Family Life Ministry, I was constantly experiencing "ah ha" moments as one class after another built upon and connected with my learnings in the previous class. Systems, networks, cross-over topics and methodologies, generational studies, cultural diversity, leadership development, group techniques and theories, age specific and intergenerational education, faith development, worship and liturgy, and family communication were some of the varied parts of DCE and Family Ministry training. Although he focuses on the word network instead of systems, John Roberto has taken the vast majority of these topics, updated the issues and the research, thrown in the impact of modern media and technology, and created a comprehensive plan with resources that will serve churches of all sizes.

The premise of John Roberto's book asks three questions: "What could faith formation in Christian churches look like in 2020? How can Christian congregations provide vibrant faith formation to address the spiritual and religious needs of all ages and generations over the next ten years? And, how can churches envision the shape of faith formation in the year 2020 and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in the second decade of the 21st century?"

No small task, but the author provides tools and a vast array of resources and examples to flesh out the basis for the questions and the possibilities for the future.

Roberto challenges you to think outside the box in the first section of the book, using multiple scenarios focused on four different target groups based upon their level of connection and commitment to the Christian faith. In other words, he encourages you to look at where people are before you tweak your current ministries, launch new ministries, or ditch what you are already doing. The varied groups are those who are actively involved, those who come once in a great while, people who are spiritual but not connected to a church, and those who are uncommitted and unconnected. Each scenario group has different needs and touch-points for connecting them in a deeper way for further faith development.

The second section of the book promotes the formation of what Roberto calls a Lifelong Faith Formation Network that will speak to the needs of the four different scenario groups. I found the tools at the end of the section helpful for needs evaluation and mapping out future faith formation initiatives for the different scenarios. As a resource junkie, I greatly appreciate that all the tools and worksheets in the book are available on the book's website at www.faithformation2020.net. The step-by-step tools take the reader and the congregation from the initial exploration and evaluation through implementation and marketing.

Section three of the text is a current and comprehensive view of the leadership skills needed for conducting a Faith Formation 2020 plan. Roberto explores six different leadership competencies and again provides tools for implementing and evaluating leadership skills and needs.

The final section lays out 16 strategies for faith formation, applies them to a matrix of the four scenarios, and then provides an abundance of real life examples and resources of the strategies being used by other congregations.

Overall, I found John Roberto's text a trove of resources and a helpful reminder of the systems approach to ministry that was implied in my collegiate training. I appreciated the value Roberto places in the faith formation benefits of the liturgical church year, in utilizing technology, and physically connecting with people outside the church walls. Roberto looks at each individual as a unique traveler on the journey of faith and the Faith Formation Network as a modern, customizable tool to assist them on the journey. I would highly recommend this book for church staff and leadership study and challenge you to leave it on the shelf once you have finished reading it. Even in our era of quickly changing methodologies and technology, *Faith Formation 2020* should serve as a foundational and living process that will carry you to 2020 and compel you to connect to the years beyond.

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Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church

Kenda Creasy Dean

Oxford University Press, 2010

What does it mean to be a Christian? It's supposed to be a straightforward answer that centers in believing in Jesus as the Savior of the world. But, as our society has placed

a negative connotation on religion, so also the details of our belief system have become fuzzy to American teenagers. The Church is responsible for teaching the belief system of Christianity, but how can they do so if the answers are contrary to the consumerism and emphasis on self that society has placed upon us?

In *Almost Christian*, Kenda Creasy Dean looks at how American teenagers view Christianity as they want it to be, calling it, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." It's a feel-good religion more than anything, and one where teens seek God when they need him and where there is no sin or consequence for it. "The National Study of Youth and Religion reveals a theological fault line running underneath American churches: an adherence to a do-good, feel-good spirituality that has little to do with the Triune God of Christian tradition and even less to do with loving Jesus Christ enough to follow him into the world."

Based on a national sample of youth and parents, historical perspectives, and in-depth research, the author looks at the revolution of the adolescent life stage and how teens have formulated their own opinion of life and faith. The facts and statistics draw out questions and challenges for both parents and leaders in the church. Teens can't articulate their faith, so how do we give them a foundation and the platform to talk about the subject? How do we teach the language, but still develop authentic relationships in a world where they can spot hypocrisy right away?

How did we get to the point where teens are practicing this feel-good religion? "Not because they have misunderstood what we have taught them in church. They practice it because this is what we have taught them in church." This begs the question, "What exactly are we teaching them?"

It's easy to get caught up in the fluff and glitzy entertainment methods to draw teens into ministry and learn about God, but is that effective in the long run? "Christians believe that faith depends on the electrifying presence of the Holy Spirit, who gives cultural tools their holy momentum. Church can (and must) help by plunging teenagers into Christianity's peculiar God-story, and by inviting young people to take part in practices that embody it."

The author looks at the practices of highly devoted teenagers in various Christian denominations and helps develop ideas on how to bring more young people to a place of living out their faith in daily life. In Part 3, "Cultivating Consequential Faith," Dean looks at the arts of translation, testimony and detachment in helping youth to own their faith and probes us to ask ourselves, "How can we create these opportunities in our own settings?" As church professionals, it's also important to recognize that the need to understand faith is not desired just by the youth, but also by their families. "Adults need spiritual apprenticeships as much as

their children do—and adults need them first.” It’s important to look at the big picture of ministry in our congregations and the idea that understanding identity is not just a problem for teens.

It was appreciated that the author described her own struggle with the research findings and how they are to be used in helping shape the faith and understanding of our young people. She asks a personal question addressed to her youth worker friends, and it is one for everyone in church work to consider: “What keeps you in ministry with young people—really? What gives you enough hope to stay in this business?” There is certainly discouragement in recognizing that the Church is part of the problem, but also hope that the Church has responsibility in being part of the solution.

As church professionals, we can read this book as a resource which provides research data and applications, similar to many ministry books. But, the author also provides the opportunity to look at ourselves and the churches we are a part of and move us to align our focus on the Person of Jesus Christ, where it belongs. “The single most important thing the church can do to cultivate missional imagination in young people is to develop one as a church, reclaiming our call to follow Christ into the world as envoys of God’s self-giving love.” The mantra of “Almost Christian” is hard to swallow, but the hope in the opportunity we have to teach Christ and his message of love to our young people is present and steady.

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Lutheran Education: From Wittenberg to the Future

Thomas Korcok

St Louis: Concordia Publishing House
2011

In the early 1540s, Martin Luther stated, “God has preserved the church through schools. They are the preservers of the church.” (*Luther’s Works*. Vol. 54, 1967, p. 452.) This remark to his students revealed Dr. Luther’s understanding of the relationship between the reform of theology and education. While the Reformation was a theological movement, it took place within the context of academic reform of the late medieval university. Additionally, Luther and his colleagues initiated a reform of elementary and secondary schools. Therefore, wherever the Lutheran Reformation spread, the establishment and expansion of educational institutions soon followed.

In *Lutheran Education*, Thomas Korcok demonstrates the important role that the integration of academic and theological reform has played throughout the history of the Lutheran church. Particularly, he concentrates on the significant role played by the liberal arts in the Lutheran pedagogical tradition. Based upon a thorough examination of the Lutheran educational history, Korcok argues that the trivium (grammar, logic, rhetoric) should remain at the core of Lutheran elementary instruction. In his estimation, this educational paradigm still serves as the best conduit for Lutheran catechesis and for training students for their future earthly vocations. The author arranged the book into three main sections that he compares to a three-sided painting called a triptych. The left side of this literary triptych examines the efforts of the 16th century Lutheran reformers in the establishment of a theologically centered pedagogy in their schools. Korcok argues that the Reformers brought three streams of influence together: earlier Christian pedagogy, Renaissance humanism, and Evangelical/Lutheran theology. By doing this, they created a distinctively Lutheran approach to the traditional liberal arts.

Ultimately, the Reformers wanted the goal of elementary education to be the preparation of each child for the eternal life granted in Baptism. For example, the learning of the basic grammar of German and Latin served the purpose of reading the Bible, *Luther’s Small Catechism* or other theological works. However, Luther and his colleagues also emphasized the significance of education at every level for the fulfillment of the Christian’s calling in life. A young man who received a proper education in Latin and Greek literature, history, and music would most likely become a pastor. He also could be trained in the study of law or medicine. While 16th century young women usually did not attend secondary schools, the Lutheran Reformers stressed the importance of learning basic grammar (including Latin) for all children.

In the second section, Korcok examines how the Saxon Lutherans, particularly C. F. W. Walther, adapted the liberal arts for teaching in their own schools in the United States of America in the 19th century. Walther and his colleagues responded to the Rationalism and Pietism by returning to the theological and pedagogical orientation of the 16th century Lutheran Reformers. The Missourians (as Korcok identifies the Saxon immigrants) instituted schools that focused on confessional Lutheran theology

and also an adapted liberal arts curriculum. For instance, the Missourians’ earliest schools emphasized the study of classical languages (Greek and Latin), modern languages (English, German and French), history, mathematics, logic, geometry, and some science. Eventually, their schools did distinguish between those studying for the pastoral office or teaching ministry (often these two went together) and other vocations. While the pastoral education emphasized the classical languages and music, the basic form of the liberal arts appeared in both schools. The original constitution of the Missouri Synod described the subjects that each teaching candidate should be qualified to teach. With the establishment of the teaching colleges and seminaries, the 19th century Missourians established an adapted liberal arts program from elementary school through the university level, with orthodox Lutheran theology at its center.

Having examined the formative periods of the 16th and 19th centuries in Lutheran pedagogical history, Korcok finally turns toward the present and the future. He provides a short overview of modern classical education and its relationship to Lutheran theology. He discusses the challenge of modern liberal education (Dewey’s progressive education) to the traditional Lutheran liberal arts education. For example, Korcok points out how Lutheran liberal arts pedagogy may guide the person who has been freed from sin in Baptism to think critically about his or her world. He concludes, not surprisingly, that the liberal arts provide a solid foundation for the understanding of all fields and especially the relationship of theology to other subjects.

This reviewer highly recommends this book to anyone who is a pastor, teacher, or other church worker for the historical perspectives alone. Additionally, Korcok argues persuasively for a return to a liberal arts curriculum in Lutheran schools. The historical evidence suggests that Lutherans had a distinct pedagogy based on the integration of the liberal arts and Lutheran theology. However, he does not discount the need to adapt the liberal arts to our modern schools, and he notes that Luther and Walther made adaptations to their own circumstances. Finally, this book has no major flaws except for some typos and the need for a bit more editing.

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