

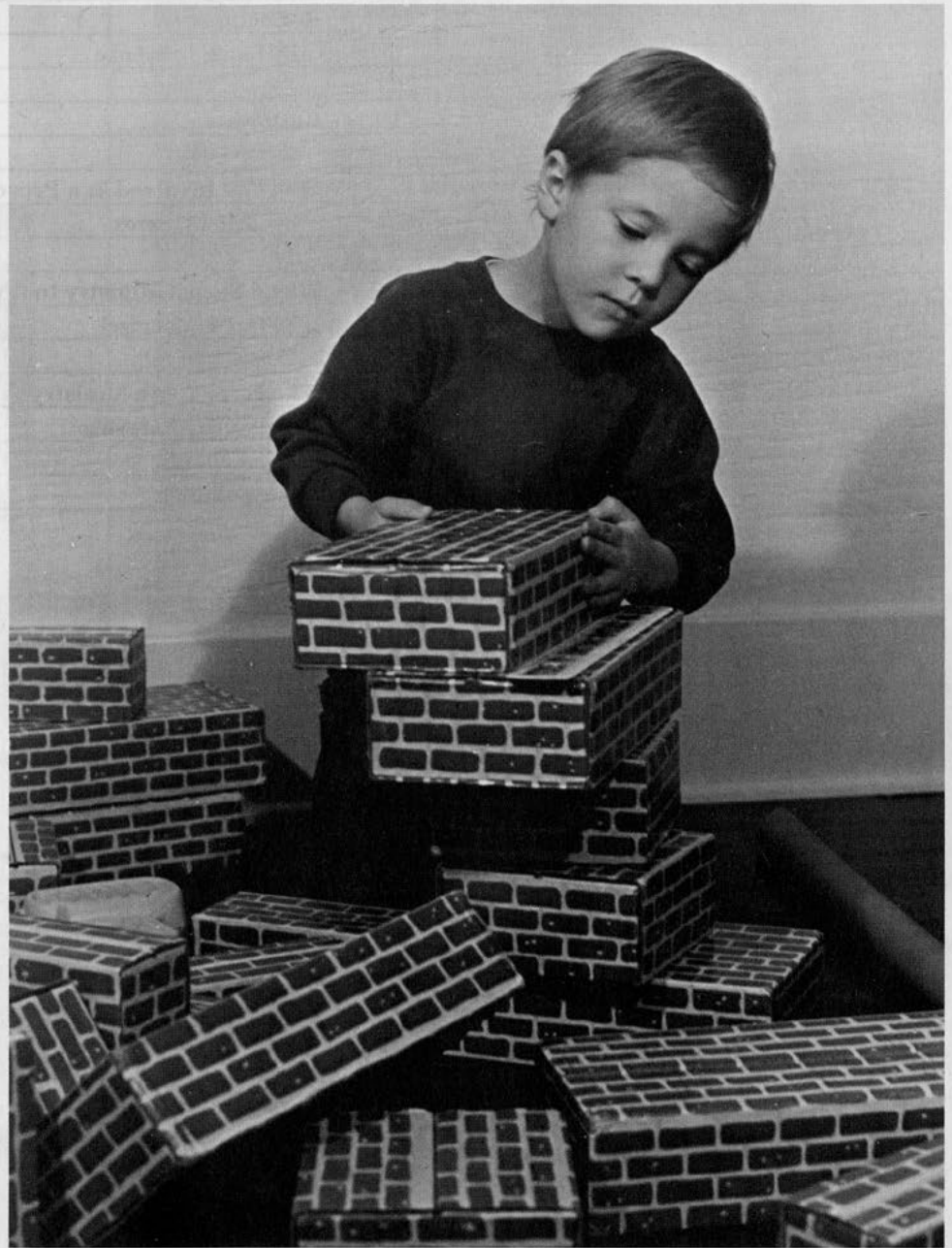
ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring, 1988

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UILDING A MINISTRY TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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EDITOR'S NOTES

As I read the copy for this number of *Issues* I was reminded of an incident that happened when my wife and I were seated at a table in a dinner theater with two other couples we had just met. One couple said, "If you don't mind, we'd like to do a Debbie table prayer." Then they folded their hands and prayed, "God is gracious, God is good, and we thank Him for this food."

As we ate, this couple proceeded to share how their young daughter has insisted that they pray before eating ever since they enrolled her in a Christian school in their community. Hopefully our ministries to children and youth are as effective in our respective parishes. Where we suspect or know that improvement is needed, the materials prepared by our authors for this *Issues* can help us motivate, stimulate, and do effective Christian ministry in our efforts to share the Gospel's sweet message generously with the younger members of our congregations.

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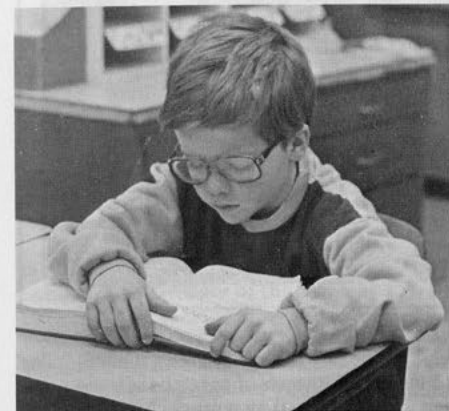
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reflections LEJECTION

The Bible record includes an incident in which certain Jewish leaders tried to discredit Jesus by reminding Him that He was not yet thirty years old. His disciples attempted to dissuade some mothers from bringing their children to Jesus.

Does this negative attitude, which reveals itself in actions that diminish the time and other resources your congregation provides for children and youth, find expression in your church today? The answer probably is both "yes" and "no" in many parishes.

The answer is, "no, it does not exist," to the extent that a parish provides first quality instructional facilities. This includes having the best instructional materials available to teach the Word. The answer is "no" to the extent that a parish provides trained, salaried teachers, directors of Christian education and pastors to minister to all children and youth. The attitude definitely does not exist if a congregation provides an atmosphere in which the younger generation feels that it too is an important part of the blessed, happy, spiritual family of God.

Unfortunately, a multitude of parishes honestly have to say "yes, we do diminish the importance of our ministry to children and youth by some of our actions and in some of the attitudes we display." Among the "areas needing improvement" one might discover that available Christian curricular material is limited to what the Sunday school collection will buy. Another is reserving the less than desirable rooms in the church plant for classes and activities of children and youth. Similar areas for congregational growth can often be found as we look at the qualifications of those who are the leaders for our children and youth, at the amount budgeted per child and youth as compared to similar figures for adult ministry, etc.

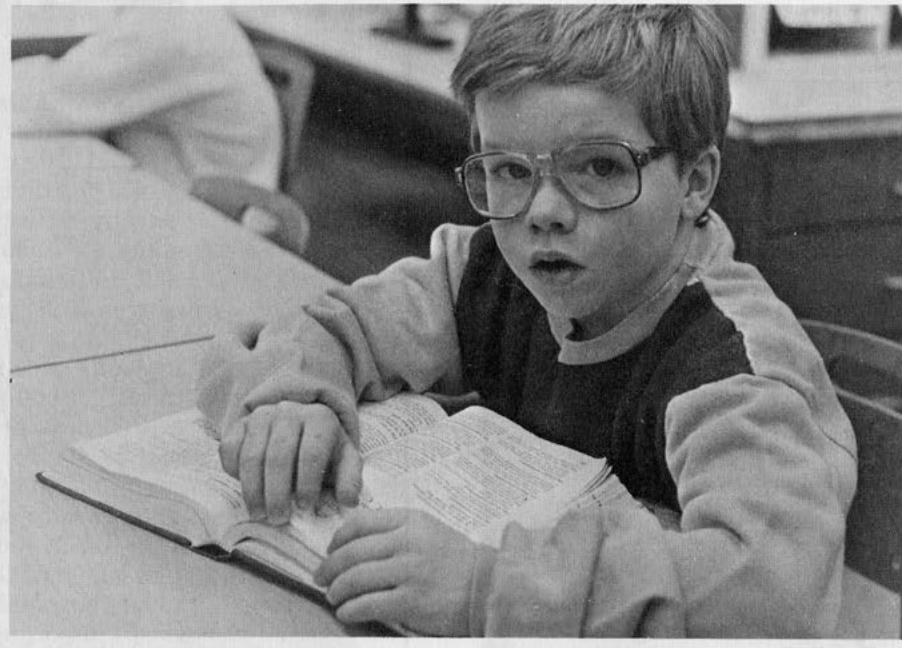
Let's be like the Jewish leaders who took time for a twelve year old boy who was eager to learn and who astonished them with His understanding and answers (Luke 2, 46). Let us also be like Jesus who let the children come to Him because "the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19, 14)

Concordia-Seward is ready to help you with your parish's needs for ministry to your children and youth. It is preparing one out of every four workers currently in training in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for the churches ministries. The majority of Concordia-Seward graduates are specialists in child and youth ministries.

Concordia is especially ready to help your congregation fulfill another of its responsibilities, to prepare for serving in the ministries of the church. We invite and urge you to encourage your sons and daughters to dedicate themselves to church service already while they are attending elementary school. The high school years is the time to tell youth how much you value and esteem those who preach and teach the Gospel. It is also important to be able to present your youth with information on your congregational moral and financial support package that will make entering Concordia a possibility for anyone from your parish who can meet the entrance requirements.

The Lord knows what we are doing for our children and youth. May He bless your leadership in providing whatever it takes to feed His lambs and both young and mature sheep.

Ralph L. Reinke, President



Serving Young People Well

Some thoughts prompted by a quotation by C.F.W. Walther

C.F.W. Walther, our first synodical president, is quoted as having said, "You cannot use your time to better advantage than by serving well the young people of the congregation." His concern for and support of ministry to young people led a few years after his death to the formation of a youth organization which served The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for over 80 years. While the organization has changed - Walther League, an independent auxiliary, was replaced in 1979 by Lutheran Youth Fellowship, an integral part of Synod - LCMS interest in and support of youth ministry has never altered, and this is reflected in most congregations in many ways.

Have you ever wondered why youth ministry has often rated such specialized concern? I believe it may be that as their children enter adolescence, parents begin to realize that their time of guardianship will one day come to a close, that their children are **children** no longer and will soon fully exercise their growing independence. Youth ministry then is an effort to extend the ministry of the church and family through the trying teenage years.

The words of Walther are not misplaced. "You cannot use your time to better advantage than by serving well the young people of the congregation." Although Walther was no doubt speaking to young seminary students - future pastors - I suggest that his advice is also good for parents, lay leaders, youth counselors, and average church members. Ask yourself this question, "How do we strive to serve youth WELL?"

Let me offer two simple (and not so original) thoughts which I feel need to be shared with the parents of today - especially the parents of all the "not-yet-teenagers" in our congregations.

The first is this: Don't start too late! One saying

goes, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." The attitudes and interests of young people are set in place long before they approach the teenage years. While parents' anxiety may increase as youth approach junior and senior high, their ability to influence (and the ability of the church to influence) is already, at that point, on the wane. Don't wait to plant the good seed of faith through Sunday School, family devotions, and time together as a Christian family. Do it now!

And I have a second warning: Don't climb the wrong mountain! Modern Americans seem to have "mountain-climbing" instincts. The urge to excel is strong in our generation, and parents seek to give their children every advantage - good education, sports activities, music lessons, quality life-style. Parents offer them every opportunity to excel. It will all be in vain if the choice of priorities insures only that they reach the top of the wrong mountain. "What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world but destroys his own soul?" Any mountain is the wrong mountain if it displaces Christ from the throne of our lives and if, in the family's decisions regarding how time will be spent, it takes priority over regular worship and Christian education opportunities.

Our time is "well spent" serving youth. We cannot afford a youth ministry which does not serve well the needs of youth and their families, or a ministry which serves only a few. Our goal - through LYF groups, the Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ, drama, gatherings, retreats, Bible studies and all the rest - is to reach out with a quality ministry to all youth and families in our congregation and community. By God's grace, we seem to be making progress toward that goal. We pray that it will be the same for others as well, for "You cannot use your time to better advantage than by serving well the young people of the congregation."

Tom Nummela

Teaming Up for Effective Ministry

On the wall of a service station in a small Nebraska town hangs an old dust covered, age-yellowed paper plaque which shows two large work horses harnessed and hitched to a large boulder. They are pulling mightily, head down, legs straining . . . going nowhere. They are pulling in opposite directions. The caption reads: "Pulling together makes a job easier."

The horses may expend their energy and collapse in exhaustion, having accomplished nothing. The stronger of the two may move the large rock and thereby move the other animal as well. One's harness may break sending both pitching uncontrollably on their opposite ways. Each of these possibilities would have less effect on the boulder than if the horses were to team up and pull together.

Making the assumption that the mission of the two horses was to move the rock, it is unlikely that the task would be accomplished unless something happens to change their individual goals or unify their efforts.

Even the Lord's disciples had a problem with goals and team work. They were frequently pulled in a direction opposing the Savior. Peter, the impulsive one, needed a crisis of gigantic proportions to make him realize which is the proper direction. James and John fought over who would be greatest. Jesus reminded them both that neither was to be greater but all were to be servants, working together, meeting the needs of others.

Do modern-day Lutheran (or other Christians) disciples pull in the same direction, toward a common goal, or do they as teams of called workers - pastors, teachers, DCEs, principals - work on their own turf forming one, two, three, a dozen isolated groups pulling their boulders of work in opposite directions?

Scriptures say that everyone is blessed with special gifts and talents. The Lord sends teams of these equipped workers to His churches to carry out the Great Commission. And today the Christian churches on earth need every ounce of strength that the leaders can produce using their God-given talents. All of this energy must be moving in the proper direction, pulling the Church toward its goal.

Samuel Smith Drury said, "I would rather have a wooden church with a splendid parson than a splendid church with a wooden parson." Replacing "parson" with "team of ministers" points out one more aspect of team ministry. The team cannot wait for the "perfect" or "right" situation in which to function. Every call from the Holy Spirit

places a specific team member in a specific location for a specific reason.

The pastor must encourage the teachers to fulfill their calling. He must, at every juncture, speak in support of Christian education in the Sunday school, day school, mid-week school or in any other place. A pastor who does not speak supportively of the total Christian education program in his parish is doing the parish a gross disservice. In so doing he begins to pull the heavy load in a different direction. Whether it be by commission or by omission, the results are the same; the mission of the Church suffers.

Likewise, the called educators must encourage and support the pastor as he fulfills his calling. They must be united with the pastor in purpose and process. A monumental break in ministry occurs when educators do not openly and constantly support the programs of the congregation, as guided by the pastor.

The Heavenly Father provides the people and the place. The Only-begotten Son provides the message. The Holy Spirit provides the courses and the power. The Lord's Church is the arena. May the team move, unified, toward the goal - "Go . . . make disciples of all!"

Stanley Fehlhafer

A Neglected Ministry

"I hate God!" A young mother stood facing me. Cradled in her arms was her newborn Down Syndrome son, Matthew. This outreach evangelism call was not going as planned. Words seemed hollow and useless at the moment. What did the church I represented have to offer this young mother? Her anger spilled out in a wash of tears. As I held Matthew, she reviewed events of the days since Matthew's birth. Mountains of information, undefined terms, questions without answers, parents, family and friends who didn't know how to respond had added to a stressful situation. How could this fragile young family successfully withstand the stresses associated with raising a handicapped child?

The stress of child rearing is not a new phenomenon, especially when it is a handicapped child. Family therapists have identified five coping resources used in stressful situations. One of these resources, religiosity, describes the role religious beliefs play in a person's adaptations to life experiences. Not surprisingly, researchers found strong evidence that religious beliefs provide a "buffer" to stressful situations. Survey re-

spondents indicated their religious beliefs helped them accept their handicapped child and provided a source of daily strength. These results are not unusual and, quite possibly, could have been expected. The significant results of the survey indicated that although the respondents regarded their religious beliefs as a source of comfort and support, 42 percent subsequently participated less in church activities. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents viewed their church as less supportive than other community agencies.

Statistics can, and often do, indicate many things. It appears the beliefs of the church provide a private, individual source of strength. However, the church as an agency is not viewed as acting on the beliefs it espouses. This is appalling. How can a church which espouses caring and concern for fellow believers be so lax in providing for members in need?

The church is a collection of individuals, as is any social agency. It can organize and promote social ministry programs like other agencies do. In the maze of social ministry programs within the church, the care of handicapped members and their families has received less than priority attention. Much is written within the church regarding ministry to youth, single adults, and the aging. These are indeed important ministries. Ministry to handicapped individuals and their families is equally important. Where is the church's commitment to this ministry? A review of Christ's ministry should cause us to focus on the blind, the lame, the diseased, the handicapped. The church's focus on this ministry is blurred.

The corporate church must attend to this ministry by preparing programs and providing resources for congregational use. Lest the responsibility for ministry to handicapped individuals and their families be assigned to the corporate church and left at that, it is necessary to remember that each of us is the church to those around us where we live, work and play. A church member espouses specific beliefs. Witnessing to these beliefs demands action. Ministry is action. Active ministry to the handicapped and their families takes many forms. Everything from listening to providing respite care can help. Assess your skills; choose your form of ministry; get involved! Remember Jesus' words - "If you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me."

Judith Preuss

Why Get Involved in a Preschool Ministry?

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14)

For more than 50 years, congregations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have been providing Sunday school classes for three- and four-year old children,¹³ who are the ages now most commonly referred to by the term "preschool." Some congregations have also included such young children in their vacation Bible school classes. In recent years, however, a number of congregations have been extending their ministry to include preschoolers in classes that meet for half-day sessions two, three, or five times per week; and a growing number of congregations are sponsoring programs of full day care for groups of children that include those of ages three and four. The 1972 *Statistical Yearbook* was the first of the Synodical yearbooks to take note of this, when it reported 10,140 prekindergarten children in Lutheran schools.¹² The 1986-1987 Lutheran school statistics report 1400 preschools and day care centers in operation in Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations,² with 54,091 prekindergarten children enrolled.¹¹

Family Needs and Structure Are Changing

Why are so many congregations getting involved in a preschool ministry? One answer to this question might be that they are attempting to meet more of the needs of the changing society in the United States. "In perhaps the greatest social change of this century, women are entering the paid labor force in ever-increasing numbers. Among women, mothers of young children are the fastest growing group of workers in the nation." This statement in the report, "The Child Care Crisis in Texas: An Introduction to the Problem,"⁹ is followed by the statistic that more than 54% of mothers of children under six years of age were in the paid labor force in 1984. Decker and Decker report that "the number of children younger than six years of age with mothers in the work force was 5.8 million in 1970 and is projected to nearly double by 1990."⁵ Many of these children are living in single-parent families, which comprise 15% of all United States families.⁸

Family structures and lifestyles in the United States have definitely changed, and Decker and Decker note that "Most parents, even the advantaged - economically, educationally, and physically and emotionally healthy - often feel inadequate in trying to meet the demands of our rapidly changing society. Early childhood programs need to offer support to these parents as they help their children develop during the early years."⁵

Day Care - A Need and Opportunity

Full day care is a primary need for many families; and

many churches have become involved in meeting this need. A study by the National Council of Churches of Christ, completed in 1982, found that churches are the single largest providers of child care in this country. One church out of every three houses a child care program. About half of these programs are actually operated by the church, while the others are operated by individuals or groups who rent space from the church. The 14,589 programs identified in this 1982 study did constitute the largest single sector of the "child care market." The report noted that, for every child in Sunday school, eight children are in church-housed care Monday through Friday.¹⁴

Aren't there already enough church-related programs for young children, then? Of course, there is never enough child care to meet the needs of families, but the NCCC report identified another fact that should be of concern. Explicit religious instruction was often conspicuously absent in the child care programs being operated in church facilities. Spiritual development was indicated as a program goal by only one-fifth of church-operated programs that serve preschoolers, and by only 10% of those that serve infants and toddlers. Seventy-eight percent of church-operated programs did indicate that religious beliefs are important considerations in the hiring of staff, but only 39% of independent centers in churches said that.¹⁴ This would imply that there is another valid answer to the question, "Why Get Involved in a Preschool Ministry?" God's people need to be concerned about the spiritual development of young children who are in a critical period of life for forming attitudes and values.

Full day care is a major national need that will be highlighted in April of 1988 in a national, prime-time documentary special on public television entitled, "Who Cares for the Children?" This special, produced by the Public Television Outreach Alliance, will "showcase some of the most innovative and successful solutions around the country to providing quality child care through progressive uses of resources."⁴

Preschool Education is Growing

Full day care, however, is not the only kind of program that is being offered for preschool-age children and/or requested by their parents. The United States Census Bureau reported in 1986 that "39% of all three-and-four-year-olds, or 23.5 million children, are attending schools - a 25% increase from 1980 and a 400% increase over 1965. The increase occurs among children of non-working mothers as much or more than among those of working mothers."⁶ According to *Education Week*, Nov. 17, 1982 and reported by Decker and Decker, "The National Center for Educational Statistics predicts a 33% climb in preschool enrollment between 1980 and 1990. This will be the largest gain

by Leah M. Serck

for any level of education."⁵ Preschool children are going to school!

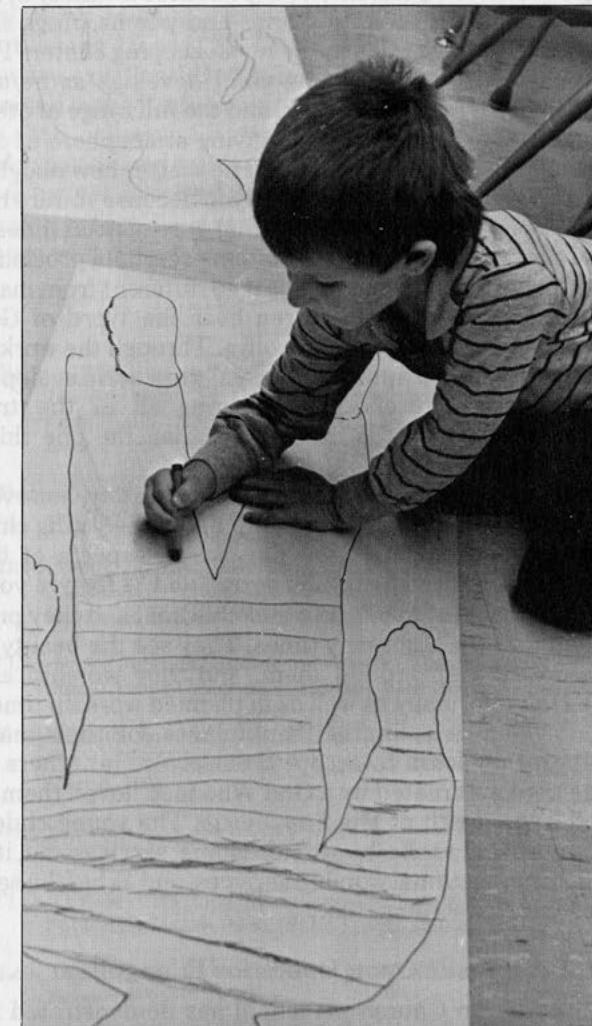
At present, most preschool programs are privately operated by individuals, churches, or for-profit groups. A growing trend, however, is for public schools to provide classes for preschoolers. While many states had already been offering free public schooling for preschool children with developmental disabilities, the number of states offering programs for non-disabled four-year-olds continues to grow each year. In 1986 both New York and Delaware began offering classes in some of their public schools, joining the District of Columbia, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, who had already been offering such programs in many of their schools. The state of Iowa passed legislation in 1986 that could put 4-year-olds into their public schools in the early 1990's.

Congregations from the various Lutheran church bodies have already become much involved in preschool ministry. In his Foreword to the new manual for preschool boards and administrators, *Managing Lutheran Preschools*, Dr. Martin Wessler reported that there are currently over 2,500 Lutheran preschools, most of which were started and are now being operated by congregations. More than 15,000 board members and directors are involved in these operations, and more than 60,000 students, along with their parents, are being served by these Lutheran preschools. Lutheran congregations have discovered that "the preschool ministry is an important function in carrying out the mission of the Lutheran congregation."¹⁰

It was stated in the 1983 Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod *Convention Proceedings*, Res. 2-17, that we as a church body believe that "the most effective educational agencies available to the church for equipping children and youth for ministry are the full-time Lutheran elementary (including preschool) and secondary schools."¹¹ The fact that some 54,091 children were in LC-MS prekindergarten programs in 1986 indicates that many congregations believe this. The Lutheran preschool can help to carry out the five functions of the congregation: education, worship, evangelism, fellowship, and service.

Preschools Feed Jesus' Lambs

A high quality preschool is carefully designed to provide appropriate experiences for each child at her/his level of development.³ Such a Lutheran preschool provides a stimulating setting for the development of the whole child. In a climate of Christian love and caring, children explore interesting materials, and they develop their intellectual skills through experimentation and discovery learning. They sing and laugh and work and play with other children under the guidance of dedicated Christian teachers, and thus grow in social skills and knowledge. Their physical "selves" develop as they run and jump and hop, when they



play on climbing equipment, and when they handle puzzles and games and blocks and toys. The creative life of the young child develops as she/he experiences a variety of art media, dramatizes favorite stories and poems, sings and dances, and creates roles in the housekeeping center. The emotional "self" of the young child develops as he/she experiences joy, sadness, anger, and the full range of other human feelings in the warm, forgiving atmosphere of the Christian preschool. Learning that no matter how naughty one is, Jesus still loves and forgives you because you are His own dear child has to make one feel very special indeed. And of course the Lutheran Christian preschool proclaims Jesus Christ! This is what makes it so different from many other preschools. Little children hear the Word of God every day in Bible lessons and songs. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, their spiritual "selves" grow and develop. A good Lutheran preschool is teaching all of the true "basics," and nothing is more basic than the one thing needful! (Luke 10:42)

Jesus is not confined to any one part of the day, however. The Christian faith and the worship life of the young child are nurtured throughout the day, in all aspects of the curriculum. Children hear "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you" from their teachers and from other children, and they pray with and for others at many times. They see the beauty of God's creation all around them, and they worship and praise Him informally as well as in planned worship times. They develop a feeling of thankfulness for their many blessings; they learn to accept themselves and others as unique persons created by a God Who just "loved them to death" - the death of His Son, Jesus. The young child's faith is nurtured as she/he attends chapel services and, it is hoped, congregational worship services, and as he/she sees the teacher worshipping, too.

Preschools Open Doors for Evangelism

The Lutheran Church preschool has demonstrated its effectiveness in evangelism. Most young children love to sing the songs they learn at preschool, and they love to talk about their dear Friend, Jesus. They will do this at home, as well as when playing with friends in their neighborhoods. They want to pray at home before meals, as they do in preschool before snacks. Most parents of young children are interested in what their children are learning in school, and because children love to have them come in and look around, parents also get to experience the Christian environment and visit with the teachers. They see the love of Christ shining in these teachers, and they see the differences in their children when Christ is a major figure in their lives. Because so many of the children in Lutheran preschools come from non-Lutheran families, and many come from families who have no other church affiliation, the preschool has brought many new families into the congregations. Pastor Wayne Menking of Trinity Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, Texas, is one of the principal speakers on the new videotape, "I Can't Wait," which was produced by Augsburg in 1986.⁷ Pastor Menking lauds

Trinity's Children's Center for its outreach with the Gospel to families in the community. He says that it is one of the congregation's most visible ministries, helping the community to know "who we are and what we are about." Pastor Menking has found that, through this program for young children, Trinity is able to "reach ears that would not otherwise be hearing the Gospel."

Christian fellowship is experienced by the children, their teachers, and the other staff members who are working around the church facilities when preschool classes are in session. It is also experienced in parent meetings, and in small gatherings of persons who meet to make materials or equipment for the program. Support, encouragement, and caring are felt as children and adults meet to work, play, or worship together as members of the body of Christ. Children begin to get a feeling for "church" as being more a group of people who love God and one another rather than as just a building.

The Lutheran Christian preschool is providing a service to the community with its educational program for the children. Study groups for parents and other interested adults, especially those relating to various aspects of child development, are another service that many congregations are providing through their preschools. Children might sing in nursing homes and visit with the "grandpa and grandmas" who live there. They may participate in gathering food for the community pantry, and clothing for the needy in their community or in other places.

Some Concerns Evaluated

Might there be some good reasons for *not* getting involved in a preschool ministry? At the conclusion of Chapter 11 in *Managing Lutheran Preschools*,¹⁰ Dr. Glenn Bracht shares a number of concerns that might be raised. Some people believe that preschool children are too young to go to school, and that they should be at home with their mothers. Many preschool children *are* at home with their mothers much of the time, but many others do not have a mother at home during the day and are spending their waking hours in some place other than their home anyway. It is also said that preschools are just babysitting services, and that all the children do is play. While some of the information shared earlier in this article should help to dispel that concern, it is also true that young children learn effectively *through* play, which has been called by many prominent authorities "the child's work." Trustees and persons in charge of other programs of the church fear that the preschool will use space that the church needs for other purposes. It is safe to say that most of the 1400 programs presently operated by congregations in the LC-MS are sharing space with the Sunday school or the Boy Scouts or the Wednesday quilting group or with any of a number of other groups, and most of them are making the arrangement work so that it is tolerable, if not always completely satisfactory, to all concerned. Usually the biggest concern, however, is that the preschool will cost a lot of money. It will! Quality programs *are* costly, when one considers that

well-qualified staff must be employed; that safe and appropriate materials and equipment must be made or purchased; that the facility must be heated and/or cooled, lighted, insured, and maintained so that it is safe for young children - and that it might even need renovation to meet state licensing regulations.

Is it all worthwhile? The senior students in Early Childhood Education at Concordia, Seward, were asked to respond to the question of "Why Get Involved in a Preschool Ministry?" Many of the ideas that have been shared earlier were also expressed by these students. One young man, Carl, had these thoughts in his concluding paragraph: "It (the preschool) can be a marvelous learning and growing experience for the church. But whatever 'branches off' from the preschool take place, they will all tie into the spreading of the Gospel. The parent who seeks the teacher's advice may find that she/he (the teacher) has used this as an opportunity for sharing Jesus. The grandmother (aide) who buttons the child's coat may tell the child of the love of Jesus, or merely show it with her smiles or her little gifts to the preschool room. A preschool that cares and shows a great witness to the entire community of love, care, and concern." Perhaps Julie provided one of the most important reasons for getting involved in a preschool ministry. She said, "It's possible and probable that in your preschool ministry, there will be children whose lives are *only* touched by Christ - His love and message - right *there!*"

Jesus told His disciples, "Feed My Lambs" (John 21:15). He also said, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of My Father Who is in heaven." It is not the will of My Father Who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:10, 14, R.S.V.). Scripture says that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). If one little child comes to know Jesus as Savior because the Holy Spirit was at work in the preschool in your congregation, that precious soul would make it all worthwhile. And if the reports from existing preschools are correct, the angels must be having a most delightful time!

Resource Sources

Congregations interested in starting a preschool ministry can get much helpful information from Mrs. Marilyn Beccue, Associate Director of Early Childhood Education, Board for Parish Services, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, St. Louis, Missouri. *Managing Lutheran Preschools*¹⁰ will be a special blessing, as will the many publications available from the Lutheran Education Association/Department of Early Childhood Education, River Forest, Illinois. A key publication from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to assist the congregation in recognizing the planning for a program that is developmentally appropriate for young children is the newly expanded edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving*

Children Birth through Age Eight.³ *Integrating the Faith*. Vol. 1 for Preschool and Kindergarten¹ is indispensable when it comes time to actually plan the program; and the *Eternal Word* religion curriculum materials from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri for Prekindergarten are excellent! Dedicated Christian teachers are being trained in the Early Childhood programs at a number of the LC-MS colleges. Contact the Director of Placement for information and credentials on available candidates.

Why get involved in a preschool ministry? The best reason is that it is a real ministry to the people of God - to those who already know Him, and to many who do not.

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Why a Parish Ministry to Children
is Crucial Today!

W

HEN I WAS A CHILD GROWING UP in Minnesota, there were many things that made a lasting impression on me. Strangely enough, one of the strongest impressions came from the Gerber's baby food commercial, "Babies Are Our Business - Our Only Business." Through the words of this commercial and the smile of the half-dressed baby in the commercial, the Gerber people tried to convey to the television audience that their company made it their business to provide nutritious food for all babies, so that these small children would receive a good start in life and be able to have a healthy future.

Lutheran educators of today have no choice but to establish a motto that is a parallel to this long-lived Gerber commercial. In order to ensure that children are treated with the genuine concern that God intended, we must all boldly state that in Lutheran education "Children Are Our Business-Our Only Business." The business of Lutheran education is to ensure that children will get a nutritious spiritual, emotional, social, aesthetic, intellectual and physical diet to enable them to have a healthy future.

Children Are Very Important to God

Children are important creations of God. Already in Genesis 33 we are told that children are a gift of God. In Psalms 127 we learn that children are a blessing and a heritage of the Lord. They are a result of God's goodness. Concern for children is also evident in Scripture. When some tired, disgusted disciples thought that "children should be seen and not heard" they were quickly chastised by our Lord who blessed the children and wanted them near Him.

We are reminded in God's Word that it is "child-like" faith that is strong and healthy. When God inspired the Bible, He did not leave references to children out of the text. He made sure that Bible scholars would understand that it was a young David who slew a mighty Goliath; that it was a young Daniel that refused to bow to idols; that it was a baby Moses who was already in infancy selected as a strong leader; that it was a young boy's lunch that was used to feed 5000; that it was Naaman's servant girl who convinced his wife that he should go to the river; and that it was a young Jonathan and a young David who discovered the meaning of friendship early in their lives.

God has given directives to parents in the book of Ephesians and Colossians concerning their relationship to their children. He warns parents not to discourage their children, anger their children, or irritate their children.

by David Mannigel

Instead God desires that parents raise their children in Christian instruction and discipline. This is an awesome task. It is a task that is so immense that our Lutheran church has seen fit to establish Lutheran day schools to assist parents in this God-given command.

Parents Need a Strong Spiritual Partner

Lutheran schools existed in our country long before the organization of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The dominant role of Lutheran schools has been to train children in the way of the Lord.

Lutheran classrooms are far different today than they were even as late as the fifties. The classrooms are now heterogeneous classrooms made up of children from various denominations; children of unchurched families, children who do not speak English, children from many different cultural and racial backgrounds, children from single-parent homes, children of dual-working parents, latchkey children, children from homes with "live-ins," children from homes where abuse is rampant, and the list goes on. Never before in the history of Lutheran schools has the need to help parents nurture their children been greater. Never before has Lutheran education needed to take more seriously the slogan, "Children Are Our Business-Our Only Business." The school and the home are going to have to become *stronger parents* in the education of children.

Vital to becoming partners in education is getting to know the families with whom the school is to become partners. Home visits are an asset (a must) in getting to know the families and the homes from which children come. A home visit allows the teacher to see what the child sees, to hear what the child hears, to smell what the child smells, to sit where the child sits, and the like. It is easier for a teacher to understand why a child can't get rid of head lice after seeing all the animals that live in the child's home; it is easier to understand why a child uses frequent profanity after conversing with his parents for half an hour; it is easier for a teacher to understand why a child cannot keep a desk clean after sitting in the living room in which he lives; it is easier for the teacher to empathize with a child who has smelly clothes after choking on the cigarette smoke in his home; and it is easier for the teacher to understand why the child can wear a different outfit to school every day after leaving the mansion in which he lives and by which two Rolls-Royces are always parked. Home visits help teachers understand what a child understands and the way he understands it.

Children Need Christian School Teachers

Once teachers understand how a child perceives his world, they can begin working with the child to help him understand that he is a special child of God and a worthwhile human being. Recent statistics show that when children enter first grade 80% of them have positive self-esteem. Shocking as it may sound, by the time children reach the fifth grade the number of children having positive self-esteem has dropped to 20%, and by the time students are in high school the number has descended to 5%. These facts are scary. Is it any wonder that drug abuse, teen-age pregnancy, alcohol abuse, and teen-age suicide are on the rise? For some reason children have gotten the idea that they are not worthwhile human beings created by God. This must change, and *Lutheran schools* can be a good change agent.

Lutheran schools can offer all of the traditional secular subjects in a Christ-centered, Gospel-strong atmosphere. Lutheran educators, unlike public school educators, have the opportunity and privilege to daily share the news that God has forgiven everyone and that there is nothing anyone has done that can cause a separation from God. Children can be made to feel their importance to this world and God's love for them in this world. Everyday that a child is in a Lutheran school he can be assured of the fact that Jesus loves him and died for him. Everyday that he is in a Lutheran classroom he can see the model of a Christian teacher and become a reflection of that model in his life.

Lutheran educators are "alive." That means they are "full of life." They are willing to go the extra mile to ensure that every child in school is successful. Attempts are made by the life-filled educators to have learning situations that are intriguing to all students. An alert educator will know the strengths and weaknesses of all of his students and will provide for those strengths and weaknesses in rewarding ways.

One midwestern Lutheran school has an elementary faculty that weekly marks the successes of all the children in the elementary department. Each elementary teacher evaluates the kind of week each child in the class had and makes note of at least one way in which each child was successful. If a teacher cannot think of successes a child is having, the matter is discussed with the principal and a course of action is formulated which will usually involve the parents in at least a telephone conversation. In the same Lutheran school, the junior high department meets bi-weekly to discuss concerns about students. The faculty is concerned that each student emerge as a winner and plans strategies to assist in this goal. It is "little things" like success charts and bi-weekly evaluation meetings that help keep children in the perspective in which they should be kept.

How a Home and School Partnership Works

As stated earlier, in order for a school to adhere to the motto, "Children Are Our Business-Our Only Business," it is tremendously important that it form a strong bond with

the home and that the home and school become active partners in the education of children. Very often parents are uncertain as to how to help their children become worthwhile human beings. Parents need to be trained and/or helped in becoming partners with the school. The earlier parents become aware of ways to assist schools in nurturing their children, the better and longer lasting the results will be. A good time for a school to start assisting in the education of parents as partners with them is when the children are in kindergarten.

Our school has initiated a program this year entitled "Creating Home Involvement in Learning Development" (C.H.I.L.D.). This program is a four-part-in-service program for all kindergarten parents. Each part of the inservice is one hour in length and deals with a different phase of child development. Each inservice meeting is designed to give parents helpful hints and ideas for becoming partners with the school by reinforcing the parents with the developmental activities that are happening in the school.

The first inservice pointed out how children are "spittin' images" of their parents. Values taught in a Christian day school can be undone in the home if the values there are weak and worldly. A strong Christian day school can help the parents see the importance of working together to instill strong Christian values in children who live in a world where values are deteriorating rapidly.

A second session taught parents the importance of communicating with their children. It taught them how to listen to their children.

A third helped parents understand that God didn't place the same intellectual capacity in each child. Too often parents worry if their child is not reading the same book or studying the same spelling words as other children in the class. The goal of the third meeting was to help parents understand that some children are "Leo Latebloomers," and that there is nothing wrong with that.

The final program emphasized nurturing the physical self. Parents were given tips to help ensure that their child was physically ready for school each day. Suggestions were given for good hygiene and proper body care. The ideas for the programs at these four meetings were selected by the principal and kindergarten teacher. Their selection was based upon what they observed to be some of the needs for parents to satisfy if they are to become better partners with the school.

Because Lutheran schools care so much about the children in them, they do not give up easily when it comes to doing anything that could possibly be an aid for the nurturing of those children. As the schools continue to reach out to the children through their families, it becomes evident that the "cries for help" come in many ways and from many different directions. A strong cry seems to come from parents of adolescents who seem uncertain as to how to cope with this age child. One of the best outlets for parents with these problems is to let them hear other parents with the same problems. A "Parents of Adolescents" support group is a positive way to help parents help each other. Very often through a group such as this, one parent learns that

the situation in his house is quite normal and his fears are laid aside. He has been encouraged by the words of other adolescents' parents.

The Parent Partner Plan

A Lutheran school can also provide opportunities for parents to become partners with each other and to help each other grow in Christ. A new program just initiated by our School Board is "Parent Partners." The model for this program is the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus combined social functions with spiritual teaching. He called Zacchaeus to come out of the sycamore tree because Jesus wanted to go to Zacchaeus' house for dinner (social). While Jesus was at Zacchaeus' house, He taught some Scriptural truths and Zacchaeus became a new man.

Our School Board has paired up 80 families in their "Parent Partners" program. Forty of these families were inserviced by the board on how to be "encouraged." This is what the book of Hebrews calls us to be. These "trained" forty families each asked another family to pair up with them so that they could grow to appreciate one another more and grow in love for Christ together. Each paired group will meet once each month to nurture friendship and, hopefully, to become stronger in faith. If the plan works, it will be enlarged to eventually include all of the school families. This is another example of how Lutheran schools care in an "extended" way for the children of the school.

Lutheran Schools Open Mission Opportunities

Lutheran schools are not inexpensive. It is probably the Lutheran school that swells the church budget more than anything else in it. But, schools are a very valid and legitimate part of that budget. There is probably no other program of the church that has such an intensive ministry with any other group of people. This particular target group has the luxury of hearing about Jesus and His love for them five days a week. The children not only learn about Jesus; they also learn how to tell others about Him. The children are taught to become little missionaries. There are numerous examples from parishes throughout Synod that could be shared about children of non-churched parents who have attended a Lutheran day school and have shared the Good News that was learned in school with their parents. This led them to take steps to become active members of the church. Many of our Lutheran teachers and pastors today are in those positions because they were motivated by the lives and words of their Christian day school teachers. Hundreds of Lutheran teachers all over our land can relate experiences about receiving letters from former students who express the tremendous comfort and strength they have received in their life situations because they could recall Scripture passages, Bible stories, hymns, prayers, and the like from their days in a Lutheran school.

The Lutheran school is a vital mission of the church today. It can provide children with a spiritual avenue that can produce a positive self-worth in children that will help



them be a powerful witness for Christ throughout their entire lives. Just last week one of our junior high teachers asked a boy in a study hall who had his assignments done to respond to the phrase, "I am proud of..." This ninth grader wrote the following:

"... being myself: having the ability of running, swimming, cooking, skateboarding, piano playing and finding new synthesizer options every day. I'm proud that I have fine artistic ability, brought from my dad. I am proud that I can manage money wisely and that I can think forward before I do things. I am proud that I worship the supreme God and that I have the utmost faith in God. I am unusually proud of having so much faith in God that I have absolutely no fear, whatsoever, of death. I am proud that I attend a school that is high in quality. I am proud that I have a synthesizer and that I can create various sounds and songs with this instrument. I am proud that I have extreme interest in New Wave music and of artists of quality music."

This young man has attended our Lutheran school for nine years. He feels good about himself and knows that God is his Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. He has been the business of our school - our only business. I am proud and thankful that I am part of this very important and special business that is one means that has been created by God to share His love and forgiveness with the children of the world.

Who Says Youth Ministry Is a Must?

Several weeks ago a veteran director of Christian education (DCE) sent me a brochure which described his congregation's ministry efforts with its young people. Blazoned on the cover was this statement:

"Our goal is that youth will see that Christ forgives all sin, brings to life faith in God, and leads us to live out our faith, through fellowship, study, recreation, service, singing, and worship."

At the bottom of the brochure's cover page were these bold words **"THIS IS A MUST!"**¹

On the surface, few congregations, especially their paid staff, lay leaders, and parents with young people, would dispute this urgent claim. Yet consistent, caring and comprehensive ministry to young people necessitates extensive investment of manpower and money. When considering all of the needs of a congregation, is it a "must" that there be this kind of ministry to the 12-21 year olds?

This article will attempt to explore why the "must" is so. Prior to doing that, the author will lay out some key perspectives related to youth ministry. Basic needs of young people will also be focused and characteristics that help a ministry to/with youth to be vital and meaningful will be reviewed. Some "hoped-for-outcomes" of such a ministry will also be described.

Since youth ministry happens in specific contexts, with specific people, the remainder of this article will focus on the efforts of one parish to answer the question, "who says youth ministry is a must?"²

Parish Realities

Budget time had come again at Grace Lutheran Church. Micah Burke wondered if he had the energy for all the meetings, parking lot discussions, and phone calls that lay ahead. Even though he was in his second year of chairing the Youth Board, he still felt uncomfortable having to debate the merits of various church programs. Not only did he have to defend a youth budget of \$8,800 but he was aware that there were some rumblings about how the Director of Christian Education's salary had added considerably to the congregational outlay for youth ministry.

In some ways this year seemed like a re-run of last year. With ten weeks to go, projected congregational expenses exceeded income by \$12,000. Various lay leaders, especially those on the finance committee, were already assuming their "doom and gloom" posture. And the treasurer had resumed his annual litany of "Do you really need all of the money you've asked for?"

Last year such reactions put Micah on edge. Not this

year. With the help of Grace's DCE he and the youth board had taken a very pro-active stance toward advocating for youth ministry. Therein lay Micah's major discovery as a board chairman, namely, if congregational members and leaders were expected to be supportive of youth ministry, they needed to be educated regarding its vision and goals and given a consistent up-date on what had been happening to and with young people through their various activities and programs.

Developing a Team

Another discovery that Micah had made as chairman was that effective ministry to youth happened through the joint efforts of both youth and adults. Just this past year the youth ministry team had finally jelled. It was composed of the following five inter-linking mutually supportive groups:³

Youth Board: Five adults elected in the annual voters assembly to serve with four young people (two from the high school group and one each from the junior high and young singles group) whose major responsibility was to give direction to the overall ministry, decide policy questions, develop and implement a budget.

Program Planning Team: Elected representatives from grades 7 through 12 plus the youth counselors and the DCE whose major task was the actual planning and carrying out of the activities, events, and programs that composed Grace's youth ministry efforts.

Youth Counselors: Selected adults who were trained to support young people in carrying out their activities, events, and programs and to develop caring relationships with individual people.

Parent Council: Parents selected from the various age groups who periodically met with the youth board chairman, DCE, and counselors to share ideas, information, and concerns.

Youth Ministry Advocates: A network of parish members, none of whom had current program responsibilities in youth ministry, who were willing to 1) minister one-to-one with a selected young person; and 2) speak on behalf of youth ministry activities, projects, and programs amongst other adults.⁴

After some "trial and error," Micah found that these five "members of the team" groups functioned best when there was an ample amount of coordination, cooperation, communication, and common vision happening within the team. He also discovered that a dependable vehicle for strengthening these kinds of behaviors was a well-designed retreat.

by William Karpenko



Laying the Foundation

Even though it had been a minor miracle to find a workable date for the Youth Board and Program Planning Team, the outcomes of their first weekend retreat were well worth the effort. Besides building a sense of community among those who retreated, the ad hoc retreat committee had identified three other hoped-for-outcomes:

- 1) **Development of a youth ministry mission statement;**
- 2) **Identification of the scope of Grace's ministry to youth;**
- 3) **Re-establishing the means through which cooperation, coordination, and communication would take place.**

Micah hadn't realized how ambitious the retreat committee's goals were until after he had gotten home on Sunday evening. He also was profoundly grateful that they had invited a neighboring parochial school principal to be their retreat facilitator, and that they had asked their pastor to lead them through a study of Romans 12 as a basis for

developing their mission statement.

After four revisions, the MISSION STATEMENT that was agreed upon for the coming year was:

In view of God's mercy in Jesus Christ, we - youth and adults - seek to be transformed by God's Spirit into living sacrifices, always maintaining a realistic picture of who God has made us, that our congregation's youth ministry may build up the entire Body of Christ within our parish and beyond as we share our grace-given gifts through various worship, outreach, recreation, service, fellowship, and educational activities.

Building off of this mission statement, the SCOPE of Grace's ministry to its youth presented another challenge. What helped to shape people's thinking were two questions that the DCE raised: 1) What are the distinctive characteristics of Grace's youth ministry? and 2) What needs of youth is Grace's ministry attempting to fulfill?

The first question generated lots of discussion which finally was crystallized by a section of a book that the DCE had brought along as a resource.⁵ Grace's youth ministry was to be characterized by its being:

Person-centered: providing diverse activities and programs through which young people could be heard, known, and understood;

Peer-centered: providing training and encouragement so that youth can minister to each other;

Team-centered: linking together youth and adults of different ages and abilities to achieve common goals;

Content-centered: providing events and classes that prepare youth to live their faith now and in the future;

Christ-centered: maintaining a focus on Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life regardless of the type of activity or project.

The second question focused upon an acronym - AFFIRMS - that Merton and Irene Strommen had developed to describe the needs of young people in *Five Cries of Parents*.⁶ By expanding on their concept the group identified the following twelve basic needs of youth - AFFIRMATIONS - and twelve goals to meet those needs during the coming year.

Achievement: The satisfaction of arriving at excellence in some area of endeavor.

Goal 1 To publicly recognize achievements of youth in the various newsletters (church, parent, and youth) and through the youth bulletin board.

Friends: The development of one's capacity to make friends and maintain them.

Goal 2 To offer youth group functions which provide activities that help people get to know each other.

Feelings: The self-understanding gained from having learned both to share one's feelings and to respond to another's feelings.

Goal 3 To provide young people with the chance to participate in the PEER training program.

Identity: The sense of knowing "who I am" and of being able to describe one's individual talents and gifts.

Goal 4 To offer a six-week Bible class study on "Gifts of the Spirit."

Responsibility: The confidence of knowing "On my own, I can make decisions and follow through on them."

Goal 5 To give young people significant responsibility for planning and carrying through their own activities.

Maturity: The recognition that one is becoming an adult.

Goal 6 To hold special celebrations for "rites of passage" such as confirmation and junior and senior graduation.

Adult Models: The experience of relating to caring adults who genuinely live out their Christian faith.

Goal 7 To continue having youth-adult "fun nights" involving recreation, worship, music, and drama.

Training: The strengthening of one's capacity to understand the Scripture and use it as the source and norm of faith.

Goal 8 To initiate a Breakfast Bible Study which emphasizes key scriptural promises.

Inspiration: The joy of participating in worship experiences that uplift and provide direction.

Goal 9 To take the "Joyful Noise" prayer and praise group on a spring break tour.

Outreach: The reaching out to others in spiritual, physical, social, or emotional need.

Goal 10 To participate in one of the synod's "servant events" this summer.

New Experience: The exploring of new ways to learn, grow, and simply enjoy God's world.

Goal 11 To make a special effort at keeping youth events creative, fun, and pressure free.

Sexuality: The acceptance of responsibility for one's new role as a sexual being.

Goal 12 To offer seminars on sexuality for youth and for their parents.⁷



The final "outcome" of the retreat centered on how best to coordinate and communicate these hopes and plans. In addition to the ongoing "behind the scenes" follow-up and resourcing by the DCE, the "C and C" looked like this:

	Coordination	Communication
Youth Board	Monthly meeting Twice-a-year retreat	Agendas, minutes, and newsletters (youth/parents)
Program Planning Team	Monthly team meetings Quarterly planning meeting Twice-a-year retreat	Phone contact, face-to-face, planning, newsletters
Youth Counselors	Monthly support meetings	Newsletters
Parents Council	3-4 times a year	Newsletters
Advocates	Once-a-year training Twice-a-year sharing	Newsletters

Meeting

But, as everyone at the retreat acknowledged, the real challenges ahead were to do all of the ministry captured in the goals, and to educate the congregation regarding the importance of what the Board was trying to do.

Raising the Awareness Regarding Youth Ministry

Following the retreat, there was considerable discussion among youth board members regarding how best to begin to systematically educate the congregation regarding its ministry to and with young people. The consensus was to simultaneously encourage the use of four interlinking approaches:

1) Informal "word of mouth" sharing: spreading the word among adults that "good things" were happening in youth ministry;

2) Youth involvement in parish life: helping young people make their special contributions to the worship, social ministry, education, and evangelism activities of the parish;

3) Media resources: developing brochures, bulletin boards, newsletters, and other printed resources which raised awareness and provoked thought regarding youth ministry;

4) "Official" reports: having the Youth Board chairman and DCE report to various groups, boards, councils, and voters assemblies which clearly described youth ministry activities.

Of all the approaches, the Youth Board invested most of its energy in identifying and developing thought-provoking resources that, on alternating months, could appear in the church newsletter and in the Sunday morning bulletin. For example, the first one focused on helping people feel "good" about Grace's ministry to and with its youth.

How Does Grace's Ministry to Its Youth Rate?

Below are twelve characteristics of a "healthy church in youth ministry," according to some "district guidelines." Grace is doing 11 of the 12. Praise God! This congregation:

1. Understands youth ministry as part of the parish's ministry of Word and Sacrament and not just as "an organization."
2. Established a board responsible to the parish church council (or board of directors) for regular youth ministry planning.
3. Provides, through that board, a ministry to grades 6-8, 9-12, and young singles.
4. Provides, in that youth board, equal representation of youth and adults.
5. Through that youth board plans a balanced, varied program of youth ministry activities that focus upon youth's need, concerns, and questions.
6. Uses short term "mountain top" events - gatherings, retreats, lock-ins, servant events, and trips - to strengthen the ties that bind individuals into the group.
7. Attempts to support the ministry of parents to and with their youth, rather than compete with them.
8. Is sensitive to the need for meaningful worship in the life of the parish which meets the needs of young people and young singles.
9. Seeks to provide channels for youth input and involvement in the life of the congregation, e.g., high school input through the board of youth ministry in parish issues.
10. Systematically identifies, recruits, trains, and supports adult volunteers to work with young people.
11. Understands youth ministry as a partnership between youth and adults designed to build up the entire Body of Christ rather than a churchly chance for young people to do their own thing.
12. Provides adequate budgetary support for a program of youth ministry through the congregation's budget.⁸

The Youth Board's efforts to educate the congregation regarding its ministry to young people did not go unnoticed. The congregational treasurer wanted Micah to explain where he was going to get the money to cover the increased printing expenses. Lots of parents expressed appreciation for their thought-provoking and informative newsletter. The church secretary pleaded for some help running off and stuffing the bulletin inserts.

Perhaps one of the most telling signs that congregational members were growing in their appreciation of the need for youth ministry was a comment made by the chairman of the Board of Elders. He said that a number of people had sug-

gested that Micah be nominated to serve as an elder but that the nomination committee decided to ask Micah to run for chairman of the Youth Board once again. The elder indicated that people were beginning to see how vital it was that Grace have a consistent, caring, and comprehensive ministry to its young people.

"Micah, Is It Worth All of the Effort?"

And then there was Micah's wife, Joan. Although very supportive of his involvement initially, Joan had grown weary of all the time and energy Micah's chairmanship had taken from their marriage. She found herself needing some assurance that he still felt what he was doing was important and necessary because she, too, knew the status of the congregation's finances and that budget time was right around the corner. So, in her characteristically blunt way, she simply asked him after he returned from a Youth Board meeting, "Micah, is it worth all the effort?" She didn't have to wait long for his stream of consciousness response:

"Very much, Joan. . . You see, I remember what was given to me during confirmation and in the years that followed. . . I remember Joy and Andy Alexander who welcomed me and others into their home as lay counselors. . . Some of my most positive remembrance of how a man treats a woman were from being around them. . . I remember how my home congregation gave me a scholarship to go to a five-day youth leadership training program. . . and pastors like Norm Behrmann and Fred Schumacher who made Jesus real without being stuffy. . . I remember adults who supported us in our efforts to acquire a ping pong table. . . And Lou Fashholtz who patiently opened the Scriptures for us in Bible class, even when we were weary from Saturday night shinanagans. . . I remember the pride we all felt when Mike Neski pulled our youth choir together so we could sing "Beautiful Savior" in Sunday worship. . . Even when our youth group fell on rocky times I can still remember that there were adults around who cared. . . They gave us a place to be ourselves, to learn to express ourselves, and to discover who Jesus was. . . Those experiences stabilized me during some rocky teenage times when I was bucking my folk's influence. Funny as it sounds, those days still nurture me, Joan. . . The reason I'm putting all this effort into Grace's youth ministry is that I want Grace's young people to experience the church as a caring place, a place where they can come out of the storms of life and be with some friends who hold Christian values. . . What they experience during these years can help them be caring spouses, thoughtful parents, ethical business people, involved congregational members, and alive followers of Jesus. . . When I remember what I was given, Joan, I have a burning desire to see that others have similar opportunities."

Joan's question had opened up a storage house of memories for Micah, some of which were new even to her. The more she listened the more she realized what she had missed as a teenager since she and her parents had seen "confirmation as graduation," and efforts to involve her in church-related activities had proved fruitless. Looking back for Joan was a lot less comforting and nurturing. In fact, it was downright depressing as she remembered the family tension, lonely nights, desperate dates and failed

first marriage. Rather than look back, Joan was grateful for what Micah had brought to their marriage and for her own growth in the faith. And maybe, just maybe, it was also her turn to start passing on some of her newfound joy in Christ to young people who don't think "confirmation means graduation."

Who Says Youth Ministry Is a Must?

As the voters assembly convened, Micah felt lots of energy. His feeling intensified after his youth board report received a positive reception.

The budget discussion that followed wasn't as pleasant. The finance committee was out in force and was raising tough questions regarding various line items in the proposed budget. When the youth board figures were presented, Micah suddenly had a sinking feeling as the treasurer introduced them with these words, "Now there's been lots of positive PR for our youth ministry this year. And that's good. But we've got to be realistic. We aren't meeting our financial commitments. So who says that youth ministry is a must, especially to the tune of \$8,800 plus what it takes to salary a DCE?"

In retrospect Micah couldn't have asked for a better opportunity to test the congregation's commitment to youth ministry. Although he couldn't remember all of what was said, he and Joan were able to piece together a number of the reactions to the treasurer's question:

Jake Hall, teen-age parent: "We're new here at Grace. Frankly, we didn't just join because pastor gives a good sermon, although that's true too. We have two teenagers and two more getting close. We shopped around for months before joining Grace. We wanted a church that cared about its teenagers.⁹ Our two boys like it here. Driving 23 miles to church is worth it for us if our kids receive sound Christian training."

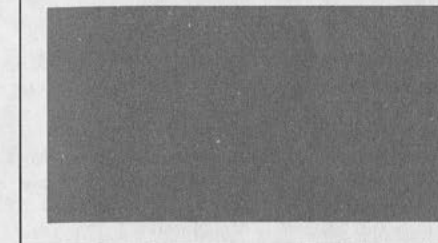
Bill Poppe, Evangelism Board chairman: "Our committee has been studying *Closing the Back Door* and one of that book's main points is that the highest dropout rate within the church is among teenagers. They often don't feel loved and accepted. It is crucial that we keep providing a positive, caring climate for our youth or they'll leave us in droves."⁹

Arlyn Lindsay, 5th grade parochial school teacher: "Sometimes people believe that our parochial school is in competition with our youth program. No way! We work hand-in-hand. After all, wouldn't it be rather short sighted of Grace to invest lots of money and manpower in a K-6 school and then do nothing for the kids when they enter junior high and high school?"

Liz Holmes, public school board member: "Things are different than when we were growing up. There seems to be more pressure on kids. Every moment seems spoken for and there are so many demands. What's more, our kids are barraged by options. It's like they're growing up in a mammoth supermarket with a million items in stock.¹⁰ We need to be helping our youth during these formative years because the choices they make can determine the shape of their lives for many years to come."

(Continued on page 20)

book reviews



YOU AND YOUR PARENTS by Harold Ivan Smith. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987.

Many times in counseling with young adults, the litany of their many difficult and depressing dilemmas begins with the refrain, "You see, it's my parents. . ." The sentence can continue and conclude with many differing problems, but the struggles have a similar starting point. How can young adults who love their parents and conscientiously want to honor and respect them break away and establish their own identity? It's a tough question and one which some people never resolve throughout their adult years.

Harold Ivan Smith addresses this dilemma in his latest effort, *YOU & YOUR PARENTS*. This prolific author, known especially for his writing on marriage and divorce issues, has subtitled this volume, "Strategies For Building An Adult Relationship," and his work is chockful of practical advice and counsel to enable adult sons and daughters to develop deep, meaningful relationships with their parents. His work is commendable in that he addresses this sensitive issue both with a concern for parents and with a compassion for their "adult children." Hopefully, this approach will effect a reconciliation which eliminates acrimony. This is refreshing since some of the literature produced by "adult children" bitterly and vindictively denounces parents in order to escape conflictual relationships. On the contrary, Smith's references to his relationships with parents, especially his father, are respectful and moving, and yet also honest and frank.

Smith offers ten guidelines for sons and daughters who desire a relationship with their

parents which allows for dignity and integrity for both. A sampling of these guidelines shows that his approach is basically positive assertiveness which avoids win/lose confrontations. For instance, the first task noted for "adult children" is to "choose to be a son or a daughter." This is to be supported by another task, namely, to "accept your parents as YOUR parents." In both of these strategies, Smith calls for a realistic recognition of the relationship as it is and for accepting personal responsibility to maintain and/or improve it. Obstacles to be removed along the way include perceived parental injustices and control mechanisms from the past which still affect the present, idealized notions of what parents SHOULD be, and ingrained "fight or flight" reactions which intensify conflict. No small task, here, but Smith helpfully includes step by step strategies to work toward overcoming the barriers and to build a positive relationship.

Perhaps, the finest recommendation for this little book stems from the generous application of Scriptural examples and models. Jesus was an adult son who dealt positively with his parents, even when they wanted to control Him (Mark 3:21, 31-35). Still another model, and perhaps one that more closely resembles the conflictual relationships with which we are more familiar, is that of Jonathan and his father, Saul. Jonathan struggled to love and honor his father even as he was being used to betray his best friend, David (1 Samuel 20). Smith appropriately illustrates many of his guidelines for boundary setting, rejecting parental fears and resisting control patterns by using these and other Bible references.

This book is a good resource to recommend to every adult son or daughter whose intention is to love and honor parents with integrity and freedom. It is a "how-to" book with much practical advice which may annoy those who are looking for more in analysis of conflictual relationships and for more insights from developmental psychology. Family life professionals have ready access to those resources, but this work is for the layperson who desires what Smith values as the "priority item of adulthood. . . not marriage, but renegotiating the parental relationship." I suggest this reference as a great starting point in the renegotiation process.

Richard C. Pflieger



TELEVISION AND RELIGION: THE SHAPING OF FAITH, VALUES AND CULTURE by William F. Fore. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987.

William Fore is the author of numerous articles and several books dealing with television and religion. He is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church and serves on his church's communication board. He presently holds a position on the Communication Council of Churches and has been active in studying the relationship of the electronic church to local parishes.

In his present work, Mr. Fore recognizes the impact television has on our lives and indicates in his opinion, that the mainline churches are ill prepared to cope with it. In his reference to television, which he calls the "Technique," he notes that many churches' response to television is to recommend to their membership that they not watch it. Such an approach he calls "Christ against the culture." Some churches join the television scene, often employing some of the same methodology as secular television. He calls those religious bodies the "Christ of culture."

His response to these two premises is to offer another possibility. The possibility of "Christ and culture in paradox" or "Christ transforming culture." It is to this end that this book was written, and the remainder of the book deals with how this might be accomplished.

All this leads to a theology of communication. This is the key concept, since Mr. Fore avers that Christianity itself is communication. If the reader accepts that premise, then it is possible to proceed through the rest of the book.

I found the fourth chapter particularly enlightening since Mr. Fore contrasts the great themes of Scripture - e.g., creation, the fall, the covenant promise, the kingdom of God and the servanthood of Jesus - with the world depicted on television. He proposes that Christians must use the medium to tell the truth regarding these themes and the world.

A book on television and religion would not be complete without a look at the "electronic church." Mr. Fore has written often about this segment of our society. Here he updates his information regarding the "Bakker" affair as well as showing that he has a clear understanding of the other major television preachers and their corporations.

Fore offers suggestions to the mainline churches regarding the use of television in their ministries. He explores such areas as narrow-casting.

The book closes with a chapter entitled "Signs of Hope." Indeed Mr. Fore offers signs of hope to those in the religious community who seek to make of television the medium that could be used to share the gospel and make people realize the great Scriptural truths listed before.

This book would be excellent for the serious layperson who is interested in television as a medium for the spread of the Gospel as well as a textbook for a moral education class. It is most readable and, as always, Fore presents an intense interest and wealth of information on the topic.

Ray Huebschman

(Continued from page 18)

After the voters assembly adjourned, Micah had mixed feelings. He still didn't like meetings that debated the merits of various church programs, yet he was glad that the congregation affirmed their monetary commitment to youth ministry. Word would quickly spread among the young people that the adults of the parish had demonstrated again that they cared about them in a tangible way. What was sobering to Micah though was that *all age groups* within Grace congregation deserved consistent, caring, and comprehensive ministry. He was just grateful that he could contribute to the well-being of Grace's teenagers and hopefully, if the Youth Board's mission statement was true, that such efforts would benefit the entire congregation not only today but in the years to come. And who knows, maybe there will be a young person so touched that he or she will some day chair a Youth Board.

¹ The brochure was developed by a very gifted DCE named Harlen Teske, currently serving Trinity Lutheran Church, Jefferson City, Missouri.

² As Lyle Schaller has suggested in his book, *Activating the Passive*, Nashville; Abingdon Press, 1981, pp. 17-19, there are all sorts of special dynamics that exist in small, middle-size, and large churches. Rather than attempt to speak generally about youth ministry in a variety of parishes, the author has chosen to describe the efforts of a middle-size parish (870 members, including 67 young single, 73 high schoolyear, 34 junior highers, and a 117 student K-6 parochial school).

³ Another helpful, but slightly different, "team" structure can be found in *Involving Youth in Youth Ministry* by Tom and Joni Schultz, Group Books, Loveland, Colorado, 1987.

⁴ An outstanding resource for training adults to be advocates is the *Advokit Manual: A Resource for Developing Advocates for Young People*, the Board for Youth Services of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1333 Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO, 1985.

⁵ Mike Yaconelli and Jim Burns, *High School Business*, Youth Specialities, Grand Rapids: Zondervon, 1986, pp. 105-112.

⁶ The acronym in this article is an adaptation and expansion of the Strommens' material found in their well received resource for people who work with youth and families. Irene and Merton Strommen, *Five Cries of Parents*, New York: Harper and Row, 1985, pp. 33-59.

⁷ A new thought-provoking four-part youth video seminar on sexuality is "Why Wait?" with a companion eight-session video cassette for parents entitled "How to Help Your Child Say 'No,'" Josh McDowell, Word Press, Waco, Texas.

⁸ These "healthy characteristics" are an adaptation and blending of a Northern Illinois District resource entitled: "Characteristics of the Healthy Church in Youth Ministry" and Lyle Schaller's characteristics of a thriving youth ministry, *Survival Tactics in the Parish*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1973, pp. 152-154.

⁹ Alan F. Harre, *Closing the Back Door*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983, p. 17.

¹⁰ Eldor Kaiser, "Growing Up in the Supermarket," *Issues*, Summer 1973, pp. 5-8.



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