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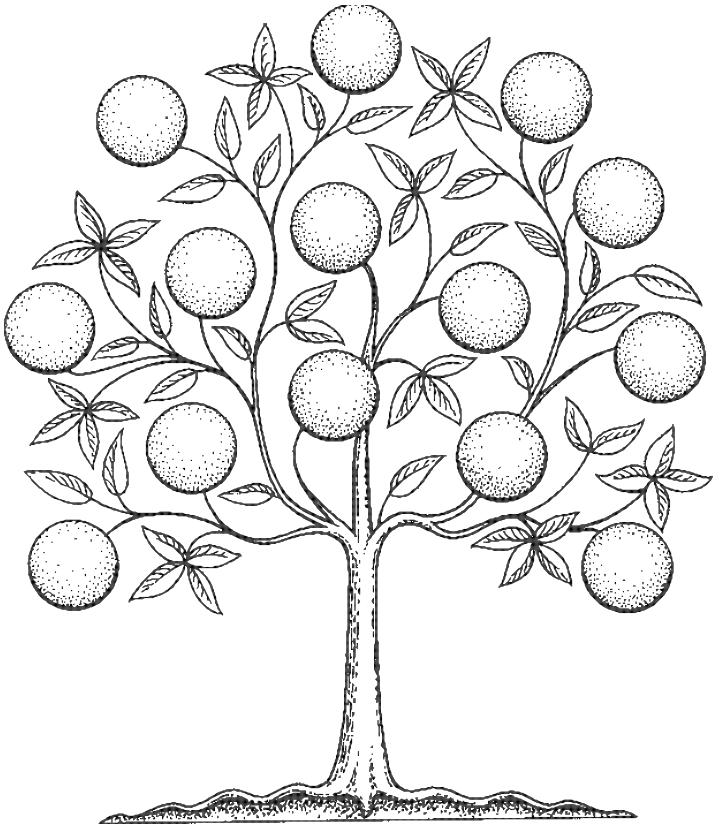
The Lutheran Educator

The WELS Education Journal



The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and
he who wins souls is wise.
Proverbs 11:30

The Lutheran Educator

The education journal
of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
edited by the faculty of Dr. Martin Luther College

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Before and After

Let's make up a game, "Before and After."

Think about your classroom for a minute. How long have you been teaching in it—30 years, a few years, a few weeks? Who taught in that classroom before you—you know, the person about whom the children kept saying, "But, Mrs./Miss/Mr. ... didn't do it that way!"

The former occupant of the classroom in which I teach was a long-time president of this college. On quiet afternoons I imagine I can still hear that unforgettable booming voice expound on Shakespeare or the DFL party in Minnesota. On the other end of the building, on damp days, I think I can still smell a faint wisp of cigar smoke. In other corners of the building are echoes of O. Henry, Edgar Allen Poe, Genesis, psychology, sight-singing, and dogmatics. All these former teachers are very much with me.

You and I should remember those who have gone before. These persons are an evidence of God's grace and his blessings on Christian education. God gave these persons to the church to serve him in the teaching of his Word. The beginning of the school year is a good time to look back.

It is also a good time to think about *after*. Who will follow you in that classroom? These "afters" are as important as the "befores." Children and young persons will continue to need teachers. You and I need to teach in such a way that those in our classrooms will aspire one day to be where we are.

Christian education is a tapestry of people. Before you and before me there is another teacher, and before that person was another teacher, back through Luther, and Augustine, and St. Paul, and Christ himself, and Ezra, and David, and Moses, and Abraham, and Adam and Eve teaching Cain and Abel. And after you and me there will be another teacher and another until Christ comes again and the need for the kind of Christian education we have on this earth ceases.

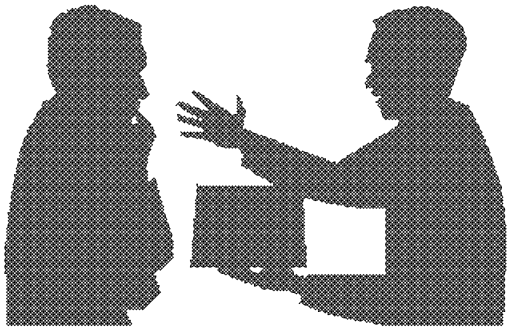
The people in this tapestry are not the focal point, however. There is a golden thread of God's Word which unifies and gives purpose to the persons in the tapestry. That Word reaches out to the lost and unbelieving, draws them to faith, and nurtures them in that faith. The people in the tapestry, including you and me, are holders of that Word.

Reflect on those who went before you, pray to the Lord of Harvest that there will be others to follow you. Above all, study that golden thread which gives purpose and meaning for you to be in that classroom at this time and assures the hope of salvation to you and the ones you teach.

JRI

Breaking Through the Filters

Geoffrey A. Kieta



Have you ever had the feeling that you were saying one thing, but the person listening to you was hearing something else? As a world missionary, I often have that experience when I am trying to communicate a religious truth to a person from a non-Lutheran, non-North American background. I'm sure at least part of the problem is that I don't communicate very well (especially in Spanish), but part of the problem is that the person really isn't taking in the full import of what I am saying—he's really converting the meaning that I am trying to communicate into another meaning that he is more familiar or more comfortable with. Here in Colombia, we call this phenomena "filters." It can be a very frustrating thing to deal with.

Let me give you an example. Recently a man came to study with us. He had questions about God, and God in his grace led him to us. After talking with him for a little while, I realized that he wasn't a Christian. Here in Colombia, we have a three-lesson, audio-visual course called Spiritual Healing that we use for evangelism. It focuses on the fact that most Colombians realize that they are sinners, but not many know about God's free gift in Jesus Christ. At the end of the first class, which tries to drive that concept home, I asked this man if he were to die tonight, what would happen to him. He gave a very thoughtful answer. Looking at his life, he knew that he deserved to go to hell, but he also knew that Jesus had died for his sins and that he would go to heaven if he tried to live a good life. I had hit a filter. In Roman Catholic theology, "forgiveness" is something that Christ makes available to us, and "grace" is a quality that God gives us which enables us to earn that forgiveness. What he said was very much in accord with what he had grown up with—Jesus died to make it possible for us to earn our salvation.

Your filters are a little different from

ours. Probably evolution and political correctness are bigger issues than a Roman Catholic world view, but the root cause is the same—as is the danger of the filters. I don't think I would be going out on a limb if I said that a large part of the problems that we face in fostering spiritual growth among our youth results from not getting through the filters of the sinful nature.

What is a filter?

Simply put, a filter is something in a person's mind that keeps him from understanding the gospel message, even when it is proclaimed in its truth and purity. I remember a seminary professor recounting his experience at the death bed of a faithful member and leader of the church. When he asked him why he would be in heaven, the man replied, "Because I've been a good church member all my life." Somehow, he had missed the point. He had a filter that was keeping the gospel message out.

In the first place, a filter is the result of sin. The big filter is the Old Adam. The Scriptures are quite clear on this point. St. Paul says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1Co 2:14). To the person who does not know the gospel, the concepts that we try to convey are foolishness—and we are not surprised by that fact. We don't expect that anyone who doesn't understand that forgiveness of sins is a free gift will immediately grasp what we are saying. It seems natural that the Old Adam would attempt to convert that message into something else, something works related.

Even though we know theologically that this is the case, nevertheless, on a practical level, we often run headlong into a filter as if it were a brick wall. Obviously, when we are trying to share the gospel with someone, we strive to be as clear and unequivocal as possible, but our methods aren't perfect. More importantly, the Old Adam has a definite advantage (humanly speaking)—he has had a whole lifetime to entrench his mistaken ideas in the mind of the listener. We generally have much less time to dig those ideas out and replace them with the gospel.

> *"A large part of the problems that we face in fostering spiritual growth among our youth results from not getting through the filters of the sinful nature."*

A filter somehow distorts or interferes with our message. Even when we are being crystal clear, the sinful mind has an incredible capacity to rearrange our words so that the listener hears what he wants to hear. For two thousand years, the Christian church has read, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:8,9). Yet, again and again, the church on earth has converted that message into something similar to the Catholic concept: "It is by a meritorious quality in yourself that you, with God's assistance, believe and do good works so that you save yourself," or "It is by your invitation of Christ into your heart to be your Lord and Savior that you believe and are saved." No clearer or more true sentence was ever spoken than the words of St. Paul, and yet, there is no more misunderstood and perverted concept in all the world. So, while we want to do everything possible to avoid being misunderstood, we are going to hit filters anyway.

To understand how filters work, we need to realize that they are generally culturally conditioned. The filters in the Midwestern United States are not necessarily the same as those in South America or Africa. Latin America has been dominated for centuries by an entrenched Roman Catholic Church, so we face many filters that reflect that theology. But there are also other factors. The entire world is importing American mass media at an unbelievable rate. If I were willing to pay for it, I could get CNN and ESPN here in Bogota. There are malls here that are nicer (and far more expensive) than any I have seen anywhere in the U.S., and they all have theaters and record stores. (My wife and I saw *The Piano* and *Schindler's List* within a month or two of their release in the States.) So we do face those filters. Other important factors include an extremely high rate of desertion by husbands, domestic abuse, machismo, an unbelievably high crime rate, a steady influx of peasants into the city, and more.

> *"The sinful mind has an incredible capacity to rearrange our words so that the listener hears what he wants to hear."*

All this makes for a somewhat different set of filters here than in the U.S., although at times they are strikingly similar. Here, most people tend to think of the Catholic Church as the Christian church, and to lump everybody else (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Evangelicals, and Lutherans) into more or less the same bag. The more you distance yourself from the "grab-

bag," the more likely they are to throw you back in with the Catholics. So when we try to establish our theology as distinctively biblical, we run into a filter—we are either Catholic or one of the others, depending on the person's point of view. In the U.S., you have filters too. They are a little bit different, but they exist. If you have a student in your school or your confirmation class whose parents emphasize the materialism of North American culture over the values of the Bible, you have filters to break through. If you have students who absorb the "values" of MTV and rap music, you have filters to break through, too. Finally, if you have students with original sin, you have filters to break through.

What effect does a filter have?

The most obvious effect of a filter is a complete or partial misunderstanding of the gospel. At least, that's how we see it. From the point of view of the listener, it must sound as if we are splitting theological hairs, with no clear purpose involved, or that we are beating a dead horse (actually, the wrong dead horse, since he is not hearing what we are saying). Clearly, if Scripture is true that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, then this kind of misunderstanding is a serious issue that deserves to be addressed.

Sometimes, this misunderstanding manifests itself in an attempt to reconcile what we are saying with what the person has already been taught. When we share the gospel with people who have been raised thinking that they have to earn their way into heaven, it is not uncommon to get the response, "That's what I've always believed." But just a few minutes earlier, they told us that they were getting into heaven because they were pretty good people, or at least, they could pay off in purgatory whatever sins they had committed. These people are totally serious. They don't see any discrepancy at all. If that is the response, it naturally follows that they are committed to staying in the Catholic Church, because, after all, the Lutheran Church believes the same things, it just uses different words. Since we cannot look into the heart, it is difficult to know what a person actually believes in a case like this, because his confession is muddled. There is still much that needs to be done, if for no other reason than to try to clarify the life and death difference between faith and works.

The other primary effect of filters is pure frustration on the part of the missionary and on the part of the listener. From the point of view of the missionary, the reason is obvious. He's frustrated because he is not getting his message through. He feels as if he is talking to a wall (because, in a certain sense, he is). From the point of view of the Colombian, it is also frustrating because he doesn't see or doesn't want to see the point that the missionary is laboring to make. Since he doesn't yet understand the gospel, he doesn't see the importance of the apparently fine distinction that this gringo is trying to make. If the frustration level rises high enough, Satan wins, because the missionary doesn't want to waste his breath

and the Colombian (or Malawian or Indonesian or North American) national just wants to be left alone. The gospel message never gets through.

What can we do?

The solution to the problem isn't easy, but it does revolve totally around one simple truth: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Ro 1:16a). The solution isn't to be clever; the solution is to communicate the scriptural concepts of grace and the exclusivity of the gospel. All the techniques discussed in this article are really only ways of getting a hearing—of getting the person to listen carefully to what we are saying and to see the inherent difference in our message and the message of the Old Adam—which wants to filter that message no matter what culture you belong to. And it must be emphasized that any other message could be transmitted using the techniques that we use to break these filters down. Indeed, the mass exportation of North American culture is breaking down many cultural filters that affect the way nations and peoples view each other (and in the process raising new concerns and filters).

The most basic element in finding a solution is recognizing that the root of the problem is sin. The sinful nature does not want to understand the gospel and you have to drag it kicking and screaming to a knowledge of the truth. That means that we have to apply law and gospel—being "slick" or clever will accomplish nothing. Our approach then has to be one in which the severity of the law is upheld in the face of the natural man's desire somehow to evade it or minimize it. At the same time, we need to emphasize the exclusivity of grace—only God acts in grace, we do nothing.

By that, we do not mean that we use a dogmatics text to preach the gospel. Following the example of Christ, we apply the word to the day-to-day life of the people we are trying to reach. We look for ways of expressing the concepts in terms that they readily grasp. For example, in a culture where most people don't have checking accounts, the old stand-by illustration of grace as God making a deposit into your account might not be as real as it is at home. But there are other ways of conveying the same concept. Finally, though, we need to teach concepts that are not, by nature, a part of the Colombian (or North American) mentality. For that reason, our approach has to be educational in nature. We realize that we are teaching foreign concepts, so we have to explain these concepts and we have to contrast them with what the people already know. We also realize that we have to get their attention—we have to convince them that we have something to offer (and experience has shown that they don't figure they need a classic North American WELS adult instruction course).

A part of getting a hearing (and of good educational methodology) is convincing the hearer that you have something worthwhile to say. This is even more important if you are the outsider trying to share what might be viewed as

simply a North American or German cultural phenomenon. We hold that the gospel is non-cultural, but to a Latin American or an Asian it is easy to dismiss Lutheranism or even Christianity in general as nothing more than one culture's attitude and beliefs about God. As such, it would be no more valid than any other culture's religious system. Therefore, we work hard to remove the cultural divide between us and our listeners, so that they will give us a chance to speak.

We offer two short, audio-visual courses. The courses are short because life is complicated in Latin America and it is difficult for people who are not yet believers or who are new to the faith to ride the bus for two hours to come to a fifteen-week course (which we do have, and which is a requirement for membership). The first course is called Spiritual Healing. This course offers "healing" because many Colombians realize that there is something missing in their lives, but they don't know what it is. Spiritual Healing works hard to emphasize grace—it is evangelism pure and simple. It has at least two strengths: It always emphasizes the same message, and it is in very good Spanish (recorded by native speakers) so that the "gringo" element is minimized.

The most basic problem of the Colombian filter is that Colombians know God only as a God of justice. Because they have been taught that God is a judge whose love we need to earn through the sacraments of the Catholic Church, most Colombians have a fear or frustration relationship with God. It is no accident that throughout Latin America, Christ is most often portrayed as dead (either on the cross or in the tomb) or as a child (generally with Mary). You almost never

see a depiction of the resurrected Christ. Latin Americans need to have their false concept of grace corrected so that they can see Christ's sacrifice for what it is. They also need to have that concept applied not only to their relationship with God, but also to their relationship with their neighbor and their view of themselves (the idea that our self worth is determined by the extent of God's love for us, as demonstrated on the cross, is not well understood). Essential to our method is contrasting the biblical concept of grace with the natural, or in this case Roman Catholic, concept. I believe that this is

an essential part of breaking down any barrier. Not only do we have to show them the stark difference between working our way into heaven and receiving heaven as a free gift, we have to demonstrate the eternal consequences of that approach. In our course, we show the difference in the audio-visual portion, but then we drive it home with the discussion portion of the course. This part of the course gives us the ability to ask questions both to provoke thought and to evaluate responses. We have general questions prepared, but we tailor each presentation to the person in question. Each of us has his own set of illustrations that he uses to make these concepts as vivid and concrete as possible.

Experience has taught us that at the end of Spiritual Healing, many Colombians still think that we are teaching the same thing as the Roman Catholic Church. That's why we have Spiritual Identification. In this course, we ask them to consider what they believe (hopefully by this time it is the gospel, since that is what we have been telling them). Then we ask them to take a good look at what the Catholics believe and also what the Evangelicals believe, because there are many evangelical missionaries here. At the end, we point out that it is essential to be a confessional church—a church that clearly states what it believes and why.

The emotional element

Throughout Spiritual Identification, we contrast what we believe with what the other churches believe. In short we engage in apologetics (a defense of the Scriptural teachings in view of false doctrine); this is an essential element in breaking through the filters. We do this after a detailed presentation of the gospel to give the Holy Spirit a chance to work faith through that message, but we don't ignore apologetics. We use Scripture extensively to support our position, and generally, in the end, one of two things happens. When we get through the filters, the student realizes that he cannot be Lutheran and Catholic at the same time.

> *"We have the Word of God, and that Word has been punching through filters for thousands of years, despite Satan's best efforts to keep that from happening."*

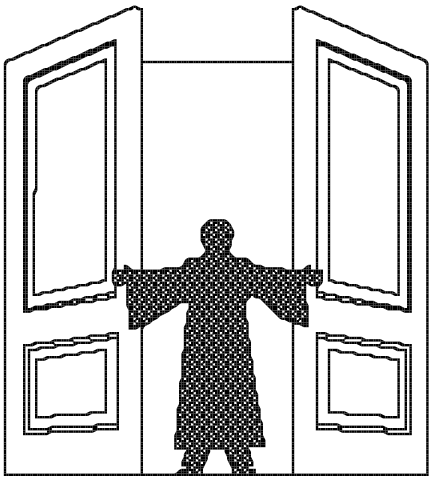
When that realization comes, the person has to chose. This is perhaps the most difficult moment. Although the person has heard the gospel for some time, he usually has emotional and cul-

tural ties to the old church. Virtually every Colombian was baptized and raised Catholic, and if his family is active in the Catholic Church, he will see joining the Lutheran Church as no different from joining the Jehovah's Witnesses. That emotional pull is one reason that it is so important thoroughly to remove the filters. We have to get the gospel through because most Colombians go through a period in which they want to believe the truth but also belong to the Catholic Church. They want to erect a "biblical filter" and hear the truth in the Catholic mass and strain out the falsehood. Not only is this an unbiblical strategy, but it is an extremely dangerous one as well.

Although I have focused almost exclusively on how we deal with filters in Colombia, the fact remains that all people have an Old Adam, so they all filter the gospel. The best remedy in the church is an emphasis on Word and Sacrament that makes the gospel a part of the day-to-day life of our membership. The best remedy in evangelism is knowing what you are likely to run into and finding a way to contrast the false ideas of the world with the simple truth of salvation by God's grace in Christ. I said earlier that humanly speaking the Old Adam has an advantage, and that is true even among believers. No Christian spends more time in the Word than he does in the world. But viewed from a spiritual point of view, we have the ultimate advantage. We have the Word of God, and that Word has been punching through filters for thousands of years, despite Satan's best efforts to keep that from happening.

Whatever approach you take when you challenge the comfortable concepts that the world plants in your members and your prospects, remember, "the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). If it can do that, it can cut a hole through any filter.

Pastor Kieta serves as a missionary in Bogota, Columbia.



What's Wrong With "What's Wrong With It?"

Jonathan H. Rupprecht

"What's Wrong With It" in the May 1994 issue of *The Lutheran Educator* endeavored to correct wrong approaches to matters of adiaphora, but the article treated the topic incompletely and tended to substitute one extreme for the other, leaving room for dangerous confusion.

As we know, adiaphora are matters that are neither specifically permitted nor forbidden in Scripture. Many specific actions and choices in our daily lives can be included under this umbrella, but of course there are always those voices that take refuge in the term "adiaphora" to claim that they can't be denied their personal wishes, when in fact they need to be confronted with the biblical issues. That is a common misuse of the adiaphora issue which we need to be on guard against.

We were told in the article that discussing matters of adiaphora "over a cup of coffee, at faculty meetings, during conferences, or in your classroom" is "sad" and "a waste of time and energy." The article also repeatedly stated and implied that such discussions merely involve personal opinions and that we should not be "sparring over questions of adiaphora." Those are serious overstatements that distort the issue involved.

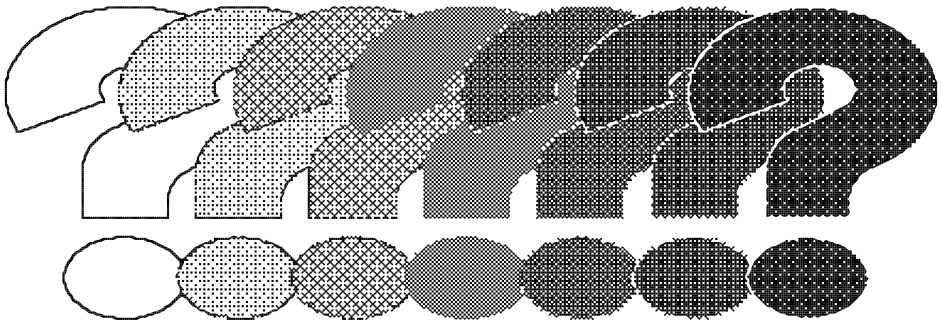
Yes, we need to avoid confusing personal opinions with biblical principles, but let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater and simply avoid discussions of adiaphora, which the article seems to suggest in spite of other good points it makes. Yes, the question "What's wrong with it?" may well put us on the defensive, but that certainly doesn't mean that if we accept that question "we are defeated no matter what answer we may give." I was puzzled and alarmed to read that giving a response to those who challenge our positions means that "we have chosen to place personal viewpoints ahead of our calling," "have failed to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," and "have missed the point of Christianity." Being on the defensive, which the writer found to be so offensive, is an important part of taking up that sword of the Spirit, and that is certainly not a matter of "personal viewpoints"!

Yes, passages like Romans 14:1, 2 Timothy 2:16, and Titus 3:9 warn us about wrongly "passing judgment on disputable matters," about "Godless chatter" and "foolish controversies"

and "unprofitable and useless arguments and quarrels about the law." But "What's Wrong With It" seems to ignore the other side also presented in Scripture, such as the exhortation to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" against those "who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality" (Jude 3b & 4b), or Peter's familiar injunction to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...with gentleness and respect ... so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1Pe 3:15-16). Or as Paul wrote to Timothy, "Be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim 4:2).

It's a matter of apologetics, defending the faith; and that involves not only gospel but also law in defense of any part of God's word that comes under attack. We can gladly let ourselves be put on the defensive because of challenging questions, and we can gladly defend the faith "with gentleness and respect," "with great patience and careful instruction," "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15)—in love for the person spoken to as well as in love for God whose truth we zealously defend.

"What's Wrong With It" does very correctly say that "when we and our students look at all actions through the eyes of faith, we will be able to settle issues of adiaphora in a God-pleasing manner." And the article suggests some good responses to three examples: How would boys' earrings help the church proclaim Jesus? How would proms promote God-pleasing behavior? and How could we use shorts or caps in the classroom to glorify God? Yet so much of the rest of the article undercuts, even contradicts that fine emphasis by seeming to suggest that we just drop the whole issue when it comes to adiaphora. That would be dangerous naivete to say the least. The area of adiaphora is clearly one of Satan's favorite fields of operation. This is where he gets us to lower our standards by giving in to challenges of "What's wrong with it" instead of showing people the Christian



principles involved, even though the specific matter may not be addressed in Scripture.

Take the matter of dancing, the example amplified in the article. The article suggests that all the contentions against dancing in the past were a waste of time because we permit it now. But the fault is not with those who contended against dancing. The fault is with giving up the fight and letting standards be lowered; with apparently pretending that dancing has little to do with the Sixth Commandment, the Sixth Petition, and Matthew 5:28; with seeming to ignore the fact that even the world freely acknowledges the connection between dancing and lust. True, not all dancing necessarily involves lust, and the point is not to issue some type of legalistic edict like "Dancing is a sin; case closed," but to contend for the faith, to continue exhorting and encouraging one another, to remind each other that there are many differences between being children of God through faith in Christ Jesus and being children of this world. That is not legalism, that is not mere personal opinion, and that is not optional, either.

Even if we could say that "God does not deal with His saints by asking such pointed questions of them," nevertheless the point here is not so much our *asking* this question as it is *answering* it when asked by sinners. "What's wrong with it?" is a valid and important question, even if asked in defiance. It is "Satan's trap" only if we let it be that. And sometimes it is very much in place for us to *ask* this question, also, to get ourselves and our students, the members of our congregations, to think, to search the Scriptures and examine ourselves, so that we will do the right and avoid the wrong for the right, scriptural, gospel-motivated reasons.

The article states, "Issues of adiaphora can be settled by compromise or by giving in even when we are positive we are in the right." While there is truth to that statement, there is more that needs to be said. Adiaphora, in principle and by definition, are morally and biblically neutral. As such, compromise and giving in is quite commendable. But the article fails to stress that there are also adiaphora in the concrete and in specific contexts where making a particular choice can send the wrong signal. Such concrete adiaphora include choices of

> *"These matters of adiaphora are often the exact places where we are directly challenged to use our Christian freedom most responsibly."*

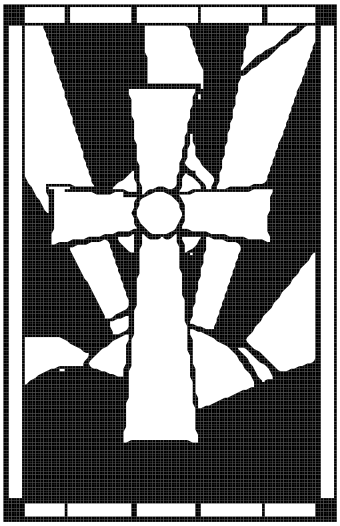
entertainment, clothing, use of money, and a choice of jobs and careers. These matters of adiaphora are often the exact places where we are directly challenged to use our Christian freedom most responsibly: not only permitting what is biblically permissible, but also making the necessary contemporary applications of timeless biblical principles. Compromising and giving in at such times can suggest that applying those biblical principles is really not that important anyway.

We dare not sweep aside matters of adiaphora for fear that "personal viewpoints" and "sparring" will make things unpleasant and unproductive. It is in just these instances where we are called upon to exercise our biblical discernment and sensitivity; and certainly not only being sensitive to the liberties granted in our Christian freedom, but especially also sensitive to our Lord's will in our lives as his children who are in the world but not of the world.

It is very easy to cave in to worldly, human pressures in cases of adiaphora in order to avoid unpleasant reactions from the human flesh, and just say "Go ahead." But we need instead to grapple scripturally with the issues at hand. This will often involve patient responses to questions of "What's wrong with it?" It will also involve sometimes saying "No" in matters of adiaphora, after giving the gospel reason behind that application of law. That is not legalism, it is loving guidance; it is living in the fear of God, motivated by his gospel to serve him according to his law.

Satan is constantly seeking to make us his children instead of children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And he often uses matters of adiaphora to lead us down the wrong path of wrong choices till we lose our way completely. Certainly there is abundant evidence of this in the world and in the church. Let's not let false charges of "legalism" or "personal viewpoints" or "waste of time" divert us from our responsibilities to keep ourselves on the narrow road that leads to life. May our Savior include all of us among the few who find it.

Jonathan Rupprecht is pastor of Arlington Avenue Lutheran Church, Toledo, Ohio.



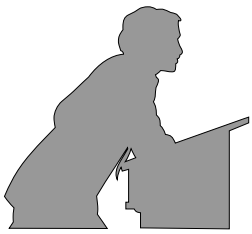
Paul Willems Responds

My point in writing "What's Wrong With It?" is that when Christians rant and rave, threaten or cajole, ridicule, or coerce fellow Christians into following their opinion about a matter of adiaphora, we have, at the very least, engaged in godless chatter and foolish controversies. We have, at the worst, prevented young maturing Christians from wrestling with an issue of interest to them and making a God-pleasing decision on their own. Yes, their decisions may be less than wise. These decisions may even have to be revised as they work more deeply into issues that once seemed so simple and clear to them. But how else can young Christians learn to make decisions? How else can young Christians learn there are issues that are not black or white, that there are issues in which they must decide using available knowledge and experience? When these same persons have been told what the correct decision must be, they are not being guided into spiritual maturity or being equipped to deal with matters of adiaphora in their adult lives.

Kingdom work and worship are of a spiritual nature, but there is a worldly component to them. Decisions must be made and policies formulated by Christians. That is not always an easy process nor will Christians always agree. Professor Roland Hoenecke points this out: "Decide and determine they must. ... But will there not exist differences of opinion on matters left for man's decisions? There certainly will. Many options may be expressed. They may differ radically. Likely, but one can be adopted and followed. ... Where God's children, concerned about the common welfare, in love honor one another above themselves, there will be no stubborn insistence on having their ideas prevail or even the threat of bolting should their suggestions be rejected" (unpublished material, n.d., n.p.). Where better to gain experience about adiaphora than at the feet of loving Christian teachers and among fellow maturing saints.

As teachers we never can assist the Holy Spirit in his work of sanctification, but by imposing upon our students our own personality, our opinions, and our thoughts on almost every controversial issue of adiaphora, we may be hindering the Spirit's work. We need to get out of the way of God. Jesus came that believers may have life to the full (Jn 10:10). Let us be found busy declaring that gospel message of our Savior and training those we teach in making God-pleasing decisions in matters of adiaphora so they can "... become mature, attaining the full measure of perfection in Christ" (Eph 4:13).

Paul Willems teaches at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minnesota.



Profiles of Ministry: Family Minister

Joel A. Nelson

"I'm not sure I understand. You want me to be what?" I asked the man on the other end of the phone call.

"Family Minister," he said. "We are calling you to be our first Family Minister." Perhaps it was the late hour. Perhaps it was because I had just finished a Board of Education meeting. Perhaps it was because I had skipped supper. Perhaps it was because I had never, in 12 years of being an LES principal and teacher, heard of anything like this before.

"Let me quickly read what the job description says your responsibilities would be," the phone caller continued. "The Family Minister shall be responsible for...

a) developing and maintaining a planned, integrated, and well-balanced program of Christian growth through Bible study for all family units at St. Paul's congregation;
b) discipling all of our members for Christian growth in the Word and integrating all new confirmands;
c) discipling parents and children;
d) developing a nurturing spirit within all members of the congregation;
e) developing and maintaining programs which assist parents in their marriage and parenting skills;
f) developing and sustaining programs which assist single parents whether by divorce, death of spouse, or unwed;
g) developing and sustaining a singles' ministry;
h) developing and maintaining a current curriculum for the entire religious instruction and discipling of members from cradle to grave;
i) contacting youth who are away from home;
j) maintaining a Christian education file on our members;
k) representing the congregation in matters pertaining to family and youth wherever such representation is necessary or desired;
l) the part-time Christian education programs in the congregation;
m) the supervision, oversight, and coordination of all youth programs and activities in the congregation not connected with the LES;
n) advising any and all church boards and committees related to this call; and
o) preliminary counseling in connection with this ministry."

All that said over the phone was pretty overwhelming. All that seen in print

after I received the call document and other particulars was really overwhelming. I was smart enough to know that a job description, by design, contains more than you can possibly do so that you can't say you weren't told to do something, but this job description seemed to contain more than five people could do, especially within a congregation of 2400 members. After many prayers, the counsel of others, and weighing where best to use my talents and abilities for the Lord, I accepted the call to St. Paul's in Muskego, Wisconsin, to become their very first Family Minister and one of the first staff ministers in the entire Synod. Three and one half years into my call, I see that much has been done, but much more remains to be done.

Where does one begin?

Though there were some things I was asked to do initially (get more effective teen youth programming going for the congregation's 180 teens, strengthen existing programs: Sunday school, Pioneers, parent/teacher organization, VBS, etc.) , there were also some initial things I needed to do regarding "family ministry." First, I needed to educate and raise the awareness of the congregation a bit on what my position actually was (not pastor, not teacher, but something uniquely alongside these two familiar roles that would bring more diversity, more strength, more organization to the whole St. Paul's ministry package) and secondly, communicate to the congregation what I thought "family ministry" meant and why it was needed. These two tasks would not be easy because of the congregation's size, my newness to the position itself, and the rather broad, nebulous definition "family ministry" has.

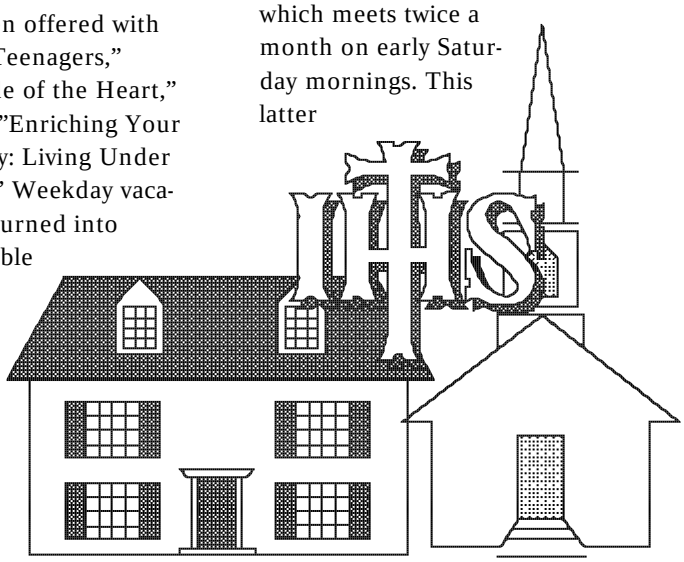
I gave short presentations to almost every congregational board, committee, and organization. I told them what my job description said and what I thought that meant. I wrote articles in the congregation's newsletter, wrote personal letters, published reports, and produced special newsletters for the Sunday school and teen programs. I asked for support, prayers, and partnership. I also tried to define "family ministry" in as simple a way as possible because, in concept, it really is quite simple: Through the Word of God, bring families, whatever their make-up, closer to Jesus and thereby closer to each other, closer to fellow church members, and closer to their church's ministry and mission. In practice, however, family ministry is not that simple. It is a varied, dynamic, two steps forward—one step back, process of proactive and reactive effort and energy.

Since I had to manage existing programs (Sunday school, Pioneers, teens, home/school, etc.) and these programs impacted families, I encouraged each group to focus on the family. What does the family and its members need and how could the group meet some of those needs? Group leaders met to study the Word, evaluate the existing programs, write group mission statements and leader's job descriptions, explore ways to be more "family friendly" more inviting, more caring with the

children and adults the programs touched. People with the spiritual and natural gifts needed for leadership in these programs were sought, nurtured, and added to the talented and dedicated teams already in existence. Also, special "family ministry" task forces were assembled to discuss what the congregation was doing, what it needed to do, and how it could improve the way it was doing the Lord's work. Certainly, everything suggested hasn't been done, but God is good, and by and large, awareness has been raised, interest has been aroused, improvement in many areas has come, and member involvement has increased. Much remains to be done with God's gracious help and blessing.

But what about the other stuff?

Side by side with the existing organizations' refocus has been a better effort to equip families and their members through the Word. Bible-based classes and seminars have been offered with titles like, "Parenting Teenagers," "Parenting: An Attitude of the Heart," "Raising Kids Alone," "Enriching Your Marriage," and "Family: Living Under the Same Leaky Roof." Weekday vacation Bible school was turned into an evening, "Family Bible Week" for adults and children. "Sharing the Summer with the Savior," an every-other-Sunday program for children and parents, was begun during the summer between church services. Sunday school "family events" have been added to the yearly schedule. "Monkeying with the Monk: A Fun Look at Martin Luther," "Playing with Grown-ups: An Evening of Games, Contests, and Laughs," and "Family Film Festival: A Christian Big Screen Adventure," are three such events. The home/school/ parent/ teacher organization restructured and renamed itself UNITY and is working very hard to bring home, school, Sunday school, and church together by sponsoring programs on sibling rivalry, family traditions, honoring grandparents, and conducting home devotions. Finally, in an effort to encourage men to be better workers, fathers, and church leaders, two groups were begun: St. Paul's Business Leaders' Prayer Breakfast Group which meets four times a year at a local restaurant for breakfast and a spiritual presentation, and C.L.I.M.B. (Church Leaders Investigating the Message of the Bible) which meets twice a month on early Saturday mornings. This latter



group is a Bible study/church issues discussion group made up of all the members of the boards of education, trustees, elders, and the ministerial staff.

It's the people not the programs!

Perhaps the biggest factor in effective "Family Ministry" is getting to know people. It's only when you take the time to make a home visit, chat over lunch, talk on the phone, have a counseling session, write a short note, or get a small group together that you really find out about people, their feelings and needs. You also have a chance to communicate to them how much you and the church really care. Personal contact is the best way to share the gospel, and the gospel is the only thing that can put today's family on the proper course and keep it there. "Family minister" and "family ministry": The terms sound somewhat new, especially today as nearly every religious, social, and political agency and entity has rediscovered *family,* making it the new politically correct issue, and touting how "vitally interested" they are in the family's future. But family ministry is nothing new. Bringing family members closer to Christ, each other, and the church is what WELS churches have been doing for many years. The only difference is that today a new form of ministry, staff ministry, can effectively join with the traditional pastoral and teaching ministries in reaching and teaching more of God's dear children. It really works!

At St. Paul's, the staff ministry position of Family Minister, under God's great guidance and blessing, has been an important addition to the ministerial team. It has brought more organization and focus to programs that have been reaching children and families for many years but recently have lost some of their direction, enthusiasm, and effectiveness. It has brought more diversity and flexibility to the congregation's overall ministry package, encouraging new ways to evaluate and deal with typical family problems, developing different strategies, enlisting additional member talents, and providing new opportunities for families to learn and grow. Our staff ministry position has opened new doors for members to share concerns, express opinions, seek help, and, most of all, learn what God has to say to them. It has also provided much needed help for the pastors and teachers. In our ever-decaying world, this ministry is another support to steady spiritually strong families and another safety net to catch spiritually weak families before it's too late.

The position of Family Ministry, as well as the other staff ministry positions being developed throughout the synod, is having a wonderful impact. Why not consider such a ministry in your congregation?

Jason Nelson is Family Minister at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

Letters From Home

If Only More Teachers Were Poets

Ramona M. Czer

Dear Teachers:

Read any good poetry lately? Composed any? Strange questions, but I wish more teachers enjoyed poetry. At last year's public reading by Barbara Esbensen, a wonderful writer of children's poetry, I saw only one of you. Perhaps the rest of you had other commitments, but how she charmed us by her love of words. Anyone who can write a book called *Words with Wrinkled Knees* must have a relationship with words we need to learn about.

Poetry has a way of working its meaning into your soul that prose doesn't. Perhaps that's why the psalms, especially the ones about praise and confession, touch us so profoundly. They touch our emotions, not just our intellect, and cause us to lift our heads up exultantly or bow them down in contrition. Plus the metaphors, the word pictures, help us remember God's colorful words long after the exact syntax of narratives has been forgotten.

The fun of manipulating words poetically is the main thing I wish you could discover and then pass on to our children. At a recent workshop I gave for teachers, they looked hesitant when I asked them to give me a metaphorical response to the question: What is your writing style like? They could compare it to an animal, a land form, a Biblical event, or a piece of clothing.

> *"Poetry has a way of working its meaning into your soul that prose doesn't."*

They surprised themselves, however, with their apt and creative responses. One woman said, "My writing style's like the Creation story because it's just being newly born." "My writing's a pair of sweatpants," said another woman. "I like it to be loose and comfortable, but

I do have to control it with the elastic around the waist and ankles." An older gentleman said, "I want my writing to be like the scent of a skunk—to linger in the air after I'm gone." And another man said, "My writing seems dry and flat like the desert, but I find hidden vegetation and animals in it that I never knew existed!"

What agile minds and imaginations! What poets, though I doubt they'd call themselves that. Don't people know you can dabble in poetry just like you can putter at golf or tinker at piano playing? It's not some esoteric realm reserved only for philosophers, geniuses, and madmen. Anyone can play with words and look at the world through fresh eyes. To me awe is one of the most vital things a teacher should possess and pass on to children. "A schoolmaster should have an atmosphere of awe, and walk wonderingly, as if he was amazed at being himself." (Walter Bagehot) Poetry teaches us the pathway of awe.

If more teachers were poets, they'd be able to help counteract that strange opinion that "poetry is boring." If more teachers were poets, they'd understand effortlessly that there are a million ways to say something, not just one right way. If more teachers were poets, the playground would sometimes be the best classroom. There's nothing more inspiring for writing tree poems than dangling in the branches yourself.

"Writing poetry," says excellent poet and teacher Kenneth Koch in *Sleeping on the Wing,* "develops the imaginative intelligence. It can give a student ease in expressing his feelings, attentiveness and sensitivity to words, and artistic or aesthetic appreciation of language and of how things are said. It can help him to bring together his feelings with what he learns and knows, give him a sense of accomplishment, a heightened sense of his own individual style, and a love of literature. It can help him to be aware of and able to use his own perceptiveness and originality in whatever he does."

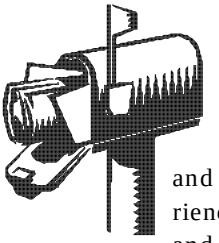
If you scribble a few lines of verse and then read your halting but inevitably individual expressions to your students, you will teach them far more about poetry than an anthology ever could. Because poets beget poets, your work may one day have undreamed of consequences. Someone once said, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Words move people. Words move hearts. One day hearts may be moved by psalms crafted by the poets you have inspired in your classroom. May all of us together keep looking for and describing "the dearest freshness deep down things." (Gerard Manley Hopkins)

A Poet Mother

Ramona Czer is a wife, mother, teacher, and writer living in New Ulm, Minnesota.

United We Stand

Kristine L. Yarbrough



Last fall I wrote an article asking for the creative ideas and successful experiences of teachers and I encouraged them to share these ideas in *The Lutheran Educator*. Since then, I have enjoyed reading and using some of those ideas.

In my article I also invited any teacher to arrange for his or her students to correspond with the students in my K-4 classroom. I am happy to report that many accepted my invitation and involved their students. The experience was thrilling and the children in my classroom learned more than I ever expected. An obvious benefit was that I saw dramatic improvements in their letter writing skills. The realization that somebody was actually going to read and want to understand their letters made a big impression upon the children. It was gentle, positive pressure that caused them to "polish" their writing skills.

Many of my students also became very aware of the importance of penmanship. One of my third grade girls, who often rushes through her own penmanship lessons, received a letter from her pen pal written in less-than-perfect cursive writing. She brought the letter to me and said thoughtfully, "Look at how she writes. I'm going to write back in my best penmanship so she can see how it's done." From then on she meticulously wrote her letters in correct cursive. Her own penmanship lessons did not improve, but she made a connection that penmanship does make an impression upon the reader. The letter writing gave her a "real" experience that motivated her to do her best when it counted.

The wealth of information learned about other geographical areas was another great benefit. Several teachers were kind enough to send pictures of their students outdoors in the middle of winter. We sometimes see snow dusted across our fields in Albuquerque, but my students were fascinated to see children in Wisconsin wearing a whole "suit" just to keep themselves warm at recess. In turn, I encouraged my children to draw pictures of cacti and our beautiful mountains and mesas to give their pen pals a feel for our surroundings.

One of the most enjoyable benefits for the children was the friendships they made with their pen pals. Several of my students put a great deal of effort into their correspondences and thereby they were able to develop some nice friendships through their letters. A couple of them even exchanged phone numbers and have kept in touch over the summer. That's exciting for a teacher to see.

A final, but important benefit was that I also became a "pen-pal" writer of letters. The original idea was for the students to correspond, but I found that I, too, was able to write to and share with some very special teachers out in the field. I looked forward to those packages in the mail, not just for the children, but because I was anxious to hear from teachers in Wisconsin, Michigan, and elsewhere. It was good for me to know that others are working hard to give their students the best education they can even though it is not always easy.

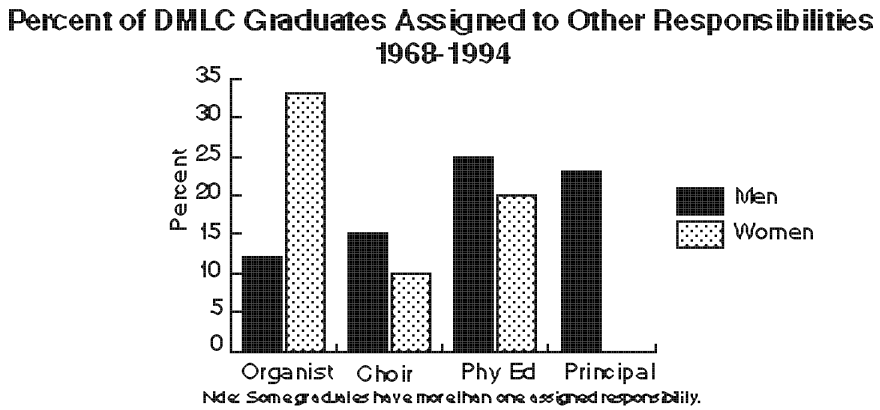
I wish to thank all those who participated with me this last year and encourage you to keep it up. It is extra work, but I hope I have shown you that the benefits are worth the time. Those of you who have not had a chance to get your students writing to pen pals, I urge you to look into it. Call a friend or former classmate who is teaching a distance away and ask if he or she would be willing to exchange letters. You will enrich the education of your students, and it will be enjoyable for you as well.

Writing letters to each other seems a small thing. But it does help us to realize that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. May all of us keep strong and united in this mutual faith. It is only when we work and share God's story of unending love, that we can continue working for the benefit of his lambs and his kingdom.

This year, thanks to the grace of God, our school has called a third teacher. Consequently, I will only have grades K - 2. I would still very much like to correspond with students in similar classes. The address is Shepherd Lutheran School, 3900 Wyoming Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87111.

Kristy Yarbrough, obviously, teaches at Shepherd Lutheran School.

A WELS Factoid



Cooperation or Singling Out?

David J. Pelzl

Cooperative learning has been the buzz word of education for some time now, and it will likely continue to have its effect in the classroom. I have used cooperative learning successfully, but I do not consider myself an expert on the topic. However, observations and discussions about cooperative learning are often a part of the mathematics methods course which I teach every semester. The following reaction to what sometimes is happening in the classroom is a result of those observations and discussions.

Consider these simple statements—"Pick a partner do work on this project!" "Form your own groups—there must be 3 or 4 of you in each group!" These statements seem harmless enough, but consider the context in which the statements are made. The first statement is made even though the teacher realizes there is an odd number of students in the classroom that day. The second statement is made even though the teacher realizes there are some shy individuals who will not seek out others for forming a group or there are some students who will not be asked to be in any group.

What are we doing to that student who is the odd one left out? What are we doing to the one who spends several hours trying to find a partner or a group to be in, and repeatedly hears the statement—"I'm sorry, our group is already formed." What are we doing to that student who is missing on the day the groups are formed? A student's self-esteem may be very fragile, and being the odd one out for whatever reason can further hurt that person in a matter of seconds.

When cooperative learning was first suggested as a teaching technique, one of its goals was to encourage persons to work together as a group. That still is good advice. Teachers were also strongly advised to select the individuals that would be in each group. What has happened to this advice? Have we chosen the easy way out because we did not have enough time to determine the groups ahead of time, or because we did not even think about forming the groups ourselves? But think about what can happen to the self-esteem of one or more students who fail to be chosen, fail to have a partner, or repeatedly get turned down.

We particularly as Christian teachers will consider the effect of our words and actions on our students. Cooperative groups can have an important place in our repertoire of teaching methods, but as with any method it has to be used thoughtfully. Methods, after all, are for the benefit of students.

David Pelzl teaches in the mathematics department at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

Listening

Gail Deltgen

An old Irish saying is "God gave people two ears and one mouth because he knew people should listen twice as much as they talk." Listening twice as much as we talk is difficult, though, because teachers, like most people, like to talk a lot. We like to talk so much that sometimes we actually forget that communication is a two-sided affair. We forget that for every talker, there needs to be a listener. And "listener" is not synonymous with "student." Teachers must be listeners, too; they must be good listeners. What, then, is effective listening? How do we learn to listen? When can we learn to listen better?

What is effective listening? Wolvin and Coakley have defined listening as "engaging in three separate but interrelated steps: hearing, attending to what the speaker is saying, and making a sincere effort to understand what the speaker is saying" (1988, 5). First we must have the ability to perceive sounds. Then we must pause from other activities to pay attention to the speaker. Yes, we may even need to put aside all those papers that we are busily correcting! Making a sincere effort to understand the speaker means we will try to recognize the listening situation and apply the appropriate listening skills.

These are the five basic listening situations: comprehensive, discriminative, therapeutic, critical, appreciative.

Each situation requires its own skill. A comprehensive listening skill should be used, for example, to understand a pastor's sermon or follow a principal's directions. A discriminative listening skill would be used to check if what our spouse says agrees with how he or she says it. For example, if the speaker tells us that our conversation is interesting, but she also keeps looking at her watch, we may wonder if she is really as interested as she says. A therapeutic listening skill is applied when a student or colleague indicates he has a problem. In such a situation, we would not advise the speaker not to worry, or tell him a story about what we did in a similar situation. Rather, we would simply listen without making any judgments, and then we would restate what the speaker is saying about the situation and how he feels about it. This will help him find the best solution, which is probably his own. A critical listening skill is used when a judgment is required. For example, is the salesman telling a fact or an opinion about the performance of the product? An appreciative listening skill is enjoying listening for its own sake, such as listening to music.

How do we learn to listen? There is no doubt that we have to practice listening. Lundsteen says, "As children we listen before we speak, speak before we read, and read before we write. Our ability to speak, read, write, and master complex cognitive skills is directly and indirectly dependent upon our ability

to listen" (Quoted in Wolvin and Coakley 1988, 12). As much as 42% of adult verbal communication is spent listening with 32% spent speaking, 15% spent reading, and 11% spent writing (Coakley 1988, 81). School children spend as much as two-thirds of their time listening to lectures and discussions (Steil, et al. 1983). Unfortunately, the time spent listening doesn't always mean the time is spent wisely. Few adults or school children are being directly taught how to listen effectively. America's education system has placed an inverted instructional emphasis on the four major language art skills. Listening is the first learned, the most used, yet the least taught. Research in language arts shows schools teach reading 52% of the time, writing 30% of the time, speaking 10% of the time, and listening only 8% of the time (Wolvin and Coakley 1988, 23).

When do we learn to listen effectively? Most adults learn of their "listening deficiency" at a time of crisis in their family, marriage, or occupation. Counselors train adults at such times in the importance of active, reflective, empathic listening to resolve some of their problems. However, before a crisis arises, people would be well advised to see family films shown in churches and attend marriage retreats and communication seminars.

Students can learn good listening skills particularly if teachers become concerned that textbooks don't adequately teach listening. Of a total of 26,141 pages in language arts textbooks, only 424 were concerned with listening (Wolvin and Coakley 1988, 25). Teachers thus need to supplement their courses with different kinds of listening practice. Instructional materials are more plentiful on the elementary and college levels, and authors are filling the gap at the high school level. Concerned teachers can also turn to the International Listening Association, the Speech Communication Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and ERIC Clearing House for Reading and Communication Skills for ideas at different grade levels.

Considering the need for effective listening, the Irish saying that God gave people two ears and one mouth so they could listen twice as much as they talk may have been right, but considering how well people apply appropriate listening skills, another explanation may be even more true: God gave people two ears and one mouth because listening is twice as hard as talking. Effective listening is difficult, but the effort will result in more than twice the reward. Try it and hear!

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Gail Deltgen teaches at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Midsummer Adventure 1994

David J. Pelzl

The past five years, as part of the Dr. Martin Luther College Summer Session, the college has hosted an academic summer camp for children. The camp's purpose is two-fold: to enrich the academic background of children ages 10 to 12, and to provide teachers of that age children ideas they can use to enhance their teaching in their own classrooms.

The summer camp has always filled quickly. The children come from more than ten different states and the country of Antigua. The popularity of the camp encouraged the organizers to expand the enrollment this year to 48.

Students spend most of the time from 8 am to 8 pm in classrooms in active learning. The students not only like the variety of things they learn, but soon realize that they can learn without having any homework! Midsummer Adventure has been arranged around the themes of creating a newspaper, writing across the curriculum, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie,* and this year, foreign languages.

This summer the children learned Spanish or Germany by being immersed in both the language and the culture of the people. The teachers who attended the camp were able to see two master teachers (Phoebe Lawrenz and Carrie Pfeifer) use similar but different techniques to help the children learn the language. In addition, the children learned to play handbells, they learned songs in different languages, they studied undersea plants and animals, they did mathematics, they made tessellations, they studied rocks and science processes, and a host of other things. All this was done in a setting of enjoyable socializing with other Christian children and teachers.

Plans are already being made for the summer camp next year. This one will have a stronger focus on science and related activities. For more information look for the 1995 summer session catalog early next year or write to Special Services, Dr. Martin Luther College, 1884 College Heights, New Ulm, Minnesota 56073.

David Pelzl teaches in the mathematics department at Dr. Martin Luther College and is the coordinator of the Midsummer Adventure camp.

REVIEWS

The Hydra: A Video and Teacher's Guide by Patrick Miller and Daniel Grunewald. New Ulm: Media Center, Martin Luther College, 1994.

This video and its accompanying teacher's guide is a result of a 1994 summer session science course, Freshwater Ecology, taught by Dr. Paul Boehlke.

The two students in the course, Pat Miller and Dan Grunewald, produced a 22 minute videotape on the freshwater hydra. They obtained their specimens from Lake Hanska near New Ulm. The video clearly shows the structure and functions of this hollow, many-celled coelenterate. The videotape is superb. The live footage of the hydra was taken with the college's Zeiss Research Microscope fitted with a super VHS recorder. The hydra's stinging cells, the hydra attacking its lunch, the hydra's movement and reproduction, as well as other microscopic animals are shown clearly and in detail. A running commentary helps the viewer identify what is shown the screen. The commentary also includes appropriate recognition of God's creative hand.

Not only is the quality of this production impressive; the price is equally so. For $5.00, ordered from the Media Center of the college, you can receive the tape and teacher's guide. This is an excellent investment for any elementary or high school science class. (JI)

Hartwig, Theodore. *The Picture Catechism Explained*. New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1994.

This book is part of a set of excellent materials for teaching Luther's Small Catechism. *The Picture Catechism* containing the art work of Donald Muth came out in 1983. At the same time a set of 30 charts printed on large (22"x34") card stock was produced. Now Professor Hartwig has written an explanation of the pictures and has contributed insights from Luther as well as his own scholarship on the text of the Small Catechism.

Hartwig worked closely with the artist Muth in designing the pictures for *The Picture Catechism* and the charts. Thus he understands well the symbolism that Muth used as well as the reason Muth had in choosing a particular picture to illustrate the Chief Part. Hartwig's explanations should be very helpful to teachers who use *The Picture Catechism* or the charts.

The Picture Catechism Explained is more than a teacher's resource, however. In an introductory essay, the author describes his views on the teaching of Luther's Small Catechism. The remaining chapters are on each of the six Chief Parts and the Table of Duties. Each chapter includes the pictures from *The Picture Catechism* and Hartwig's discussion of those pictures. In these explanations, the author gives evidence of a lifetime of scholarship and familiar-

ity with the Lutheran confessions and with the writings of Martin Luther. More importantly, he clearly and convincingly shows the scriptural foundation upon which Luther built the enchiridion.

There are numerous resources on the market for teaching the catechism. Many of them just add another layer of obfuscation to Luther's catechism. *The Picture Catechism Explained* in a notable exception. Luther himself would have approved. (JI)

Mackall, Dandi Daley. *God Made Me.* Illustrated by Michelle Neavill. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992. Part of the series, "Ready, Set, Read: Beginning Readers."

Both the author and the illustrator have produced a little simple concept picture book showing God as the creator of the world and all kinds of "kids." The book is well-written with controlled vocabulary and rhyming text. The illustrations are delightful pictures of God's little children. It would be appropriate for children ages four to seven. (BH)

Long, Kathy. *God is Near.* Illustrated by Elizabeth Swisher. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992. Part of the series, "Ready, Set, Read: Beginning Readers."

Young children have fears and scary times. They do find comfort in knowing that the almighty God is always near. However, the author fails to help the child see this comfort. She loses the message of the nearness of God when she repeatedly connects it to a mother's act of brushing a child's hair after frightening situations. Unfortunately, she also uses a contrived and predictable writing style. Suitable for children ages four to seven. (BH)

Reid, Mary Carpenter. *Come to the Desert With Me. Come to the Island With Me. Come to the Mountain With Me. Come to the Ocean With Me.* Illustrated by June Goldsborough. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991. Part of the series "Discover Books."

What fun it would be to be a cousin of these little children and explore and discover God's creation in four different areas of our world in these four books. All young readers will travel as cousins and see, smell, touch, feel, and taste the wonders God has created in deserts, islands, mountains, and oceans. The detailed, colorful illustrations tell as much as the text. (BH)

Wright, Christine. *Just Like Emma–How She Has Fun in God's World.* Illustrated by Biz Hull. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992.

Readers of this book written for children ages five to eight experience a day in the life of Emma, a young girl with spina bifida. The "nothing much" day, as the father in the story says, illustrates what a typical day would be like for a handicapped child. From getting out of bed in the morning to helping around the house and playing games, through swimming with family and friends Emma experiences a life similar to everyone else's. Emma also experiences the disappointments which come from her handicap, such as staying home

when the family goes to the store because she cannot ride the bus.

This "talkabout" book could be used to help physically handicapped children understand more about their abilities and difficulties. The study guide at the conclusion of the book would be helpful in discussing the book and its implications for children who are physically challenged. There is minimal reference to God in the book which might make applying the Word difficult. The book also fails to develop how Emma has fun in God's world. A child reading this book to understand how a handicapped person can rejoice in God's creation might miss the point. Nonetheless, the book has merit in its simple overview of the life of an handicapped child and the discussion guide at the conclusion of the book. (AS)

Wright, Christine. *My Sister Katie–How She Sees God's World.* Illustrated by Biz Hull. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990.

Because Katie is vision impaired she sees the world in a very different way. She "sees" with her other senses and enjoys her time at the playground, making cookies, and having fun with her big sister. Because she is close to her father, Katie has a special joy as she discusses the day with him and as he helps her learn how to knit. Katie also experiences conflicts with her friend Sam and his dog Bowler. These conflicts are largely left unresolved and do not fit the content or the purpose of the book.

The two references to God in the story are about being thankful for friends coming over and for God's creation. These references are adequate because they can serve as a starting point for discussing the book with children of the age level (5-8) for whom this book is written. The study guide at the end of the book is quite useful in helping the child understand more about the abilities and problems that visually impaired children encounter in their world. The strength of the book lies in the many situations Katie faces as she adapts to her visually impaired condition. (AS)

Lewis, Beverly. *Mountain Bikes & Garbanzo Beans.* Illustrated by Meredith Johnson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993. Part of the series, "Ready, Set, Read! First Chapter Book."

J.P. Witmer wanted a bike. Instead he is stuck with garbanzo beans because his mother is on a health food kick. J.P. had a deal going to buy a bike; he was still short some money. His friends devised a profitable recycling project. It worked, but then a problem arose. J.P. kept his money in a drawer where he stashed other things, like the garbanzo beans he wouldn't eat but couldn't deliver to his dog who liked them. His girl cousin Robin asked him to store some money for her, money she had saved for a Mother's Day gift. J.P. put the money in the drawer near his garbanzo beans and bicycle fund. His dog, hungry for the goodies stored there, raided the drawer, and ate the beans and Robin's money. J.P.'s was safe. Robin needed her money; J.P. gave his to her. He had none to buy his bike. Thus the problem develops.

J.P. eventually tells Mark, from whom he planned to buy the bike, why he is unable to do so. Mark was a church member who was learning Bible passages for a reciting contest on Mother's Day. J.P. helps Mark learn his passages and accepts Mark's invitation to attend church on Mother's Day. Mark wins the contest and its roller blades prize, a prize he valued more highly than either of his two bicycles. He gives J.P. the bike because the contest winning passage, Luke 3:11, encouraged him to do so. J.P.'s mother receives a rose at church and responds by offering meatloaf instead of garbanzo beans for a Mother's Day lunch. All ends well.

The theological implications are unclear. The boys seem to understand that the Bible is a special book, one that deserves trust and respect. They do not seem to know of the Lord Jesus, however, and the story does not suggest that Mark would have considered following the passage's message if he had not won the prize. Perhaps the story is suggesting that doing God's will is valid only when he pays us in some special way to do so, a bad message to leave with children. (GJ)

Reviewers: Beverlee Haar, John Isch, Gerald Jacobson, Alan Spurgin