

VOLUME 46
NUMBER 2
DECEMBER 2005

The Lutheran Educator

The WELS Education Journal



The Lutheran Educator

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

VOLUME 46 **NUMBER 2**
DECEMBER 2005

Editor — Jack N. Minch

Editorial Board — Philip M. Leyrer, Cheryl A. Loomis, James F. Pope, David D. Sellnow

Editorial correspondence and articles should be sent to *The Lutheran Educator*, Editor, Martin Luther College, 1995 Luther Court, New Ulm, MN 56073. Phone 507-354-8221. Fax 507-354-8225. e-mail: lutheraneducator@mlc-wels.edu

The Lutheran Educator (ISSN 0458-4988) is published four times a year in October, December, February, and May by Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226-3284. Periodical Postage Paid at Milwaukee, WI.

Rates: One year—USA/\$10.00—single copy/\$2.50. Canada/\$10.70—single copy/\$2.68. All other countries—air mail \$16.80. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Write for multi-year rates. For single issue only, Wisconsin residents add 5% sales tax, Milwaukee County residents add 5.6% tax.

Subscription Services: 1-800-662-6093 extension 8; Milwaukee 414-615-5785). Write NPH, 1250 N. 113th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284. Order online: www.nph.net/periodicals

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Lutheran Educator*, %Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226-3284.

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The Lutheran Educator Reader Survey

Note to readers: *The Lutheran Educator* is seeking your input as we plan for future publication. This is not a scientific survey; we are simply looking for feedback. You may tear out this sheet and send answers by mail, or, if you prefer, send numbered answers via email. (You would not need to type each question—just question numbers).

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 I'd be less likely to read each issue as it was published
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 I'd use the online archives about the same as I do now
 I'd be willing to pay a small annual fee to access the web material
 I'd hope that print subscriptions could still be purchased for an appropriate fee
 Other (specify):
9. What topics would you like to see treated in *The Lutheran Educator*?
(Suggested authors for articles are welcome also.)



How Faithful Is Faithful?

“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). The Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul to put it very simply: stewardship, the management of God’s blessings, requires chiefly faithfulness.

Christian teachers recognize that they are stewards, managers, of special blessings from God. The Lord of the church has entrusted them with the privilege of being his representatives to the students in their classrooms. God has given teachers the unique responsibility of feeding precious lambs with his Word. In the name of Jesus, Christian teachers encourage, rebuke, correct, and model Christian behavior.

In view of these privileges and responsibilities, Christian teachers, led by the Holy Spirit and the new self, strive to be faithful in their calling. But how faithful is faithful? My observation is that the answer to that question says much about a person’s ministry.

Why is it that called workers, including teachers, put in much more than 40-hour work weeks? To be sure, there are various reasons. “There’s so much to do.” “It won’t get done if I don’t do it.” “I want to be faithful.”

It’s that last answer that I want to address. How faithful is faithful? Faithfulness does not mean that I devote endless hours fulfilling the duties of my call at the expense of my family. God wants me to be faithful in caring for and loving those people whom he has placed in my life. Faithfulness does not mean that I work incessantly, to the degree where my health suffers. God wants me to be faithful in caring for the body that he gave me. Faithfulness does not mean “burning out, rather than rusting out.”

Faithfulness does mean that I will carry out the duties of my call as best I can with the gifts and abilities and time that God has given me, while maintaining a healthy balance in my personal and family life.

It’s interesting to see the examples Jesus left in this area. While the Lord’s public ministry was very limited in time (3+ years), Jesus still rested. He observed the Sabbath Day laws. We hear about Jesus pulling his disciples away from the crowds so they could get some rest. The urgency of Jesus’ work and the short timeframe to get that work done did not lead the Lord to misuse his time. Of course, he did all things well. He did everything perfectly.

That life of perfection, along with his sacrificial death, won forgiveness for all sins, for all people – even my sins of redefining faithfulness. You and I find forgiveness for these and all our sins in Jesus. That then gives us the desire and strength to be faithful as God defines it. God help us all to understand how we can be faithful in our calling as ministers of the gospel and faithful in all the other areas of our lives.

JFP

Sociology With an (like in Sin)

Frederick Wulff

Most of us teachers have taken a sociology course sometime or another. More than likely these courses have helped us better understand society. A number of years ago, I wrote a symposium paper touching on how sociology can be useful for classroom teachers (Wulff, “Sociology,” DMLC Symposium: Equipping the Saints for Citizenship Through the Social Studies, 1990). Helpful as they may be, sociological “insights” have limitations, especially if they ignore the basic nature of human beings, or simply put, do not acknowledge the concept of sinful behavior in individuals. Dianna Fishbein, Professor of Criminology, says: “There is a growing knowledge that we are not going to solve any problem in society using just sociology” (*Scientific American*, March, 1995). True, and we might add that there is a need for a biblical understanding of human nature.

Individual responsibility and sin

The danger is that instead of insisting on personal responsibility for actions or

accountability from individuals, we push blame for shortcomings off onto society or environment in the name of sociology. In a quest to foster greater self-esteem, many offer excuses and avoid the “S” word. The order of service found in *Christian Worship* whereby we regularly confess our sins, is clearly not in sync with most sociologists. The problem of shifting blame to others with little personal accountability can have a corrosive effect on both individuals and society. Instilling “self esteem” surely has a place in dealing with people. We want them to feel good about themselves, but the concept has been perverted by many modern educators—to make people feel good in situations where admonition is needed.

Institutions, providence and sin

One sociological paradigm, the structural-functional analysis, basically holds that all institutions in society evolve and work according to natural forces that benefit society. It stresses the importance of the institutions of family, marriage, and the government, but sees

them as institutions that merely evolved because of functional societal needs. We would modify this: God created and instituted them out of his divine love and wisdom. Stable families are extremely important. Parents have been instructed “to train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6). This may seem narrow minded and restrictive because we are imposing our values on children, but Christian parents want the best for their children. We are strict lest our offspring become as the children of Eli (I Samuel 2:12-22), but we do this with kindness and fairness so that we do not exasperate our children. In a loving way, parents bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

The marriage institution and sin

The institution of marriage also must be honored as more than an evolved tradition. Individuals should be held accountable for co-habitation outside of marriage, even though society might now accept fornication as normal and natural. Unfortunately, even among some Christian families, “shacking up” is becoming respectable. Sin should be called a sin to stop this epidemic. Scripture is clear: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Hebrews 13:4). Marriage should not be looked upon as only a quaint tradition that developed over time.

Dysfunctions and sin

Under the structural-functional analysis, even the dysfunctions contribute to the

*Every individual is
responsible for his
own sins.*

well being of society because they bring about cohesion as people rally to counter the dysfunction. This fits into the evolution mode, but it is really God who directs history, and we call the dysfunctions sin. For example, in the Old Testament story of Joseph, his brothers sought evil against him, but the outcome was used for good to “save many people alive” (Genesis 45: 4-8). Of course, this did not excuse the sin of the brothers. As Christians, we know “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

God does direct all events, even “dysfunctions,” to work for our well-being and his kingdom.

Deviant behavior and sin

As defined by sociologists, “deviant behavior” is behavior that is a recognized violation of cultural norms, but the reality that the definition of alleged deviant behavior is not held the same by all makes it complicated. Crime, the violation of formally enacted law, is consid-

Wulff

ered “formal deviance” and therefore criminal behavior. That makes sense. However, there is behavior that Christians should call deviant because it violates God’s law and Christian norms. Just because something is lawful, does not mean we are permitted to partici-

The order of service found in Christian Worship, whereby we regularly confess our sins, is clearly not in sync with most sociologists.

pate in such “lawful” actions. Sin is sin. Serial divorces may be legally recognized, but the practice is sinful and demeans the institution of marriage. Abortion performed where the mother’s life is not threatened, but done just out of convenience, takes away the life of a child and is sinful. Pornographic material and obscene language are liberally permitted by law, but are not permissible in Christian homes. Scripture clearly says that out of our mouths should not come both “praise and cursing,” and we must rid ourselves of “filthy language” (James 3:10 and Colossians 3:8). In a Christian community swearing and filthy language are serious deviant activities.

Cultural differences and sin

According to the definition of sociologists, cultural differences can be seen as deviance. Each particular culture determines what may or may not be right. A prevailing attitude is that if people are tolerant or understanding, they will respect cultural differences and not impose personal cultural standards on others. That seems to make sense, but not always. For example, when people from Southeast Asia moved into Minneapolis, there were instances where adult males married young underage girls. Should this be tolerated because it is acceptable in another society? When males of the Amazonian rainforest severely beat their women as a matter of routine, should we avoid judgment? Muslim societies in eastern Africa force young girls to submit to female genital mutilation. In some places of the world women who have been raped are murdered by relatives because they “brought shame upon the family.” Early Spanish missionaries to South America have been unfairly criticized for stopping heart-snatching sacrifices. Human sacrifices are wrong. Sin is sin and should be called sin. In the Old Testament, when children were sacrificed to Molech, God condemned the practice and told people of the community not to “close their eyes” (Leviticus 20:3-4). Of course many deviances are just a matter of informal differences. People are considered different or deviant because they wear different styles of clothing, use tattoos or other body ornamentations, and so on. Some

cultures are quite different from our own and yet have beautiful customs that may be enjoyed and even emulated. Differences are not necessarily wrong. We Christians often call these differ-

*By the grace of God,
we can fight our
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most importantly,
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God.*

ences from our accepted informal norms adiaphora—things that are neither commanded nor prohibited. However, where Scripture clearly instructs about wrongdoing it is a totally different matter.

Peer pressure and sin

Actually, Christians may be called deviant, according to the sociological definition, because we are different and do not always accommodate some cultural norms that are popular. Their peers may call Christian young people weirdoes or nerds if they are not comfortable in the world of drugs and sex. Scripture says that while we are in the world, we should not conform to the

ways of the world (Romans 12:1-2). In this sense we should welcome the word deviant. We are a peculiar people “holy to the Lord our God—children of God” (Deuteronomy 14:1,2). For that we are not ashamed.

Group behavior and sin

The social-conflict paradigm stresses the exploitative nature of society. This approach is generally negative and views life in society as a struggle between the powerful and the vulnerable. From a Christian perspective, we note that mankind is certainly by nature exploitative. Materialistic people often take advantage of the helpless. Majority ethnic groups throughout history have often subordinated minorities, and unfortunately, probably always will, because of the ultimate root of man’s sinful nature. Society needs safeguards against this. We Christians need also look at this on the individual level, not just the “they” as if advocating some kind of group guilt. Do we as individuals treat minorities in a way, as Luther expressed it, by being a Christ to our neighbors?

There is another side to this. Do those individuals within an oppressed group blame individuals who may not be responsible for their plight, like the local cop on the beat or a happenstance social worker? On an international level, how many innocent hostages did terrorists behead or how many random bus passengers were blown up because of a larger conflict? These are individual acts of murder. War crimes

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like those committed by individuals under the Nazis, or more recently the Serb nationalists, should not be dismissed under the blanket excuse of following military orders. “It is mine to avenge, I will repay,” said the Lord (Romans 12:19). Every individual is responsible for his own sins.

Genes and sin

The sociobiology paradigm explores the biological basis of social behavior. The modern catalyst of sociobiology research is Edward O. Wilson, who taught entomology at Harvard. He wrote his own textbook, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975). His premise is that genes and evolution have shaped not just our bodies but our behavior as well. Controversy over this research erupted and protest demonstrations followed. Wilson was accused of encouraging the practices of sterilization, genocide, racism, and sexism.

Another sociobiological perspective comes from James Q. Wilson, author of *Crime and Human Nature*. He maintains that there is an important link between heredity and criminal behavior, and that there is strong evidence of genetic transmission of human behavior.

Sociobiology makes some sense in that all people have the same human origin in Adam and Eve, and all have inherited a sinful nature. However, sin is not essentially a biological transmission. The sinful nature exists at a level deeper than cell structures and genetic codes. All humans are equally sinful no matter what distinctions appear in our

DNA blueprints. Each sinner may have particular propensities toward particular sins, but all are fully corrupted by sin itself. Scripture declares that “every inclination of [the human] heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21). “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Christ—not gene therapy—is the answer to our sin. As to weaknesses we exhibit in respect to specific sins, Christians are not fatalistic or deterministic as though helplessly trapped. By the grace of God, we can fight our sinful nature, fortified with help from loved ones, treatment from professionals, and most importantly, upheld by the Word of God.

Environment and sin

Most sociologists somewhat accept the environmental/nurture approach—which emphasizes the role of nurture. E. O. Wilson (not to be confused with James Q. Wilson) defended himself from the onslaught of criticism by saying human nature is the product of both genetics and the environment. In the old argument between nature and nurture, the latter now draws our attention, that human behavior is frequently learned and shaped by the social world around us. How much are we products of our environment? Our families, schools and churches are important positive influences in shaping our behavior for the betterment of society and ourselves. Parents should provide a stable home life for their children. Teachers should modify their class-

rooms and teaching methods to create an atmosphere that benefits children of different abilities and learning styles. Teachers must help their students to cope with problems which stem from a changing environment much more difficult than we, or our parents, encountered — like continuous exposure to

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violence in movies and on TV, a prevailing instant gratification mentality, more broken homes, abusive parents, easily accessible illicit drugs, etc. The environment is important.

Unfortunately, some sociologists provide too much fodder to help explain away individual shortcomings. Sinful mankind looks for excuses, and has since the beginning of time. However, people should be held accountable for their actions! In today's society, we offer a myriad of defenses to justify unacceptable behavior. In San Francisco, a mur-

derer used as a defense that he was under the influence of Twinkies. The National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF) believes that misinformation is presently used to exploit the popular belief that crime and violence are products of improper diet. Scientifically trained health professionals reject that belief as unfounded (NCAHF Position Paper on Diet and Criminal Behavior; see also G. Gray and L. Gray, "Diet and Juvenile Delinquency," *Nutrition Today*, May/June, 1983). The culture of victimhood has trial lawyers coming out of the woodwork for every misdeed crying out that someone else or something else is culpable.

Neighborhoods tear down so-called "bad" houses because crack had been sold there. Folly! Bad people sell illegal drugs, not bad buildings! A lawyer once commented that his client, who had hired a thug to put another ice skater out of an important competition event, was herself a victim. He was quoted as saying that a psychiatrist would find "the real cause" (boyfriend, mother, childhood, whatever) for her misconduct. When children underachieve at school parents often blame the teacher, the school, racism, the budget crunch, the peer group, television, etc., but almost never the child who neglects the daily assignments. We know from our own experiences, if we are honest, the reason we may not have done well in some course(s) at school really boiled down to our own attitudes. Ultimately we must teach the children individual responsibility and call sin a sin. When individuals acknowledge sin, they need to modi-

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fy their behavior and appreciate forgiveness. People are not prisoners of their environment but controllers of the environment. Subdue the earth and rule over it (Genesis 1:28). Life is a challenge that calls for individual responsibility.

Conscious choices and sin

The last sociological approach to be considered involves the symbolic-interaction paradigm, which views society as a highly variable product of the continuous interaction of individuals in various settings. One aspect of symbolic-interaction holds that people are not just social beings manipulated or shaped by the social world — that we are not just puppets in an over socialized conception of the human being. The sociologist George Mead recognized the power of society to act on human beings, but he also strongly argued that human spontaneity and creativity cause human beings to make choices for themselves. Another sociologist, Peter Berger, has made some thoughtful observations. He states “unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved.” We are choosing sinful behavior when we commit wrongdoing. As Christians we believe the Holy Spirit gives us strength to deal with the world and our flesh. It is often said that faith can move mountains. With St. Paul we acknowledge that we “can do everything through him who gives [us] strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Absolution and sin

We choose sin, but God tells us: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). How comforting this is that God chose us from eternity that we might receive the adoption of sons. Then, entirely by grace, Christ took upon himself all our sins and made them his responsibility (John 3:16). “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). That is how much God loves us, and that is what gives us real self-esteem.

Humans are a special creation of God. We are the crown of creation! God has called us to be the salt of the earth; to be his people. Unlike the animals, we make conscious decisions. Do not use “sociological factors” to explain away sin. Sin should not be taken lightly. It is our sin that nailed Christ to the cross. Insist on personal responsibility for sinful behavior. Let us add an “S” for sin in our sociological outlook! ✠

Frederick Wulff is a retired professor of Martin Luther College and resides in New Ulm, MN.

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grace, Christ took
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his responsibility.*

Using Demonstrations and an Observation Notebook to Teach Science Process Skills

Steven Thiesfeldt

One of my most treasured heirlooms is a notebook from my grandfather. It is dated 1919 and includes sketches, observations and conclusions from a science course he took in high school. Since I was given the notebook after his death, I never had the opportunity to discuss it with him. The wide range of topics covered (biology, chemistry, physics, geology, etc.) suggests that the recorded notes were part of a general science course.

Back in the mid to late 1980's I participated in a series of workshops sponsored by the Institute for Chemical Education. This National Science Foundation funded program had a profound impact on my teaching. I learned that classroom demonstrations can be an effective tool for teaching science and began to use them on a daily basis. Although students were interested in and motivated by the demonstrations, they were little more than a magic show for many. The demonstrations did not seem to have a direct impact on student mastery of science concepts.

The solution to this dilemma came soon after I was given my grandfather's

notebook. The carefully drawn diagrams and meticulous notes had always impressed me. It was obvious that he had recorded the notes while observing demonstrations conducted by his teacher. My grandfather's interest in and knowledge of science made me realize that science demonstrations could be effective tools in reinforcing scientific concepts and teaching how science works. I also realized that I had stumbled onto a way to link my classroom demonstrations to the processes of science and better teach those process skills to my students. Since that time I have required the use of an observation notebook in all my science courses.

What are science process skills?

Scientific inquiry requires a variety of mental and physical skills often referred to as science process skills. Mastery of these skills can lead not only to a good understanding of science, but also to success in everyday life. A listing and description of typical science process skills follows.

- Observing – gathering information through the use of senses and instru-

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mentation.

- Measuring – collecting quantitative data.
- Classifying – grouping objects into a useful scheme according to properties or characteristics.
- Inferring – interpretation of observations based on prior knowledge and experience.
- Hypothesizing – forming predictions about the relationship between variables.
- Predicting – forecasting a future occurrence based on past observation or extension of data.
- Explaining – linking evidence with existing knowledge to provide clarification.
- Modeling – constructing images, objects or mathematical formulas to express ideas.
- Experimenting – combining all process skills to conduct an investigation.
- Communicating – sharing conclusions or information.

Ten tips for keeping the notebook

The demonstration lecture has become a big part of my teaching repertoire. My goal is to use one demonstration each class period that is correlated in some way to the purpose of the lesson. Early in the course, I use the demonstration lecture to teach students how to form hypotheses, make careful observations and draw conclusions. I also introduce students to the intricacies of scientific experimentation. The use of the notebook keeps them focused on the task at hand and gets them used to the idea

that science involves careful recording of observations.

Students will need some direction as to what should be recorded in the notebook. A list of general guidelines follows.

1. Organization – From an organizational standpoint, it is best for students to use a spiral notebook to record the observations. Let the students know that the notebook must be accessible on a daily basis. Recording the results on loose leaf sheets is a virtual guarantee that the notes will be lost or fall into disorganization.

*My students are
actively engaged
during the
demonstration and
focused on its
connection to world of
science.*

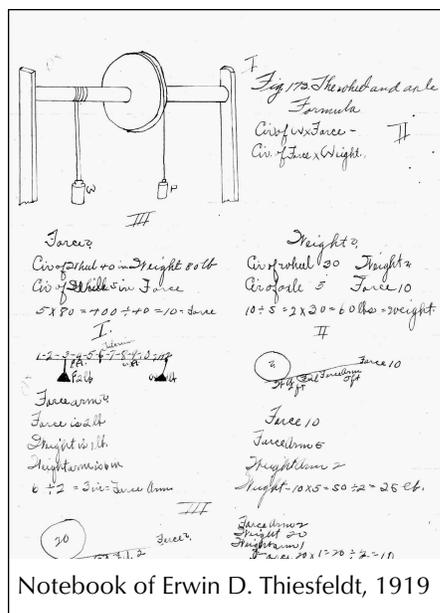
2. Title - Record the number and date of each observation. Make sure that all students are using the same numbering system; this will provide for easy reference to a previous demonstration. I often encourage students to create their own title for the demonstration.
3. Text vs. drawings – Give students some latitude as to how the notebook is kept. Some are good writers and

will prefer to use copious notes to describe each activity. Others are good drawers and will prefer the “picture is worth a thousand words” approach. Most use a combination of picture and text to capture the essence of the demonstration.

4. Think diary – Students often want to know, “How much should I write?” Give some specific directions to answer this question in the early stages. Tell them what terms to record and what parts of the demonstration require their close observation. I encourage students to think of the notebook as a sort of diary. One day, sooner rather than later in the course, they will need to look back at the notebook and be held accountable for what they have written. I use my grandfather’s notebook to guide my own directions for the student. A sample of one of his notebook entries is shown in the accompanying illustration.
5. Quantitative data – Teach students how to organize quantitative data into tables and emphasize the use of proper units when measurement is involved.
6. Qualitative observations – Encourage the use of specific language to describe qualitative observations.
7. Time factor – Allow enough time for students to complete their basic observations during class. Meticulous students may decide to add details to their notes and drawings outside of class.
8. Science content – In addition to teaching science process skills, the

demonstrations and accompanying notebook can be used to teach science content. A deductive approach is used to verify concepts taught during previous lectures. Induction can be used to encourage student discovery of key concepts.

9. Hands on activities – Once a class has mastered the idea of recording observations for demonstrations done by the teacher, the notebook can be used to record hands on investigation done directly by students.
10. Check up and feedback – After stu-



dents have used the notebook for a week or two, collect their work. The main purpose for this step is to make sure everyone is on the right track with their notebook entries. Offer individual advice to each student. Reinforce positive work and offer

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constructive criticism before bad habits develop.

The role of assessment

Students want to know whether their notebook will be graded. While the decision whether or not to collect and assess each notebook is an individual matter for each teacher, I have only collected them as described earlier to offer constructive feedback. In spite of this, the notebooks have always played an important role in assessment of student learning. Students are informed at the outset that a portion of the final test for the course will include an “open notebook” section that will address the contents of the observation notebook. The test questions are patterned after the Science Reasoning tests in the ACT. The information recorded by the student during the demonstration is used as a body of data and conclusions to answer questions. I use a mixture of simple recall questions that check the accuracy of the student’s recorded observations and higher level questions that require synthesis and application of science process skills. Periodic short quizzes during the semester can also be used to give students feedback on the quality of their observations and a familiarity with the format of the final exam.

Try it with your students!

I have found the use of demonstrations recorded in an observation notebook to be an effective way to introduce science process skills and reinforce science con-

tent. It is also a way to integrate mathematics, drawing and language arts skills with science. Although I have used the technique exclusively at the secondary and college levels, I believe that the observation notebook can also be used effectively with elementary and middle school students if a little extra guidance is provided. My students no longer think of science demonstrations as part of a magic show. They are actively engaged during the demonstration and focused on its connection to world of science. Try it for yourself and see how effective this approach can be.

Steven Thiesfeldt serves Martin Luther College as a vice president and teaches in the science division.



The Lafayette Charter School and Martin Luther College Partnership

Sarah McQuire

Lafayette, Minnesota is a small community located just north of New Ulm, Minnesota. For the past five years, the Lafayette Charter School has enjoyed a close relationship with Martin Luther College. The Lafayette Charter School has given both Junior Clinical students and Senior Practicum students a hands-on experience in a non-traditional and innovative public school.

Our Lafayette Charter School had humble beginnings in September 1999. We opened our doors with 16 students. With the help of our building owner, volunteers, and essential staff members, we bravely ushered in a new era of education in Lafayette. The growth of our school remained strong with double-digit increases in enrollment each year. With our space dwindling and handicap accessibility an issue, our landlord completed an addition to our school building in the fall of 2004. The new space gave us additional classrooms, a computer lab, accessible bathrooms, a kitchen/ lunchroom, full-size gymnasium, and some greatly needed storage space. With unprecedented growth and success, this fall we welcomed nearly 100 children back to grades K-8. With many busy years behind us and exciting years to come, we continue on with our mission of education.

Charter schools are unique public school entities that exist throughout the United States. Laws vary from state to state as far as governance and funding of charter schools, with the state of Minnesota enacting some of the strongest legislation in the nation in support of charter schools.

Charter schools are public K-12 schools started by parents, teachers, or community members who apply for a "charter" which defines the school's specific mission and goals. Charter schools are diverse, and mission statements vary from school to school. At the Lafayette Charter School our mission is to "Create a positive learning environment for general education, enhanced with agricultural concepts and electronic technology to benefit the students, school, and community."

A sponsor must authorize charter schools. In Minnesota a sponsor can be a non-profit organization, foundation, local school district, or post-secondary institution. Lafayette Charter School is currently sponsored by the local school district of Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop.

Charter schools receive funding on a per-pupil basis from the state of Minnesota. Since most charter school spaces are leased, there is also state funded lease aid available. In addition, some charter schools, including ours,

McQuire

also receive federal title funding, special education funds, and free and reduced lunch funds. Charter schools cannot issue bonds or levy for additional funds. Since charter schools are publicly funded schools, they are open to anyone, free of charge.

In Minnesota, charter schools govern, manage, and oversee all aspects of the school's mission, goals, and operation. At the Lafayette Charter School the teachers and parents elect the school board, and only teachers and parents of the Lafayette Charter School can serve on this board. This autonomy gives our charter school the opportunity to focus on innovations in teaching. Charter schools are held accountable to meet both the Minnesota and federal education requirements, as well as the requirements that have been established by our parents and community members.

Being in close proximity to Martin Luther College has enabled Lafayette Charter School to participate in both the Junior Clinical program and Senior Practicum program since the fall of 2001. Over the years, students from MLC have been placed with our teaching staff in almost every possible grade combination and specialty area, including physical education and special education. While the students are with us, they are fulfilling their state-mandated requirements that will enable them to apply for licensure in the State of Minnesota.

How each MLC student fulfills these requirements is as unique as the students themselves. The Junior Clinical

students come to our classrooms one day a week for an entire semester. These students are eager and receptive to everything going on at our school. For some of them, it is their first opportunity to get into the ebb and flow of an entire school day. For other students who have had a variety of prior experiences, they are much more likely to leap into the teaching experience. Generally these clinical students start out their semester observing what is going on in the classroom, noting management techniques, and getting to know the children. The students quickly progress to working one-on-one with children who may need extra help, attention, or instruction in a particular subject. Because most of our classrooms are multi-grade, the next step for these students is teaching a small group of children a lesson, such as a guided reading group or a literature circle. The students then may add more subjects and mini-lessons to their list of experiences before teaching lessons to the entire class.

Senior Practicum students are in our classrooms for about four weeks either directly prior to or following their Lutheran elementary experience. These students usually come to us ready and prepared for the task of teaching. This makes the initial observation period much shorter as they begin to teach small groups and then the entire class. Generally, most of the senior students teach at least a whole school day on their own. This Practicum experience is much like their student teaching experience.

The benefits to our school as part of this program are invaluable. As a supervising teacher, I enjoy having another adult in the classroom who is ready and willing to help. It is wonderful to have another professional person to assist in reteaching, managing, and supporting our children. Being a supervising teacher also keeps my teaching skills sharp. Over the course of a school year, I explain my methods, management, and teaching theories to each new MLC student. This has helped me to make sure that what I am teaching is as current in methodology and theory as what the students are learning at MLC. Finally, I have found over the years, that somewhere near the end of each student's experience, I receive the gift of time. When the students are doing their whole class instruction, it is priceless to me to be able to use the extra time to complete paperwork, grading, planning, and other individual assessments.

Our children at the Lafayette Charter School also benefit in a variety of ways from their experiences with MLC students. Our children certainly get a lot of one-on-one attention from the visiting MLC students. Having an additional teacher in the room lowers the teacher-to-student-ratio. The children also benefit from the innovative teaching methods that the MLC students are sure to deliver.

Our children also enjoy getting to know each MLC student personally. For some of our children, MLC students are the only people they know who are enrolled in college. The children enjoy finding out about our visiting MLC stu-

dents' dorm rooms, schedules, and where their home is. This often is the first time our children are able to visit with someone who has lived in a different state or country. Whether the MLC students are in the classroom, lunchroom, or playground, they are never far from being asked a string of inquisitive questions regarding their lives. At a formidable time in their lives, our children are given an opportunity to see examples of professional, young Christians.

This personal connection that our children feel to their MLC student teachers has always been most profound in the dramatic center in my classroom. Usually the drama-of-choice being played out in this center is "School." Without my prompting, the children choose someone to play the part of "MLC Student" while the rest of the children play the role of "Pupils." This drama is played out over and over again throughout the school year with the role of "MLC Student" being played as the most gentle of spirit. The positive influence, modeling, and professionalism that the MLC students have brought to our school are certainly noted by our children, parents, and faculty. We are proud to be a part of this program and look forward to continuing a strong partnership between Martin Luther College and the Lafayette Charter School. ✪

Sarah McQuire, a 1996 MLC graduate and 1999 Minnesota State graduate, teaches grades 1-2 at Lafayette Charter School, Lafayette, MN. She can be reached at mcquire@lafayettecharter.k12.mn.us

“I do” to a Called Worker

David & Roberta Retzlaff

His story

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore to send out workers into his harvest field” – Matthew 9:37-38

I remember hearing this passage as a child and already knowing that the Lord was calling me to serve him. It is hard to explain this feeling to others, but since fourth grade, I knew that I would be serving the Lord as a teacher within our Lutheran elementary school system.

The Lord prepared me well with my family background. My dad was a pastor and still serves in various ways during his retirement years. It was typical for him to be busy in the evenings with church work. Much of my family’s life revolved around church schedules and activities. My grandfather was also an influence. He spent 50 years of his life serving in the teaching ministry. I always enjoyed listening to him talk about his experiences – both good and bad. He shared how important it was to teach God’s Word to children and be an example to them in life, even if the job took a lot of dedication and often very

little pay. The commitment needed and the involvement that ministry blends into one’s overall life was simply normal to me. It was clear to me that the ministry was important enough so that I would dedicate my life to it.

In 1986 the Lord gave me the privilege of carrying out my own public ministry. During the first 14 years of teaching, I was single—sort of. I didn’t have a wife or children, but I was married to my work. My life revolved around my teaching duties. My number one priority was carrying out my Call. How late I worked at night, during the weekends, or over the summer was seldom seen by anyone. I’d have to admit that I felt socially empty at times, but I knew this work was what the Lord had planned for me, and this was how I could best serve Him.

Then five years ago the Lord brought Bobbi into my life. After our first date I knew that “this was the one.” I couldn’t explain that one either, but there was now more to life than teaching. Bobbi had never grown up with personal connections to the public ministry. With her past experiences, I wondered if she

would ever completely understand that work I did and why it was important to me. While dating, I would often go back home after an evening together and stay up late to finish work that still needed to be done for the next day. Would she ever come to terms with the amount of time it took to do the things that were asked of me? My gut told me that this was going to be challenge—but nothing that we couldn't work out.

Now, after being married for nearly five years and being blessed with a two-year-old son, Jacob, my biggest challenge continues to be balancing the time and attention needed at home with the work that needs to be done at school. Being gone for meetings and school events in the evenings is not easy, especially if Bobbi has had a tough day and Jacob is throwing a tantrum as I walk out the door. As I head up to school, I often wonder if Bobbi will ever adjust to this lifestyle that she acquired as my wife.

Her story

I can honestly say I never pictured myself marrying someone in the ministry. I grew up in a WELS family, attending both a Lutheran elementary school and high school. However, the church did not dominate our lives. Church was Sundays and holidays—not something that occupied our lives seven days a week.

My background includes an equal mix of white collar and blue collar employment. My father worked in a paper mill and belonged to a union. My

mother was an engineering manager in a telephone company and dealt with union-related issues from a management perspective. Currently, I work in a white collar position that is covered by a union. From my childhood experiences to my current position, I am used to people working 40-hour weeks where additional hours are compensated with either additional pay or additional vacation time.

After almost five years of marriage, I still haven't gotten used to the typical 60-70 hour weeks that David works, let alone the atypical weeks of more than 70 hours. Some argue that he's a teacher so he gets the summers off. Those married to WELS teachers know that isn't the case. Plus, David is also the principal so his "summer break" is simply 30-hour weeks. The yearly average of work time doesn't turn out to be anywhere near a 40-hour week. If I were to be honest, I would have to admit that there are times I wish David would give up the ministry and simply teach in a public school where a union would ensure better work hours and compensation.

His work hours are a continual sore spot for me as I feel I am often competing against the church/school for his time and attention. Since the birth of our son, his hours have become even more of an issue. It does seem strange to me that called workers are encouraged to have strong families that are good examples to others, only to have the church/school demand high amounts of time away from families.

I now empathize with spouses of

Retzlaffs

other called workers as they deal with many of these same issues, especially when I realize that I have some advantages in my current situation.

Thankfully, I have not had the glass house experience that many called worker families encounter. The main reason is because David and I live in a metropolitan area. It's a rare occasion when we run into someone from church or school while shopping or going out to eat. The lack of privacy that some families face in rural areas would be difficult for me.

In addition to living in a large urban area, I believe churches and schools in general have lessened their expectations of called worker spouses, particularly wives. In the past, the wife was often a stay-at-home mom. It's important to me that people not judge me for having a job while caring for a family. Being able to work not only helps financially, but it also gives me a sense of purpose and accomplishment which helps me to be a better wife and mother.

Our story

Since one of us views church work as a ministry and the other views it as a job, the struggle over time and schedules has been our most difficult battle to conquer. There are times when we make things work smoothly, but there are days where the stress level on our marriage is extremely high. So how do we make it work and what advice would we give to others?

Before marriage, be honest with each other about the challenges that ministry

will bring to your relationship so that you can discuss those issues ahead of time and create possible ways to overcome them.

Look at all issues from your spouse's perspective so that you can better understand the underlying problems and find ways to work on them together.

Be willing to compromise. As a spouse of a called worker, empathize with the expectations and demands that are placed upon your spouse. Your support and encouragement are greatly needed. As a called worker, ask the Lord for wisdom to keep perspective and balance in your life. Beyond the public ministry, the Lord has given you a higher calling to be a Christian spouse and/or parent.

Continually go back to the Word for the strength and guidance you need. God will not desert you when struggles arise, but he will use those moments to test you and strengthen your faith through the Scriptures.

Be reassured that the Lord who brought you together knew what he was doing, and he will remain in control. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11) Whether you are a called worker or the spouse of one, remember that this promise applies to you too! ✨

David & Roberta Retzlaff live in Madison, WI. David is principal and teacher at Our Redeemer, Madison, WI.

Not Always Positive

Martin Sponholz

Traditionally in our approach to science in Christian education we emphasize the positive role the Christian brings to the study and exploration of the natural world in developing explanations we call science. Our Lord's command to "subdue the earth" is our incentive to study and research science and marvel at what he has created and given us.

Yet the pursuit of this subject, science, which I personally loved so much that I willingly froze too many of my parts while exploring the Antarctic, cannot always be positive.

The freezing goes with the territory and becomes part of the "sea stories" bragged about and enjoyed by fellow compatriots. The not so positive issues, however, are the attacks to the Christian faith. The vast majority of scientists today are just not interested in the faith. Since at least Thales (600 BC), the pursuit of the knowledge of the natural world proudly is reported to be independent of faith and related to evidence, logic, and mathematical models only.

I don't wish to pass judgment on another man's soul and his belief in a Savior, but a lifetime committed to rea-

son alone has an effect. "Temptations come alluring." There is a price to pay for a life in science. As an example let me present an Antarctic patriot for a lifetime, John C. Behrendt, who was a geophysicist and glaciologist and now has begun to write books on his experiences pushing back the unknown of an entire continent.

Behrendt writes in his second book, *The Ninth Circle*

25 Dec. Christmas, Sun. A plane came in from McMurdo today with a Catholic priest from ChiChi and a Protestant chaplain from McMurdo. They conducted services after the usual large and delicious Navy Christmas dinner.

This brief note on the chaplain's visit and the Quonset hut "Chapel-of-the-Snows" at McMurdo are the closest to a comment on religion in my journal of experiences in Antarctica during the 1960-62 period. In an online book by Marty Sponholz of his experiences with the U.S. program in the 1960s in Antarctica he wrote: "I was stunned at the almost complete lack of interest in religion of any kind by so many of these scientists who were

Sponholz

now my friends established through frostbite, risk and survival.” With the exception of the first few weeks at Ellsworth, when a lay preacher tried to interest the station in Sunday services (unsuccessfully), I do not recall in my 13 trips to Antarctica any mention ever of any religious thoughts, or participation of any of the scientists in any religious service. Obviously, the devout Sponholz noted this as an anomaly.

[John C. Behrendt, *The Ninth Circle: A Memoir of Life and Death in Antarctica*, 1960-1962, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2005, pages 74-75.]

When I made a claim many years ago that the overwhelming number of scientists did not believe in most forms of

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religion, this is what I was talking about. My religious colleagues differed, saying that the best scientists are religious.

The thought that the positive gift to science that the Christian brings to science—knowing that God created everything, “and it was very good”—will not necessarily impress the scientist. Also, the steady drumbeat of experimental science resting on reason is not free from temptations drawing the best of Christians to doubt.

Looking for “true science” to emerge from scientists is not going to happen. An argument from semantics does not face reality. Science is an art form and always will carry the image of the unbelievers that define the frames and canvas.

If you must work in the science world as I do or excite children to scientific professions where they might use their God given gifts, a positive approach alone is not enough. Warnings to the faith are a must. Martin Luther still has the only answer:

“He who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.”

[Martin Luther, The Heidelberg Disputation, before the Augustinians in Heidelberg, May, 1518. Retrieved 4/13/2005 from <http://www.catchpenny.org/heidel.html>] ♣

Martin Sponholz is a science professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

Teaching Children —Many Gifts/Endless Possibilities

Terri Krueger

Teaching God's children—what an awesome responsibility God has given us. Yes, God gives us that responsibility and challenge when he chooses to share his precious lambs with us. We know that the time we have with these lambs is temporary, so we must make the best use of that time. In these last days there is more of an urgency to what we do.

Romans 12:6-8 tells us that there is a variety of gifts God gives. These verses not only list the gifts, but also a set of instructions of what to do with them. I Peter 4:10 tells us we should use the gifts we have to serve others in sharing God's grace.

When thinking about doing the Lord's work, one of my favorite chapters is 1 Corinthians 12. The first eleven verses deal with recognizing the gifts we have from God and how we need to use them all to the glory of God and the "common good." The second part of the chapter compares the gifts to parts of the body. Each time I study these verses something new comes to light. The wonderful bodies God has blessed all of us with, and all the intricate parts that work together to keep us healthy,

make them one of the greatest miracles of God's creation. Our bodies are made up of many parts and each has its own purpose. So God's church is made up of many people, each one blessed with his/her unique set of gifts and talents.

Another part of this chapter I find fascinating is found in verses 22-23. Here Paul states that "those parts of the body

*Sometimes we have
to ask ourselves if
the way we teach is
the way we learned.*

that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and that parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor." He goes on in verses 24-26 to say, "God has combined the members of the body... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." So it needs to be with the members of the congregation, and especially for us with the children.

Krueger

Do we sometimes treat our children as those “weaker parts”? Do we sometimes underestimate what children have to offer and what we can learn from them? Do we sometimes underestimate what we have to offer them and what they can learn from us?

In Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:4 God reminds us of our responsibilities toward our children. They are our trea-

*If we're willing to
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and we're humbled
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do this work.*

asures from God, and we need to remember they are only lent to us for a short time. What will we do with that time?

One of the best things we can do is to get to know those precious lambs who have been entrusted to us, not only by their parents, but by God himself. How can we begin to meet their needs if we don't know who they are? How can we recognize those gifts and talents if we haven't a clue what to look for?

As instructors we also need to be aware of our own gifts and talents. We

also have to recognize our own shortcomings. Sometimes we have to ask ourselves if the way we teach is the way we learned. We also have to learn to recognize that if we are auditory people teaching visual or kinesthetic students, we may find ourselves frustrated. So, as educators, we need to learn to take risks; we need to learn to stretch ourselves. We need to look at the challenges as opportunities to grow and learn. Will we make mistakes along our journey? Of course. Does that mean we don't try? As we allow the children to teach us, we open ourselves to a wonderful world of learning. If we're willing to try something new, we learn to recognize how much God blesses our efforts, and we're humbled by the reality that God has chosen us to do this work.

Things to be aware of—things that make each child a unique gift from God:

- Surroundings/environment—lighting in the classroom, time of day, how hungry a child is, his/her emotional state and support system, noise in the classroom, structure and routines are just a few of the many things that can affect a child's performance.
- Personality—a knowledge of the four basic personality types can be helpful, recognizing that no one fits completely into one of these categories:
 - concrete sequential—well-organized, independent, details
 - abstract sequential—analyzers and researchers
 - abstract random—sensitive, emotional, self-sacrificing
 - concrete random—visionaries,

- look to the future, inspire others.
- Modality—a well-balanced program using all modalities helps children learn, as most are a combination of more than one:
 - visual
 - auditory
 - kinesthetic.
 - Intelligences—Howard Garner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences helps recognize those gifts and talents.
 - Linguistic/Verbal—words and language-writers
 - Logical/Mathematical—numbers, patterns-scientists
 - Visual/Spatial—internal mental images-artists, architects, engineers
 - Musical/Rhythmic—tonal patterns, rhythm-musicians

- Body/Kinesthetic—physical movement-athletes, dancers
- Interpersonal—ability to deal with others—administrators, counselors
- Intrapersonal—ability to self-reflect-teachers, therapists, entrepreneurs
- Naturalistic—tuned into nature-farmers, forest rangers, gardeners.

As you read through the list above, be encouraged in the knowledge that God has called you and placed you in your classroom at this time to learn and guide, to pray and trust. May God continue to bless your efforts to get to know his precious lambs. ✨

Terri Krueger is a former WELS teacher and is a licensed educational therapist who lives in Madison, WI

A prayer for children who do not know Christ

Lord Jesus, Our Good Shepherd, hear our prayer for little ones. Look with compassion on all children who enter their beds this night with no knowledge of your love to warm them, with no experience of your beauty to delight them, with no realization of your presence to comfort them. Send your holy angels to protect and defend them. Save them from suffering because of the sins of others, and bring them into the peace and safety of your kingdom.

From *Christian Worship, Altar Book*
Milwaukee: NPH, 1999. p. 240.

REVIEWS

REVIEWS

Contemplating Youth Ministry

In response to a 2003 WELS Convention resolution, the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship began researching why teens and young adults are leaving WELS and their local congregations. One blogger on the WELS web log wrote concerning this topic: "I believe the reason why many of our youth are staying away ... is because they cannot show their thankfulness through their own gifts and ways. ... If you give the youth all the jobs that no other member or committee wants, the youth will leave." – Imprint <www.wels.net/wordpress/archives/2005/02/22/youth-leaving-church> [accessed 20 June 2005]

Certainly in many cases there are deeper spiritual ailments that cause youth to wander away. However, feeling left out is a sentiment I've heard expressed by some of our best young adults, a sense of being out of place when they are no longer kids but not yet incorporated as adults. When I asked a group of college students, "What more could our churches do in regard to young people in the church?" these were some of the responses:

"Well less than half of the youth at my church are thoroughly integrated into the church."

"Our churches need to recognize youth as the church of today—not merely the church of the future."

"We need to find meaningful ways to involve youth in the church, not just to keep youth happy. Youth ministry is too much lock-ins and parties and not enough meaningful involvement."

According to US Census Bureau figures, beginning in the year 2006, the total population of teens will be the greatest in American history (Reid 2004, 35). The time is ripe for us to give significant attention to how we minister to teenagers and young adults. Those already active in children's ministries might expand their horizon and strive to keep nurturing those children as they become adults. Called workers in teaching and staff ministry positions can provide an invaluable contribution to the church by assisting in this area of ministry.

A good book for evaluating and planning your congregation's ministry to and with youth is the *WELS Handbook for Teen Ministry* (WELS Youth Discipleship, 1996), available from Northwestern Publishing House. Below are reviews of three other general-interest resources dealing with young adult education and nurture. One must be wary of (sometimes glaring) theological weaknesses in these products, but perhaps they can be useful in striking up conversations in our own midst about essential elements of youth ministry.



Lytch, Carol E. *Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. 294 p. \$24.95.

Choosing Church is a result of Ph.D. research by an adjunct professor at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. It consists of approximately 200 pages of text and 100 pages' worth of appendices. Lytch's liberal view of church affairs is quite evident. She uses fellow Presbyterian C. Ellis Nelson's fuzzy definition of faith: "Faith is the 'residue' of religious experience, the enduring conviction remaining when the intense moment of theophany fades." She is uncritical of doctrine and practice in the churches she studied, accepting Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and an evangelical megachurch each as valid and successful in its own way. Christ receives prominent mention on these pages only when students speak of him in interviews; rarely does the author herself point to the centrality of the Christ. This is admittedly "a fine-grained sociological analysis," not a sound theological treatise.

The book bears reading, however, for the insight it offers into American religious culture—particularly as it pertains to teenagers. Lytch's research method was qualitative; she selected three distinctive congregations and did extensive interviews with parents, teens and staff involved in those "successful" youth ministries. She wanted to determine what factors influenced teens' loyalty to the religious denominations in which they were raised, seeking to "under-

stand why and in what ways teens decide to embrace the tradition handed down by their religious community." The portrayals of family situations and youth perspectives are thought-provoking—such as the story of Brittany who "was left stranded after she was confirmed in the church" or that of Megan who, while heavily involved in her church's activities, yet says, "God, I'm not really religious. It doesn't really take up a large part of my life. It's something I've kind of grown up with and gotten used to."

The key findings of Lytch's study draw our attention as we think about youth nurture in our churches.

Her research vividly evidences how choice and personal autonomy have become dominant in our culture. She concludes, "Teens today—like many adults—tend to conceive of religion in a highly personal way that is less tethered to an unquestioned religious authority. They might embrace a historic religious tradition, but they also might pick and choose the beliefs and practices within it that make sense to them."

Her study gives special attention to high school seniors. "It is as if seniors come to a fork in the road where they are presented with the prospect of either dropping out of church or becoming more committed to their community of faith." We would do well to see the senior year of high school—and freshman year of college—as a pivotal point in the lives of our young people. Parents easily get wrapped up in what Lytch calls "résumé-building," making sure kids get all their college programs set up, but leaving them on

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their own to pursue spiritual nurture. Her interviews attest to the fact that parents still can have significant spiritual influence as teenagers are independent adults.

According to Lytch, “the most significant of all factors contributing to teen religious loyalty” is “regular family church attendance.” That should come as no surprise. It’s like pursuing detailed scientific research to find out that broccoli is healthier than candy. Nevertheless, emphasis on the urgency of parental involvement cannot be stated too strongly or too often. Worth our reading in this regard, Lytch testifies to the consequence of cultivating “a warm climate in the family.” She addresses various parenting styles and the impact that these can have on the development of spiritual life in children and youth.

Choosing Church is an attempt to ascertain how to reach and keep teens amid a changing, post-traditional society. Intriguing for its observations on societal patterns and attitudes, it is devoid of any recognition of the gospel’s efficacy. The research here has a form of godliness but misses all its real power. Ultimately, our task in the Spirit is to keep youth connected to Christ through Word and Sacrament, not merely to help them “choose to stay connected to their religious tradition.”



Reid, Alvin L. *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium*. Grand Rapids MI: Kregel, 2004. 207 p.

\$10.99. Available from NPH.

Raising the Bar rife with Baptist theology—which one would expect from Alvin Reid as a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Reid will rub Lutheran readers the wrong way when he cheers on the various holiness and revivalist movements that have occurred in the church—from Pietism in Germany to Methodism in England and the Great Awakening in the colonies, on down to the Jesus Movement in America in the 1970s. Nevertheless, an issue he lays before the 21st century church demands our attention.

Reid claims that his research reveals a common denominator across the lines of denominations: “Churches across America treat teenagers like fourth graders, and ministry to youth is like a YMCA/YWCA meeting.” He argues for aiming higher. “Young people can and do make mature, responsible decisions. But contemporary culture, even within the church, has developed a mistaken mind-set: Youth are kids who need to be baby-sat, rather than young adults ready for the challenge of changing the world. ... Young people are not children finishing childhood; they’re young adults preparing for adulthood, and they will rise to the bar we set for them.” He likes what a 17-year-old said the church should do for youth: “Tell them we know how to be teenagers. We want them to show us how to be adults.”

In urging churches to raise the bar for youth involvement in member ministry, Reid contends that the Bible speaks of children and adults with no

separate category in between for “adolescents.” He calls to mind Bible examples of young people who did great things in the service of God (such as Samuel, David, Esther, Daniel, Mary.)

Reid’s idea of youth ministry runs counter to the frequent norm. He poses the question to parents: “Do you think that youth ministry should primarily provide activities for your children? If so, please take a day off work and, instead, take your child to a theme park yourself.” “This generation of young people,” according to Reid, “is not satisfied with the latest game or icebreaker. They want real, honest, biblical substance.” Instead of activity-oriented youth programs, he favors fostering family ministry and including teenagers right alongside other “grown-ups” in the life and mission of the church. As part of this, he wants teens to be challenged to study doctrine deeply. “If they can learn chemistry in high school, they can learn theology at church.” The fact that doctrinal teaching differs between someone like Alvin Reid and those who teach in our churches only serves to reinforce the point for us further: for our upcoming adults to face the world, be bombarded by various teachings, and still stand in faith, we need a serious approach to youth ministry.



Yaconelli, Mike. *The CORE Realities of Youth Ministry: Nine Biblical Principles that Mark Healthy Youth Ministries*. Cajon CA: Youth Specialties, 2003.

141 p. \$10.99.

When I see a book from a nondenominational publisher that has a number in the title, I’m wary: “Seven habits” ... “ten traits” ... “twelve steps.” I think of a friend who passed along books by John Maxwell that he wanted me to read, like *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. The usual content is law from a Reformed perspective: “Do these things and you will be successful.” Seeing *Nine Biblical Principles that Mark Healthy Youth Ministries* as the subtitle to Mike Yaconelli’s *The CORE Realities of Youth Ministry*, I was understandably skeptical. Then I was pleasantly surprised. This is not a book of scripted techniques guaranteed to produce youth group glory. This is more a treatise on the theory of working with youth from a Christ-centered point of view. While notions of an inner call and decision-theology show up from time to time, overall the proclamation of gospel in this little volume is refreshing. A healthy questioning of decision-like tactics even surfaces in comments like this: “I’d much rather measure the number of times I presented the gospel and offered it to teenagers regardless of the responses. If we really believe the Holy Spirit is mysteriously working in the lives of our kids, it’s our heart motives that are important, not the measured results.”

Mike Yaconelli, who died in 2003, worked with youth for over 40 years and founded Youth Specialties in 1969. The CORE is what the folks at Youth Specialties call their current series of youth ministry training seminars. As a book, *The CORE Realities* serves as

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Yaconelli's parting thoughts on what is important in youth ministry. Anecdotes and commentaries by a dozen or so of his CORE colleagues are woven throughout the text.

The first focus is on the Bible as foundation for all ministry, in an opening chapter that handles Scripture rather well. Then the "nine core realities" are explained: veracity, authenticity, audacity, humility, diversity, sanctuary, intimacy, mystery and creativity. The best content is in the first two-thirds of the book. Chapters 8 and 9—on intimacy with God and the mystery of the message—slide a bit into Pentecostalism and mysticism.

WELS readers would do well to challenge themselves with *The CORE Realities*. Most challenging to us is the urging to be audacious, rather than stay-

ing safe in sameness and tameness. Best about this book is that its lessons are applicable to any youth ministry, even with just a couple of kids in a tiny congregation. An insistence that bigger is not necessarily better permeates the author's perspective. For instance: "We have been called by a Jesus who is not impressed by large, razzle-dazzle ministries, but by a Jesus who celebrates even the small ones."

A small, fledgling youth group might benefit by reading and discussing this book—teens and adult leaders together in conversation. You will find yourselves not agreeing with everything Yaconelli and his team members say, but definitely sparking thoughts about what ministry is and what youth ministry can be in your congregation. ✪

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