Personal and Professional Well-Being for Educators in Lutheran Ministries: A Mutual Concern

by

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Foreword

In recent years financial concerns and lower enrollments have combined to raise serious issues for some Lutheran schools and the teachers ministering in them. This LEA eMonograph addresses these issues and provides a basis for deeper study of the theology and practices in our congregations and schools. The intent is to provide a structure for a discussion of this topic, seeking direction without being prescriptive beyond broader theological imperatives. In some places, metaphors are used to encourage reflection. There is a bias or support toward the current practice of considering teachers as called ministers.

The initial sections of the monograph provide a foundation for a review of church-based practice from theological, cultural, and historical perspectives. This preliminary discussion is often neglected, with discussion based more upon the experience of the participants.

The next two sections deal with the personal reflections of the workers’ understanding of the ministry and the importance of personal faith and life practices. The importance of three perspectives are then discussed—first the workers’ personal development and faith, followed by the strategic ideas present within the congregation or sponsoring agency, followed by the actual administration built around ideas regarding professional development. In some ways, I hope I have saved the best for last in a theological restatement regarding the importance of daily repentance and hope as our best tools for healthy teachers and schools.

Finally, the benediction could well be the most important; the words from James deserve a word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase study. Understanding the issue as prolog is helpful, but the scriptural imperative from James helps us to define a response that will work. It is God’s advice based upon His promise.

I have often told students that if they want to get value for their tuition, they need to do more than I expect. The real benefit of education is to live well, to be creative in finding solutions for those things that challenge our faith and lives. Living well (abundantly) is the best revenge for sin in the world, including our own selfishness. A long time ago, I realized that I got far more satisfaction from sharing and helping others to live well than worrying about my own entertainment. That is a prayer of thanks not pride; I still have my selfish and disobedient acts, but, for the most part, repentance and confession keep bringing me back to hope in my Lord’s promise. That is certainly the message our schools and teachers bring to the world. To consider that goal is the benefit I pray these ideas can bring to you and your ministry.

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The goal of this monograph is to encourage thinking, discussion, and action regarding the personal and professional well-being of Lutheran educators. The success of Lutheran schools depends upon healthy teachers. This review can be studied from a variety of perspectives: 1) theological, 2) strategic (policy level), 3) tactical (actual practice or administration), and 4) a personal or reflective view. While, the ideas in this study may be read in a sitting or in sections, it can also provide a group study over several sessions for a faculty, policy boards, administrative leaders, or other congregational groups.

The well-being of Lutheran educators is a challenging issue, since both congregational and school issues as well as personal needs and situations, may all impact, conflict, and hinder or even destroy ministry.

A positive climate can enhance ministry. The ability to follow a Gospel path in planning, leading, and managing school ministry is a core issue for the church. I pray that God will bless these words and that your study of them will support a richer life for the church’s mission. Many of the works cited can provide deeper study for those who desire to pursue these topics.

Schools are sophisticated, responsive, human systems. That makes the care and nurture of teachers both an individualistic and a complex issue. Schools as systems have strategic, tactical, and human aspects. The best strategic policy-based system may fail if the tactical leadership does not adapt to specific local and personal implementation issues. The saying is true; the devil is in the details. He really is! Failure and pain may occur when a plan is poorly implemented. Plans may fail in either conception or in actual practice. Even well-intended actions may fail to achieve a goal; where there is contention or party spirit, success would seem to be all but doomed.

What about the history of your school influences the future of the school?

Importance of this Issue

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has viewed schools as essential and valuable institutions for ministry since its formation in 1847. The initial idea that a parish was not viable without a school still burns in the hearts of some in the LCMS.

Like diamonds, our schools are considered precious; people have made many sacrifices in support of them. We should remember that diamonds do not produce their own light. They usually look drab until they are cut and polished. Like the diamond, a teacher reflects the light provided by the
How do we prepare and support teachers so that their light shines brightly?

Master, Christ the Lord, our Savior.

How brightly or successfully the light is reflected is the focus of this discussion. How do we prepare and support teachers so that their light shines brightly? A joy in my life has been to be told by some former students the light I reflected helped them to find their way. I have also had days when my reflection did not seem so brilliant. I have seen colleagues’ and my own light dimmed. Opaqueness may block my brightness; a film may form, making the reflection limited and difficult to perceive.

What causes this film to form? Luther was clear in pointing to sin as the ultimate cause. It is the caustic element that attacks the creation, dulling the brightness, diminishing the light for students, their parents, our co-workers, and even ourselves. Our sin, the world, and the devil work hard to diminish the brilliance.

Karl Menninger (1973), posed a challenging question for the new age when he asked, Whatever Became of Sin? We are so smart that we rationalize evil away or simply deny it. We employ humanistic ideas about man’s natural goodness in this post-modern age. We have the ability to make excuses for our sin. In truth, we are unable to master our sin, except by the Spirit, so we blame everything but ourselves for the darkness caused by the dimness of our reflection.

Luther proclaims the source of our salvation: sola gratia; it is only the blood of Christ that cleanses us, so the light may shine forth. By the grace of God, that washing takes place in our baptisms and in daily repentance. The freedom of being clean means we can reflect the joy of our salvation upon creation.

The condition or level of brightness in our lives can be further studied through the metaphor of another diamond, the diamond where baseball is played. A game upon that diamond provides examples regarding how well we play the game, how richly we live our lives. I know some of you may not enjoy baseball, but allow me to suggest that you can benefit by reflecting on baseball as a metaphor for life.

Think of the game’s terms used in a mission or outreach context: pitch, catch, safe, out, hit, error, fastball, curve, change-up, slider, and balk to list a few. Then there is the playing field with its sharp lines of chalk, walls that must be surpassed for a homer, dugouts where we find refuge, or bullpens where warriors warm up before entering the battle. The positions of pitcher, catcher, basemen, shortstop, and outfielders all create images of life as we consider our reflections upon the people in our game (lives). This is only
a beginning for there are so many facets you can discover in your own thoughts and conversations.

Baseball also provides subtle nuances; the fair ball over the fence is great; a few feet one way or the other and it is just a foul ball—even hit out of the park it is only dross, a long strike. By using the metaphor we can sneak up on some of our own weak or dark spots. We can then repent and embrace forgiveness, allowing us to shine brightly! There are many angles in the game of baseball, geometric and otherwise. The mound gives the pitcher a better angle for release of the ball (a plus for the pitcher), a hit-and-run play provides the runner a head start against the defense, stars only hit 300, a sacrifice bunt or fly moves the runner along, and a suicide squeeze even can provide a run against a surprised defense. You can think of your own examples. By using the metaphor, you can talk about life and come to see how both the darkness and the light impact our spiritual welfare.

How the church nurtures and cares for its teachers impacts how well schools shine their light, how brilliant a reflection they cast upon those they serve.

How the church nurtures and cares for its teachers impacts how well schools shine their light, how brilliant a reflection they cast upon those they serve. The point of your study and discussion is to help teachers and the people who sponsor and support them to consider the relationships and conditions that impact them. These conditions help determine the effectiveness of our witness—how well God’s light is reflected upon His creation in our schools and churches.

The State of Education in the United States

Education in the United States has faced significant criticism. This criticism also impacts Lutheran teachers and schools. There is not space here to deeply explore this contentiousness or the factors causing it, but briefly considering the criticism will yield a better understanding of its impact upon our school ministries. A basic understanding is that schools have become essential to a successful society. When Putnam (2000), in Bowling Alone, claims that schools are the only intermediate social institutions for most people within our society, he provides an important insight. We ask schools to do so much for our culture—probably too much. Is there enough support and direction for children without them? Without them many more children may actually get left behind! This places additional stress upon schools and teachers.

There is, however, a general lack of agreement on the learning process and the mission of schools. The dichotomy facing educators is more facts versus better thinking. Educational leaders disagree on what it means to be educated. The argument was initiated by the Committee of Ten in the

There is, however, a general lack of agreement on the learning process and the mission of schools. The dichotomy facing educators is more facts versus better thinking.
1890s, partially in response to the growth of secondary schools for a new industrial urban society, (though in many respects it dates back at least to the ancient Greeks). David J. Ferrero claims in an *Educational Leadership* article in (2005), “education’s fiercest and most intractable conflicts have stemmed from differences in philosophy. Take the 100 Years War between ‘progressives’ and ‘traditionalists.’ To oversimplify an already oversimplified dichotomy, progressives incline toward pedagogical approaches that start with student interests and emphasize hands-on engagement with the physical and social environments, whereas traditionalists tend to start with pre-existing canons of inquiry and knowledge and emphasize ideas and concepts mediated through words and symbols.”

Society struggles with this dichotomous, often feisty, educational agenda; some support a progressive view that calls for schools to prepare children for life in a changing culture, while others seek to require a traditional, even perennial, core-content curriculum measured by success on high-stakes tests.

Lawrence Cremin (1976) in *Public Education* defines education as, “the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit or evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities.” Some subject-centered essentialists focus on the content to be learned. Hirsch’s view in *Cultural Literacy* (1988), is an example. But there is no single accepted definition. Pressure for a national core curriculum is in the news this year. An earlier more pragmatic voice, Whitehead (1929) claimed, “There can be no mental development without interest….You may endeavour to excite interest by means of birch rods, or you may coax it by the incitement of pleasurable activity. *But without interest there will be no progress.* Cursed be the dullard who destroys wonder.”

Schools do not merely teach subject matter or content; they engage the whole student so as to instill an internal drive toward self-development when the external stric- tures of formal education are removed.

It need not be a battle; yet educational history in the twentieth century has been warfare from Sputnik to progressives and new math to self-esteem. As basically conservative institutions, schools are called upon to pass on cultural values. But, they must also be releasers of creativity. That is part of the richness of liberty. This argument can be intensified in Lutheran schools, where the dialog may become
more heated due to different theological imperatives that various supporters embrace.

Questions will continue to loom large on the horizon, and it will be fascinating to hear the variety of political positions adopted in this debate. We do need to research and plan on ways to improve education. People must realize some actions or methods can have a negative impact upon the minds of children and that we must make creative and corporate decisions that promote true equity of opportunity and call for creativity in the lives of all children. These are significant questions about the purpose and condition of the nation’s schools and the teachers who seek to reflect the light to our society’s children. These issues affect Lutheran schools in a variety of ways and are important to help frame a context for the success and health of those who teach in them.

The State of the Church
Mainline churches are not experiencing growth; they are shrinking. Members’ average ages are increasing and there are significant decreases in baptisms and confirmations. Some congregations have had to close schools or reduce staff. Has God abandoned them? No, but we are in a culture that often seeks to define its own success as well as its own gods. The value of a school’s ministry may be questioned. This is not the first time this has happened. As a young teacher, I witnessed a demographic shift in the San Francisco area. Communities were changing. One result was some congregations experienced declines in membership. Over the years, the attendance at several schools dried up as the congregations and schools could not adjust to the changes. The population shifted and communities changed. Parishes wanted to change, but issues related to race, culture, and poverty prevented much success. So both the church and school lost resources they needed to survive and prosper. While this is a terse description that fails to reflect many dedicated efforts to avert the situation, it still reflects the result.

In many ways, current conditions driven by demographics, culture, and economics are demanding that the wider church adapt to changed realities. There are fewer children in some communities, and classrooms may have fewer member children. Globalization and technology proclaim there are new ways to relate. Still, change is difficult; the church is called upon by some voices to change or die. This is a challenging issue as we seek what God intends for the church. We must recall it is His church. Human solutions need to reflect a faith-based scholarship. Michael Fullan...
(2001) indirectly speaks to that challenge and the difficulty of adapting to new situations in *Leading in a Culture of Change*. The need is for thoughtful institutional change and a search for the resources needed to perpetuate it. The challenge for the church is to accomplish this without losing its mission—the Gospel imperative. The church and school may need to make changes; God’s promise is not to withdraw from His people. However, if the school is to retain a role in congregational ministry, it must carefully consider the implications for adaptations to its very mission.

There continue to be a variety of institutional responses within churches. Other denominations are facing the same issues, seeking strategies from mega-congregations to house churches often relying on sociology and marketing in a search for members. Some are exploring primarily business-driven models, others reflect a dependence upon reformed or works-driven theology, often with a media or technology base to gain support for ministry; still others respond to cultural needs from gyms to childcare centers. Other congregations continue their traditional governance based upon a model reflecting rural needs and challenges that failed to respond to the industrial age let alone to what people are currently calling the information or technology age. Thus, traditional forms coexist with experimentation with new organizational theories as congregations seek ways to survive and witness to their communities. New institutional models provide ideas but also may confuse the church and its workers as they seek success. Fullan’s advice is helpful; he speaks to grounded theory and understandings rather than sponsoring a specific model, strategy, or brand. Because of sin, the church in any age struggles not to block God’s light preventing the release of His power.

Word and Sacrament are the ways we proclaim that the Spirit comes to strengthen His people. They acknowledge the notion that we are sinners, condemned by our rebellion from the Creator. We are all saved by the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross. The theology of the cross described by Peter Steinke (1983) strikes me as a helpful core understanding. The sanctified believer is the Spirit’s tool and vassal and the manner by which the Good News is declared. Lutheran schools are a great institution for both nurture and outreach. That does not mean they are easy or inexpensive to manage and maintain. Still amidst all the stress and calls for change, the mission and Spirit’s guidance must be central to the discussion. Only then is the reflected light released to show the way.

Seeking new ways is not easy, and it may even hurt programs in the name of change. Judgment errors and actions by both congregations and workers can impact ministry.
Nothing may be as dangerous as the person on a self-proclaimed holy mission; history shows that what may begin well can come to define the mission in its own terms, losing the very vision it claimed to support. Institutions serve and are governed by humans who are sinners after all. Good intentions often bear unintended consequences that may hurt people and the institutions they love.

I have observed great sorrow as congregations try to change or even close a ministry, which many have supported with years of time and treasure. Yes, a death can result in a new spirit, but often changing a ministry can seem to just cause pain and rancor. These challenges require church leaders to spend energy and time on troublesome issues that may still yield heartbreaking results. More openness and collaboration are a start—just remember it is the Lord’s ministry; teachers and leaders need to keep that in mind as they seek to discover His way. The Spirit transforms those who hear the Word of Hope.

The Ministry of the Teacher
The church’s idea regarding the role of the teacher is of central importance. I prepared to be a professional church worker, a called worker in the educational ministry of the LCMS. My vocation to be a Lutheran teacher found me as a 16-year-old junior in high school. In 1969, upon graduation, I was called to serve in a congregation. Though there have been valleys and hilltops in my ministry, it continues to be a great source of joy and celebration to say I am a minister of the Gospel. My vocation proved to be well-chosen and has blessed me with the opportunity of earning a living as well as serving in the Kingdom’s work. I feel it has been a gift of the Spirit.

In that light, the words from the Diploma of Vocation should be required reading before a congregation issues a call to a teacher. Words like, “In the name of the Triune God and by His authority we ask you to assume the responsibilities of the office to which we have called you and faithfully to perform all the duties of your office according to the Word of God...”, or “We pray God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has moved us to extend our call to you, to convince you by His Holy Spirit that it comes from Him.” That sounds like vocation language, purpose of life language, which supports teaching ministers and school ministry. Before a congregation calls it should consider such words with care and prayer. Before candidates accept a call, they should spend serious time in considering them as well. Some congregations simply hire teachers rather than calling them.
A primary question: Is the role of church educator still seen as a vocation? Are we calling a Minister of the Gospel or are we hiring a teacher. This implies that other considerations are secondary. My work as a college placement director for the church allowed me to see that this is a question of practice for congregations, regardless of the official stance of the synod. Practice indicates a great amount of variation in congregations and schools. Both practice and theory operate within worldly institutions. Even those established for good order within the Kingdom have to deal with sin and decisions about personnel and programs. We seek God’s will and promise, and I believe that the Spirit is very much a part of the process, but both the calling institution and the worker need a lot of prayer. How do we best focus upon fulfilling God’s plan? That means that the goals of the school, congregation, and worker are all secondary to the Gospel mission of spreading the Good News!

Congregations need continually to review their practices. The cost and time are demanding, but it is an important discussion for both workers and congregations. Can we maintain a holy practice with all of the temptations and distractions of secular power in a sinful world? (My position is that under the Gospel we can, but it is not an easy task, and I would suggest that churches need to be more attentive to it.) The Call’s meaning to educators is at issue by its very practice in the church today, not due to theology but practice. Even more important is the mission it addresses; the Gospel response is at the heart of our practice. It is the essential issue. Some see the teacher as merely another worker, not a Minister of the Gospel, an extension of the pastoral ministry (an auxiliary) who happens to be a specialist working in a specific ministry of the school and parish. A health check can be achieved by simply looking at the process by which a parish calls a teacher. Is it with the same energy and care with which they call a pastor? That would be a place to start, for our theology claims it is the same process, just a different office.

Another issue arises when teachers fail to embrace their work as ministry. Teachers do not always consider the time and energy required of them. In addition, they may be poorly supported and under-supervised. The issue is complicated, and the world does not allow the attention it requires. Can that reality be changed? We must better match our goals and dreams with the energy and resources required to accomplish them. We are the instruments that the Spirit uses to reflect the Word, not to merely meet some earthly measure. Do teachers see themselves as ministers? If a congregation supports that view, it is easier but not an automatic solution. Teachers who do not embrace the responsibilities of ministry may easily ignore or misunderstand actions and relationships in the congregation, which
A healthy sense of vocation is the starting point for teachers. Administration and parish support are needed, but the best sign of success remains the spiritual well-being of the teacher. A healthy spirit can be damaged or hurt by poor administrative or congregational policy. A weak teacher can be loved and nurtured toward improvement, and a strong teacher can be made even better. The need is to approach the issue from both perspectives, good policy well-administered and a willing and joy-filled response to the call. When those realities are in place, the partnership for ministry is strong and ministry is rich. Where the time and resources to support the program and strengthen workers are lacking, problems for institutions and teachers result, often with strong emotion and great pain.

Issues most often arise when these positive conditions are lacking from one perspective or the other, often both. How to assist teachers to find or reclaim their vocation is one side of the question. The other is how to provide the policy and administrative support to maintain focus upon the ministry. The health of both the worker and the school is vital. If both parts are not in place, a penalty is paid by all. When times are rough ask these three questions: 1) does the parish understand and provide support for the ministry, 2) does the administrative team (often just the pastor and principal) collaborate as servant-leaders, and 3) does the teacher embrace his or her ministry.

If those relationships and understandings are in place, the school ministry can thrive or begin to heal. If not, tinkering and bargaining will not help until the central issues are addressed. Schools are communal efforts; relationships may break down over simple personality issues or conflicting goals. That is where daily repentance and a humble spirit can be so valuable. Both perspectives of the call agreement are essential to maintain an ongoing healthy ministry in the school.

Too often the light is too dim or even missing. People act in the dark, following their own counsel. In Church and Ministry, (Kirche und Amt), C. F. W. Walther (1852) provides a strong discussion, which can benefit congregations and workers. I would recommend its study to anyone considering the issue of parish and worker relationships.
1. Clarity of the Stone - Polishing (Sanctification, removal of the dross)

Revisiting the diamond analogy, we all require regular polishing of the stone to reflect the light, the truth. With the fall, God’s marvelous creation lost its purpose. Truth was gone. It had become a fearful subjective construct to address desires and survival needs. The response became Can anyone stand for long in a world that has lost its truth, a world without the Word? God’s truth is the Word proclaimed—a gentle witness providing hope in the lost world; admonition rather than judgment—hope that the dark fears for our earthly lives are not the end of it.

In many respects, fear is the other side of hope. Fear can drive out hope. This becomes an issue when we see fear as a significant tool in our life or classroom management. We must consider the power of hope. The world uses extrinsic fear as a primary tool to maintain its authority. It is not a fear based upon love or respect, but fear of losing something that is important to the learner or the teacher. If a classroom is based on fear, it is a misuse of the law. It uses the law as a club not a curb. That is not the authority of the law the Scripture describes. Rather, it is the devil’s earthly misinterpretation of the law that often drives people away from God, portraying an angry judge wishing to mete out punishment for selfish deeds. This is not hope in the Creator who sacrificed his own Son, our Lord.

Only by the power of Jesus, (The Word, the real truth), can we stand and serve. Paul makes that announcement connecting truth and freedom; it is the truth that makes us free. How can we sinners know that truth? Only by knowing Jesus through God’s Word and Spirit. Yet, we are very skilled at seeking it in other places, where we think we are still in control. We have refined skills at rationalizing, making reality fit our own subjective perspective, actually creating our own slanted version of the truth.

“Culture eats strategy for lunch” is an expression I have heard. It is difficult to swim upstream. We become creatures of our culture. The best-laid plans often fail, especially if they seek change whose time has not arrived. It seems that we cannot withstand the siren calls of culture’s temptations. That understanding describes actions in many institutional settings. Institutions, however, only reflect the souls of their members. Often the language and action reflect only determination to win the argument; it is my way or the highway, and change or die may describe institutional decision-making in the church.

Does your business model modify the Word? If anything it
should reflect that Word which guides our lives. Is some new curriculum so powerful that it should re-shape our educational method? Do high test scores trump the Good News? These issues can be part of the battle to defeat our efforts to suffer the little children to come and know the love of Jesus. We let them distract us from our purpose. They are so seductive in leading us away from God and His mission for our lives. The Gospel seems radical and alien to secular culture because the Gospel can defeat that culture.

We do have the ability to see truth but only in the Word; often we would rather fulfill our own desires, our twisted, made-to-fit reality, providing a false peace. The devil is there to present pleasurable reinforcements; it is a heady brew. We chase from plan to vision, fearing we will never find the success or perfection we desire, afraid to stop the search, for that would be the death of our power. We are left hopeless, alone with our failed dreams. We are separated from God and each other, seeking our own way. All becomes dross! In most cases, the last thing people want to do is admit their weakness. But, that is what we should do first. If not, we rely on our own power, afraid to proclaim our own death. It is so easy to hold onto the big lie. We know that to live is Christ, yet we would rather take the pathways the world provides. That is the nature of the sin that blocks out our light. Our new life starts with repentance; our prayer is for the Spirit to now clean and polish us for the ministry.

In *Respect an Exploration*, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1999) introduces a personal process of maturity based upon understanding notions of empowerment, healing, dialogue, and factors leading to insights into self-respect and living well within society. She explores self-respect as a secular philosophical question, which is helpful to our theological view.

The quality of our thinking has a lot to do with how well we serve and live in our personal discipleship and cooperation within our institutions. Honest thinking invites us to step back and reflect upon the quality of our lives, the depth of our thinking, and the care shown in our actions. It encourages real dialogue—genuine listening to one another. If the personal understanding of the call is to be healthy, teachers have to respect themselves, those they serve, and the institutions where they perform their ministry. If this journey is not clear, it is virtually impossible for teachers to let the light shine. To embrace and be sanctified in ministry means that teachers find balance in their lives and missions. Teachers, in their meditations, and the parish, in policy and practice, need to make this balance a priority.
We can glimpse the truth in our Savior who came to make us free by the power of forgiveness. He was weak to make us strong. That is what frees us! Our vocational prayer, drawn from the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John, should be “Help us to sense Your loving presence and lead us to respond in the promise of its power. Free us to care, to love, to in turn make sacrifices for others in God’s creation. Then we can know the truth, if only dimly in this life, because of the sin that clouds our vision. But in that hope we can live richly, for in God’s brightness, Jesus is the truth that can bring us freedom over our sin and know the truth about a world that does not seek it.”

Personal Bible study and healthy fellowship, along with reflection time are good exercise for a healthy vocation. Practice daily repentance, with a focus on ministry as a joy-filled response to the Gospel.

2. Professional Reflection and Development (Refreshment for Mission)

The second response is institutional and more strategic in nature. How do the church and school care for and support their workers?

As a culture we have become less social or communal. We would rather bowl alone, play a video game in the darkness, or spend too much time on Facebook sites seeking like-minded allies to sustain our perspectives. We need a better plan to improve practice. Which actions should we consider? A good start to a ministry is a good first step for both the school and teacher.

\textit{Induction} is a growing concept in teacher education. It entails expending extra effort in the first year or years of teaching to help the new teacher have a strong, successful initial experience with ministry in the school and classroom. Some Lutheran schools have models of induction in place, but too many either don’t recognize the need or provide the resources needed to support a new teacher. Many public school districts also are implementing induction models. Lutheran schools will benefit from reviewing these programs as well as supporting local and district regions that seek to introduce new workers to the ministry. Many district presidents and other leaders see the benefits of these efforts, but lack of resources and time often hamper their implementation. Both congregations and districts would do well to consider the benefits and importance of programs that help new workers understand the challenge of ministry in their schools and congregations. More collaboration with our preparatory institutions and donors to support these programs and efforts would also be useful.
Next, schools need a strong, continuous, professional development program to enhance teacher and school performance, which is better than any lesson plan, curriculum package, theory, or software program. Great teaching is complex, so changes must be thoughtful and kept within a larger context. Attempting to change practice in a culture that has not embraced it is generally not effective. Schools change slowly, often continuing to follow traditional models, perhaps not even aware of the need for change. But, there is too much evidence not to consider some innovations suggested by practice and the literature. If changing some practices will improve the school’s function and ministry, we should consider them. Further, if there is no direct reference to practices in the Scriptures, we must use a Gospel rationale in the school context to carefully review these innovations.

We would do well to designate a small percentage of our budgets to regular sharing and professional development. Schools that may be too small to offer programs need to collaborate, but we must seek this type of activity. It should be part of the regular routine, just an aspect of daily life, like the air we need to live.

Any attempt to review curriculum independent of broad support increases the risk of poor implementation or failure. Change is difficult; it may lead to a view that it is easier to start over than adapt existing structures. There is almost always some built-in resistance to change. It cannot be done on the cheap; real change is both embedded and sustainable. Schools need to convince staff and parents that these changes are beneficial. No one should try to change the whole world the first year. Well-researched, sustainable improvements can become part of the school’s tradition.

In one school, I saw successful innovations embedded over several years. One year it was a new way to teach art, followed by handwriting, a reading scramble, and review of the spelling curriculum. The ultimate result was significant curriculum change and instructional improvement over a four-year period. It also created trust and a partnership between staff, parents, and school that embraced a continual improvement cycle as part of the very climate. All felt they were part of an ongoing refinement of the program.

This view is supported by Tyack and Cuban in *Tinkering Toward Utopia* (1995), where they posit that successful change must be consistent with existing structures and goals. If reform is to be sustained, therefore, structures must be changed as well in accordance with the reforming values. Further, social and political contexts are key factors in understanding structures. Their analysis suggests that
curriculum changes will collapse if not supported by an organizational context, especially if initial success is not clear or observable. In Changing Course, Kliebard (2002) describes pressures and realities that impact change; they include:

1. Contending voices from within the organization and culture will endlessly arise. The school curriculum can always be divided, refocused, or expanded. The question, “Why don’t you try this?” is not always helpful. Can we ever find agreement? Organizations need a transparent process to establish clarity regarding change.

2. Reforms have a powerful initial energy that may be difficult to sustain. Further, the structural support for change is often not present nor is it even considered;

3. Change is not always new. Often, it has already been tried and has re-emerged in an altered format. It may be proposed by a persistent minority voice that has not been addressed or it may be broadly held. Some claim that change is simply cyclical, a pendulum, or evolutionary in nature; and

4. Leadership may push for change to assert its leadership. I am their leader. I must provide direction! New leaders feel they need to put forth ideas or respond to a perceived need within the institution for survival or to advance their own purposes.

These behaviors are generally examples of operating in fear, responding to pressures and powers within the organization. These observations should caution organizations undergoing significant change. The emotions and politics of change play a major role in the debate. Change will happen over time; it may not always be good and can cause setbacks and problems. Being aware of these issues can promote a continuous program of success and be a positive factor in change. Malcolm Baldrige’s work and organization suggest a strong continuous improvement cycle in his awards program. It is a good way to plan and think about change. One-size solutions are not the answer, but attending to the need for change on a regular basis is a major factor in success.

Partnerships and collaboration seem to be great strategic concepts for a proactive approach to professional development for schools. Educational leadership, regional teaching centers, and professional developmental circles or communities can all help to provide direction and continuity for the health of the school, its teachers, and hence the ministry. These collaborations encourage cooperation and ownership by all involved, (where there is a power center and participants are not at the table, they are missing some of the basic ingredients). When the congregation is the on-site sponsor, it can seek to create job-embedded professional devel-
development that can be sustained over time. Further, when programs are centered on active reflection and focused on student outcomes, they will gain the support of parents and those involved. The congregational task is not to prescribe one plan, but to point out the need to support the process at the school and congregational policy level. Parish and administrative leadership need to discover and call for a model that supports the workers and mission of the school.

3. Implementation Issues (Maintaining Support)
The third area’s concern is the actual administration and support for teachers and the needs of the schools.

When a support policy is strategically determined, the administration of the policy needs to be considered next. Both the worker and the congregation should collaborate and join in partnerships and commitment to ministry for the school to prosper. If the nurture and outreach fail, the details may have derailed the process. Can our institutions and workers find the best balance?

Leadership is a favorite self-help topic in the literature. Too often administrators search for magical programs that will transform their leadership via books, seminars, or online presentations. You can become the next success story! Lutheran schools need strong educational leaders with the time and resources to review, collaborate, and manage strong continuous improvement plans for their schools.

I was a teaching principal for much of my career and lacked the time to do everything that was important or needed to be accomplished. Funding, recruitment, and public relations were all nagging needs that had little to do directly with instruction but required attention. There never seemed to be time for supervision of practice and implementation of new methods and curriculum. I was tempted to leave things alone if they did not seem broken. The blessing was that Lutheran teachers are dedicated, and most of the time they were interested in improving their own practice and performance. This is not the case in all schools. Schools must recognize the need for leaders or other staff to become leaders in professional development for the school.

One popular approach is for the staff to become a professional learning community. Some schools are seeking to build teams that manage the academic mission of the school. This approach can go a long way in Lutheran schools, but it varies from location to location, and some congregations and staff may resist rather than embrace the opportunity. It takes time and resources to see real success. There are other methods, some particular to your place, that schools are discovering. The school can have a
professional development coordinator, who works with the school community and the teachers to provide professional development that is connected to the school’s mission and expectations. It should be a shared process.

Be aware that while this is neither an easy nor an inexpensive effort, it has the potential for both stronger teachers and better prepared students. Administratively, there are costs that need to be considered. The resources needed involve time and treasure as well as personal spirit and energy. Congregational leaders and supporters have to demonstrate that they are leaders. Plans have to take these issues into consideration.

If you look at the challenge from three aspects, you should make a good start. First, consider costs, which can vary, but many institutions do budget for them. (In Minnesota, the state puts 2 percent of the budget into professional development support for professional development in public school districts.)

The second aspect is time. Can the school day and year reflect a new allocation of time? A review of the day, week, and year may reveal ways to improve professional development, personal planning time, and personal faith building without adding to the total demands on teachers.

The third need is the leadership of the school. The top-down and bottom-up model means that both the teachers and the leadership are on board for improvement.

**Daily Repentance and Hope**

It is useful to have a framework from which to operate when discussing teaching the faith in the school or in the parish. That framework helps to organize the goal or purpose for the school as well as the reasons underlying it. For Lutherans, the questions can be organized from the three articles of the creeds: creation, justification, and sanctification. Teachers should consider these three headings as they begin to organize their vocational lives.

Creation is the first leg of the triangle. It is the work of the Father continued in the children. We were created to be creative. We need to release imagination, not to be destructive or selfish but to cause good to happen during our day. The definition of *good* is not easy, but it is an important concept that must be addressed.

Justification is the work of Jesus, the Son, who brings hope to a world across the dark chasm of sin. If we are unable to move from death to life, sin to obedience, then there is no
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hope, for we are left in our lost condition, unable to restore the connection with the source of our reality. We are blinded to the Gospel power, without hope.

Sanctification is our journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is our fragile trip through life. It is the effort to be in the world as a disciple, not of the world as a citizen. Our citizenship is controlled by the Spirit, and His will is for us to reflect light; to be leaven, salt, or a source of power that creates hope. That is the reality or truth, the belief that Christian educators must share both the faith and their vocation to make classrooms conduits of God’s Grace.

This view is at the heart of the Christian walk and causes us to appreciate a faith-driven goal toward our educational efforts. Namely, that all are God’s children. Christian education is the work of the church, but it should never be exclusive to the institution’s benefit. The school is weaker when seen as a tool to secure members for the church. Its mission is to proclaim the Gospel. Christian education is an aspect of the church’s vocation. It is what we do! It is losing the distinction between nurture and outreach; for they are the same thing. It is about the proclamation of the Gospel. It is reflecting the Light! This must be inclusive, it is for the whole creation. After all it was the reason Jesus died!

A Benediction
James 3:13–18
“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”
(Revised Standard Version)

Bibliography
**Questions for Discussion**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of how your congregation provides for nurture and development of teachers?

- What about the history of your school influences the future of the school?

- How would you describe your school’s process of educating students?

- How does each teacher view his or her function in ministry?

- Which policies help or hinder support of teachers? If there are no policies, what attitudes help or hinder?

- Evaluate your induction and development plans. What can you do to improve them?

- Using the quote below, how would staff members rate their own practices?

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**Biography**

Dr. George Guidera is an emeritus professor at Concordia University Saint Paul. He has been active in the educational ministries of the Lutheran Church since his 1969 graduation from Concordia Teachers College, in River Forest, IL. Service includes classroom teaching in elementary, middle, and secondary schools, school administration, and work as a parish educator in several locations in California and Washington. In 1993 he joined the teacher education faculty in Saint Paul where he continues to teach in the areas of social studies methods, foundations of education, and middle school education. He has twice chaired the Department of Teacher Education and served as the Director of Church Work Placement. He was awarded the Doctor of Education by Washington State University in 1991.

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