The Shepherding Role of the Christian Day School Teacher in the Classroom

by Ervin F. Henkelmann

Fall/Winter 1988-1989

Lutheran Education Association Monograph Series
Volume 14 — Number 1
The Shepherding Role of the Christian Day School Teacher in the Classroom

By Ervin F. Henkelmann

Roles lead and direct. They can grab our attention and crystalize understanding. They can open doors.

Thinking of Christian teachers as shepherds has that kind of magic. It puts a fresh focus on providing spiritual care for children and families. It opens up special possibilities, new and important doors of ministry.

Identifying and discussing job roles can serve as a valuable resource to professional growth. Once defined, those roles play a special part in specifying most any person's work. They identify responsibilities and suggest tasks. One well-chosen word can go a long way in helping someone imagine or understand a certain job function. Though stated broadly, a brief list of these words can rather aptly describe a position.

The Christian day school teacher can relate nicely to a list of differing job roles. It's a variety-filled and gift-demanding day that comes with ministering to a classroom of children. And, serving within the context of a Christian congregation both adds to that list of roles and enhances each one as roles are played out in the community of care, faith, and fellowship that we know as the Lord's church.

Whether instructor or counselor, advocate or friend, coach, choral director, or classroom manager, the roles are there and are very real. The focus of this monograph is on just one such role function, the Christian teacher as shepherd. For some readers what follows will simply affirm what is already known and understood. For others, the monograph will pique new interest while perking up old resolves. For still others it will authorize and open whole new doors of ministry. May this monograph serve as a special blessing to all who consider its premises and promises. May it help parish teachers become ever more effective ministers to the children and families we serve.

* * *

During my years as a Lutheran school principal I would periodically set aside faculty meeting time to have my teachers conjure up a set of roles applicable to their work. We would then discuss some of the ramifications that list brought to their workaday lives. It was always a fruitful exercise. Besides demonstrating the complexity of being teaching ministers, the activity helped us to see the array of expectations posed and presented by our positions; to establish the relative importance of our roles; and to clarify responsibilities inherent in each role.

It was some twelve years ago that I began to strongly speak up for including a shepherding function on my role list for day school teachers. My reason for doing so had grown out of a presentation made to Lutheran principals of St. Louis on behalf of their ministry to teachers. In it I had been especially struck with a dramatic point made by the speaker, Dr. Carl Toelke, regarding a Christian teacher's responsibility toward children and their families. "Teachers are pastors!" Toelke emphatically declared.

Out of his experience as psychologist, theologian, pastor, parent, and administrator of Lutheran social services Toelke had developed this rather distinct picture of one parish teacher role. To him it seemed abundantly clear that a Christian day school educator had a shepherding role and that this role was significant. Ever since hearing that presentation I've grown increasingly more appreciative of what impact the shepherd-bent teacher has upon children and families. It makes a difference when shepherding is taken seriously and pursued with skill and vigor. Allow me to use Kirk and his Lutheran school teacher to set a better stage.

Mrs. Hansen: A Shepherding Example

Kirk can be as exuberant a kid as you can find. He's generally full of life and joy. It was quite evident that his parents' separation hit him hard. Mrs. Hansen learned of it soon.

Kirk choked out the details. It was good to share them with his teacher. He could trust her. She understood things about kids and parents.

What Kirk didn't realize, however, was how ministry wheels began turning in Mrs. Hansen's head. He'd likely
never know that her responses to the story of a sad and scared fifth grader would contribute strongly to saving his parents' marriage. Through her routine, but persistent and caring involvement, a teacher ministered mightily in a problem situation she could easily have dismissed as none of her business. Through her encouragement and follow-through a divorce-bound couple received the counseling of both their pastor and a psychologist. It worked. Why shouldn't it work? Her fervent prayers had been there. Her genuine concern had steered her on a Christ-like course. She had cited sin and its trouble-making. She had proclaimed the Gospel and its forgiveness. Mrs. Hansen had ministered appropriately and well. She had done so by functioning in a shepherding role akin to that of a parish pastor.

Shepherding is no new idea. It's been around for a long time and has a well-traveled scriptural trail.

Shepherding:
The Lord Does It All the Time

God is about His shepherding day in and day out.

The psalmist described it well. He used the metaphor of the shepherd to speak vividly of his sense of the fullness of God's care for him. It was common knowledge in the ancient Near East that a good shepherd was devoted to his sheep. His topmost interest was to supply the sheep with all it needed for its well being.

Psalm 23 stirs up many good thoughts. It's a great picture of the God-trusting life, so very complete and so very true. The Lord is at His shepherding all the time. He guides us and leads us. He sees to it that we are fed and that we get to rest. We need not fear no matter what. He is with us.

The Gospel writer John adds immense extra dimensions to this Lord-shepherding thesis with Christ's claim in John 10:14 that He is the good shepherd. No greater example of loyalty and devotion can be found. What love his life demonstrated for all time. Out of the same wood that provided a manger and a cross would come a rod and staff. He it is who has captured the perked-up ear of each believing sheep. He it is whom we follow. Minus this wonderful shepherd we would not be the Christian teachers we are. He's our all in all, our model, our Master, our Shepherd!

We remember that Jesus was a teacher. He patiently instructed that first circle of disciples. He told parables and explained them. He had classes that could number more than five thousand. He worked one-on-one as with the woman at the well. And to this role were added many others. He is the Lord. He not only knows all there is to know about shepherding, he is actively shepherding all the time.

Teachers are Flock People

As teaching ministers grow into the shepherding role there are lessons to be constantly learned through Christ and the scriptures which He opens to us. One such observation is that Christ not only ministers to individual sheep but also to the flock. Teachers, too, have flocks. Each classroom of children is a flock, a little congregation.

Certainly much of the spiritual shepherding done by the Christian teacher happens in the group setting. There are the worship times for prayer, song and praise. There's the wonderful presentation time during which another Bible story comes alive and proclaims God's truths. Group discussions often follow as those truths are woven into the warp and woof of every day life.

Teaching the flock as a whole is not just a matter of instructional economy. Each lamb feels the safety of being with other lambs. Each discovers the support a flock helps create a safe and warm place to be. As such, the "climate" is bound to contribute toward the overall social growth and development of a child.

All our children are growing up within the parameters of two powerful relational needs, the ability to break away and the need to attach to others. It is our hope they will one day become independent human beings. Their eventual maturity also calls for them to relate appropriately and well to those around them. Psychologists have us think about a continuum that has closeness at one end and separateness at the other. There's health in drawing away from family even as there's health in establishing relationships outside the family.

The shepherding teacher endeavors to understand children and their social development. She particularly appreciates relational growth. During any given day she strives to touch individual lives, but does so in the context of her class. She remains a flock person, a leader of a group, the shepherd that need not apologize for the abundance of time spent in teaching the class. At the same time she also has a picture of how each sheep is doing.

So How Is Sherry Sheep Doing?

Sherry may be only a third grader but already there is much about her that marks her as being her own person. She takes piano lessons each week and plays on a Saturday morning soccer team. She goes to Sunday school regularly and seems to enjoy her experience there. Sherry seems
plenty confident as she reads. She works alone well during quiet parts of her school day. Her parents appear to have a solid marriage and they have raised a child that is respectful and respected. She recently felt very comfortable in spending a weekend away from home with her grandparents. She seems to be at a pretty healthy point of separateness from those around her. Her teacher predicts that she'll be a responsible adult.

Sherry also likes being a part of her family. It's good to come home each day. She loves her parents. She also enjoys her church and the school she attends there. She feels a real part of her congregation and classroom. Sherry does her share of what it takes to make and keep friends. She's cooperative. She's loyal to her physical education class teammates. She plays well during recess. For someone her age Sherry appears to be at a healthy point of closeness to family and other groups. Her teacher predicts that she'll be an adult who relates well to others.

So, Sherry is fine. She's moving along her developmental way in healthy fashion. But, Sherry is Sherry, not Shelly.

Shelly is shy and withdrawn. He reads haltingly and doesn't really care to work. His homework is often incomplete and shows little in the way of neatness or pride. Shelly's classmates tolerate him, but also pick on him. Shelly's mother is pretty careless about his cleanliness and dress.

Before his parents divorced, Shelly had been coming to Sunday school at least twice a month. He's not been there this year. His teacher is pretty worried about Shelly. He participates in song and prayer, but worship seems to be little more than routine. There's not much joy being demonstrated at all.

Shelly is not showing any signs of promising change. He's not very responsible. He relates poorly to both kids and adults. Shelly needs a lot of love and attention. He needs a lot of care and prayer.

Between Sherry and Shelly are twenty-five other sheep. Each is someone to know and understand. The shepherding teacher will reach out farther to some than he will to others. Shelly is less fun to talk to or teach, but Shelly needs care. He'll get much more than one-twenty-fifth of the shepherd's interest and time. It works that way because the Christian teacher is concerned about the overall development of each child. In that complex process, with all of its ramifications, the teacher provides a climate in which a child may develop through the teen years into an adult who is more spiritually mature and better equipped to be "the people of God."

is to learn that every person of the church is a minister, called into a life of serving others. Each is a giver. At the same time each one must also learn to be a receiver, one to whom ministry comes. Each is a receiver. In God's kingdom there is that significant balance between being a giver and being a receiver. That's what ministry is all about.

It's of the Lord's design. He says we are to help one another and to forgive one another. He asks us to be good friends and to encourage one another. It's all part of His saint-equipping plan, a mutual ministry that gets us where the church needs to go. Viewing third grade as a little congregation of ministers helps it happen.

Having a vision of one's class of children that approximates a happy and healthy little parish is helpful. And it's bound to flourish best when the teacher is a parish-bonded, congregation-wise person who knows a lot about what makes a good church tick. The effective shepherd-teacher is apt to be one who identifies strongly with the congregation, is well aware of parish pains and joys, and, is a person who is particularly involved and alive in Sunday's worship, education and fellowship.

A great little book that describes well the kind of scriptural and caring congregation the shepherding teacher might envision is the 1985 publication of Concordia Publishing House titled CHURCH FAMILY MINISTRY. It's subtitle is Changing Loneliness to Fellowship in The Church. The author is Susan B. Lidums. It's a rich and perceptive resource for Christian educators, one that points to parish effectiveness through members ministering to each other, one that dovetails well with this monograph. I commend its sound philosophical base as one that shepherd ministers should read, study and discuss.

The Vision of the Shepherding Teacher

How might we begin to succinctly describe the kind of shepherding-minded Christian teacher a Susan Lidums would like for her child, or the kind we might strive to be or become? What would a brief vision statement need to include? The following is a draft example, one to think about, take apart, and adapt, and possibly adopt.

The shepherding classroom teacher is a warm and wise person of the Lord and the church, who is committed to effectively educate, support and enrich the spiritual lives of children and families through Gospel-bent and thorough instruction; who is a winsome and loving example; and, has the energy and organization to regularly include notably caring words and actions as part of everyday life in the school and parish.

Undoubtedly this hypothetical ministry person is also one who has experienced the guidance and care of shepherding people. They were there and have continued to be there. Parents and pastors, teachers and others have been there to love and to lead and to bless.

Each of us knows that to be true for his or her own life. We've been blessed. Our shepherds looked at the gawky, unsure kids we were and saw in us the possibilities for special ministries. They took extra interest in us and nudged us along. They told us we had gifts the Lord could use and

Toward Kids Growing as Ministers

As God calls each of His people into the new life in Christ, as Paul describes it in the last three chapters of Ephesians, he invites each child into ministry. Each child
made bold suggestions about ministry careers. They blessed us.

I use the word **blessed** very deliberately and I do so because of another recently-published book (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986) that suggests itself as a marvelous resource for the Christian teacher.

Titled **The Blessing** and co-authored by Gary Smalley and John Trent this book looks at the Old Testament concept of “blessing” children and what it has been for children today to grow up with or without their parents’ love and acceptance. In particular, the authors discussed five specific things parents did in biblical times, and could do today, to attach high value to their children. “A family blessing,” they say, “begins with meaningful touching. It continues with a spoken message of high value, a message that pictures a special future for the individual being blessed and one that is based on an active commitment to see the blessing come to pass.” Smalley and Trent also looked at homes that routinely withheld this blessing and the emotional damage that often faces children who grow up in them. Furthermore, the book identifies practical ways that the ministering church can encourage and build up people, to bless them. The five elements can be adapted nicely to life in the classroom.

Touch will always be an important part of a teacher's care. The shepherd is completely wise to what is appropriate and acceptable. Hugs have their place. A hand on the shoulder has its. A high five can be fun and so can a handshake.

Children blossom in the warmth of spoken blessings. They need to hear words of acceptance and appreciation on a regular basis. The shepherding teacher finds time to say, “I really am glad that you’re part of my class. You’re a neat kid.”

Words of high value are extra special when blessing children. Granting them great importance is at the heart of what blessing is all about. The root meaning in Hebrew of this concept is to “bow the knee.” One time the shepherding teacher accords top value to a child is when she says, “I’m sorry.” Apologies and requests for forgiveness are powerful words. Having children hear daily that they are ladies and gentlemen helps them act in responsible ways.

Teachers can find ways to picture a special future for each of their students. A teacher says a lot when he says, “I believe you’d make a great lawyer some day.” Much is said, too, when a fine word picture is used. Jesus gives us an example. He called Peter a rock. Peter became a rock.

Mrs. Scott said fourth grade Marjorie was a swan. She became a ballet dancer. The note I wrote to John of my fifth grade Chicago classroom about his being a pastor some day worked that way. He told me he still had the note while he was a seminarian, and he no doubt has it with him in Korea where he is a missionary.

Being actively committed to children rounds out the process of blessing. The shepherd teacher begins by teaching children that they are committed to the Lord. She stresses the fact that God is interested in their being blessed. She becomes a student of her children and is lovingly persistent in communicating with them. She disciplines the sheep in appropriate and loving ways in their best interest.

---

**Toward Better Shepherding**

It becomes apparent that there are things we can do to become more effective as teacher shepherds. Clearly, we can grow in our shepherding. Let’s turn then to the possibilities before us. Let’s seek practical ways to strengthen this role. To lend some structural manageability to the ideas and suggestions the monograph offers, I’ve selected three major divisions for this section.

I. To Be Better Informed

II. To Be More Involved

III. To Become Inspired to Act

The three areas are related. The first deals with information, and a basic to the shepherding process. We need to know about sheep. We need to know our particular sheep. We need to know what’s taking place in the lives of the sheep in our flock. We’re not able to properly move to the next two levels, involvement and inspired action, without good information.

Being informed is basic. Knowing what’s going on is something like riding a tricycle. It’s routine. It’s common. We learn to pass on basic information early in life. It’s not usually imagined to be that difficult to have enough everyday information about one’s students to function as their teacher. Becoming somewhat involved in the life of a child or family is another matter. It takes a higher level of interest and energy. We could liken involvement to riding a bicycle. There’s more risk and it requires a higher level of skill. It opens up new horizons. Involvement tends to “sign us up” for some greater responsibility. We begin to get squeamish about the amount of time and effort something might take. We can be informed in lots of ways, but we can be involved in only so many.

Then, identifying and following through on some inspired new idea is at still a higher level. Let’s compare that to riding a unicycle. Not everyone does it. Most would never even try. But, then, they’ll also not experience the high points of working with those around them. They’ll miss the more ideal opportunities to minister, the special times in the lives of people when one’s witness may have its greatest impact.

Allow me to illustrate the three levels with one small example. Children all have birthdays. It’s basic to imagine
that a teacher comes up with the routine information involved and then writes the date for each child’s birthday into her daily plan book. This information will be helpful. It will be meaningful for a child to learn that his teacher cared enough to connect September 23rd with that important personal event, his birthday.

But what the teacher will do next in interacting with the child regarding the birthday is a whole new question. How much time, effort or expense will be expended by the involvement level selected? She reminds herself that there are twenty-five children in her class who have birthdays. She contemplates a plan that communicates the care she feels, but is still realistic in terms of time and energy.

And that’s when she comes up with an inspired idea. She’ll design her own card and print twenty-five copies. They’ll be mailed to the children’s homes and she will author at least three special sentences to add to each child’s card. Would this plan strengthen her ministry to the classroom sheep? Of course. The card would be read and appreciated. Its caring message would strengthen ties and provide new opportunities for conversation. Can she make it work? Sure. Will she do it? Maybe. Maybe not. The postage cost alone may eliminate the possibility.

The same kind of scenario could be imagined for any number of other pastoral type opportunities. Consider what happens when one of your students is hospitalized. The three levels are immediately before you. Basic information is important. It’s your job to know why this child is in the hospital and to inform the child’s classmates, the school office, the church office, and the others who need to know. Then, it is still another thing to make certain that the child is on your prayer list and being prayed for by others. (Involvement) Finally, it’s quite another matter to visit her at the hospital, to pray with her there, or to deliver the cards and messages that grew out of your ministry activity back in Room 202. (Inspired action)

Change the scenario again, but let’s keep it an individualized possibility for ministry. The grandfather of Robbie, one of your students, has died. What’s the minimal amount of information you think you’ll need? How will you obtain it? Will it make a difference if Robbie was really close to his grandpa? What if grandpa hadn’t been going to church? What if gramps died quite suddenly and didn’t even have a church home to which he’d be connected for funeral arrangements?

And where will you draw your ministry involvement line? The differences are there: a sympathy card with just your name attached or one with a meaningful message included; making a telephone call to the parent who has just lost a parent; visiting the funeral home; attending the funeral service.

Obviously every new instance for special shepherding ministry must be measured on its own merits and before the backdrop of what else is taking place. What is squeezed into the schedule has to relate to the schedule. The calendar may already be saturated, or the shepherd may be quite out of energy. The tragedy would be that the schedule had room, but the thought hadn’t even arisen. Far better to be able to say, “I really wanted to, but I just couldn’t fit it in.”

**Toward Better Shepherding Information**

Let’s now consider a given school year and the basic information gathering that might serve well to assist the classroom teacher in becoming more adequately equipped for the pastoral care of the children and families of the school and congregation. Each briefly-posed suggestion needs to be reviewed with the fresh eyes of the rookie shepherd. Each is a possibility, one to count as real and within reach. All of the following items cannot be done, but all are examples of things that are being done.

1. **AUGUST HOME VISITATIONS** — What a significant way to learn about a child and a household! A fifteen-to-twenty minute visit to a child’s home says volumes about what everyday life is like for a family you’ll want to know and understand. Will you find poverty or affluence? Are there siblings or other relatives or friends living there, as well? Does the child’s room provide any place for study? Is there any evidence that this is a Christian home? Did the child attend a vacation Bible school this past summer? Is the neighborhood a happy and safe place for kids to live and play? Home visits conducted prior to the beginning of the school year will provide a teacher with a wealth of information.

2. **THE CUMULATIVE FILE GLEANING** — Generally a school office file will provide some pretty important information. What can you learn there about the child’s spiritual life? Has she been baptized or has she received early instruction regarding communion? What is the church home of her parents? (A name of a denomination won’t tell you that.) Does she attend Sunday school? At times the file will also introduce you to a single parent or a spouse that is deceased or divorced. It may bring you word that this child has a serious health or learning problem. There’s much to learn. There’s an inherent responsibility to update and correct the information contained in the file. There’s a need to get at this information early and to review it periodically.

3. **CHURCH AND SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE** — Each week the shepherd collects data regarding the child’s worship activity and any other Christian education being received. The method for doing so ministers with sensitivity and care. An individualized pencil-paper check can be both efficient and protective of children’s feelings. Explanation is made to the children. As one who is helping guide them and their families it is important for the shepherd to put together a “participation picture” that reflects periods of time. Teachers need to know about these significant spiritual activities, ones that are frequently mentioned during instruction and prayer, ones that are often encouraged through weekly reminders.

4. **PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES** — While the formal conference times with parents are used largely for communication regarding academic progress, some key time can be spent by a Christian teacher discussing the child’s spiritual growth. The teacher’s opening prayer has already given witness of her interest in this child’s faith and ministry life. Parents are led to share about their family endeavors regarding prayers, devotions and dis-
5. CHILD'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH FILE — Teachers will find it of shepherding value to collect items which not only relate to each child's faith development but also reflect upon his/her progress as a minister. A file may include things the child has written such as prayers, stories, devotions, poems and essays. It may include notes written by the teacher regarding observations, conversations or concerns. It might house an inventory or checklist about spiritual growth or certain assignments done for Christian learning class. It may be a card or note the child has sent the teacher. A collection of bits and pieces helps put together a picture or pattern about a child's spiritual life.

Additional involvement for the shepherding teacher may also come about when a program or responsibility is expanded to allow increased shepherding opportunities. The pastor who accepted the task of coordinating and improving chapel services for the school could have been content with establishing a schedule, setting the themes, arranging for speakers and organizing the offering projects. Instead, she saw additional shepherding opportunities. She worked with students in planning classroom banners based on the monthly theme. She involved the children in selecting and writing chapel service prayers. She encouraged chapel leaders to involve students in the message presentations. The work of missionaries throughout the world was emphasized in selected chapel services. Some children's offerings were designated for world mission activity. All greatly enhanced the worship of children. All had a root in one teacher's interest in spiritual care for kids.

The following brief stories of five extra-mile examples will serve to further illustrate the involvement level on the shepherd's "possibility spectrum." Ordinary observations lay the groundwork for getting into the lives of kids.

1. SOME SPIRITUAL TUTORING BECOMES A WORKABLE WAY — It became apparent to Miss Knigge on her August visitation rounds that a number of her fourth-graders-to-be were going to be very unaware of the basic Bible stories upon which much of her religion curriculum rested. They were brand new to Christian schools. How could she help? She had tutored problem readers before. What if she would do something special for kids whose faith development would be far behind those of her other students? Miss Knigge organized a Saturday morning class for three children. They came. They grew. They became friends. It seemed to Miss Knigge that all three enjoyed their Christian learning class a lot more than the others like them that she'd taught before.

2. A BAPTISM NEED OPENS A DOOR FOR DAN — Dan Rolf noted that two of his new class of sixth graders had never been baptized. He decided one September evening that he'd make it part of his year's list of goals to help Susan and Robert be baptized. Susan was really pretty, Robert was tougher. His single-parent dad had sent him to St. Paul's for academic reasons. Dan took his time with both children. He met with them individually and also with their fathers and mother to explain baptism. Last February they were baptized as part of one of the Sunday morning services. Dan was present and rejoicing and he enjoyed one special bonus very much. Robert's dad had asked him to serve as a sponsor.
3. **A LITTLE COMPUTERIZING SERVES SAM SUPER WELL** — Sam loves having her own Apple IIe in her classroom. She's managed to use it for a host of things including the collection of data on her students. Last year she decided to set up a program for church and Sunday school attendance. On Monday mornings the kids of her classroom each put in their own Sunday data. They appreciated the approach and all readily understood that it was Sam's responsibility to review these attendances with them. Sam is convinced that using the computer added fresh interest in church and Sunday school and helped a number of her students to become more responsible about attending. She also found the screen an ally in sharing this valuable information with parents.

4. **GETTING INTO WITNESSING WORKS WONDERS FOR WAYNE** — Old St. Michael's has been steadily enrolling more and more non-member children. Wayne Edwards recognized the growing opportunities he had as one of the school's teachers to share the Gospel with parents who knew little of the Lord. Last January he attended a Saturday witness workshop sponsored by a sister congregation. It was good. The workshop leader was a warm and engaging speaker. He had the group do a lot of one-on-one role-play witnessing. Wayne has grown in confidence and he has picked up some new skills. Both have helped him in sharing faith matters with parents and parishioners and his students as well. Wayne is currently working with his pastor to organize a witness workshop for the members of St. Michael's.

5. **A PUSH ON PRAYER GOT BRENDA IN GEAR** — It seemed to Brenda that each of her sixth graders was at a difficult place in the matter of ex cerde prayers. Some had huge problems being able to make up even a short prayer. Few could easily reel off a several-sentence package of petitions and praises. She determined that she would do something to help. Teaching, practicing, scheduling and encouraging followed. Brenda worked hard. The kids worked at it, too. They steadily became more adept at praying. And, Brenda knew that any growth in being able to pray from the heart would enhance classroom worship. She was right. Her students responded well. They grew in a host of ways: in understanding of prayer, in skill of praying, in confidence, in thinking, in speaking, in worshiping.

These were the things Brenda did in order to strengthen her student's abilities to make up prayers:

a. She worked with the class to identify all the obstacles that people face in becoming comfortable in leading others in prayer. This gave her new ideas on how to help.

b. She brought in the pastor, the principal, a parish layman who teaches adult Bible class, and three children suggested by other teachers. Each one came in for a short time to talk about heart prayers and to tell about how they became better at praying.

c. She set up a schedule that involved two students each day in the opening and closing devotions for the classroom. A minute or two was spent with each student just prior to prayer. They listed things to pray about and she gave a word of encouragement to each.

d. She made up a prayer each day just after lunch that she prayed with the class. Just before doing so Brenda shared thoughts about the prayer coming up and invited the class to make requests. Her modeling in this process became very special.

Whether it is a matter of extending oneself in regards to a process or on behalf of a person or family, the involvement entailed is going to spell m-i-n-i-s-t-r-y. Well-intentioned involvement provides basic support. It enriches lives. It enables the nurture of Christian education.

---

**To Become Inspired to Act**

Out of the busy and meaningful spiritual leadership of caring ministers will come the nuances and new ideas that will contribute to the improvement of the shepherding done by Christian teachers. There's much to be shared and explained. There's much to be studied and learned.

The list of inspired actions of shepherding-bent classroom teachers is broad and varied. Mentioning some in this monograph will sow a seed for some, and nurture a crop for others. In most cases seeds are little. So are these ideas. Enjoy the sampling.

1. Scraps of narrow wood become crosses. One made and stained for each child in the class can be a special Christmas present.

2. A weekly classroom newsletter is born. The lead paragraph each week talks of spiritual growth matters.

3. The eighth graders take an hour every other week on a Friday afternoon to visit a nearby nursing home. Each youngster has adopted one or two oldsters. They swap stories, gifts, and gripes. They pray together.

4. Adele volunteers to become a "reacher" for one of the Sunday school classes. She's a spiritual room mom who encourages attendance, follows up on visitors, and prays for her Sunday kids.

5. Vern has talked his pastors into having a children's message in every Sunday service and he presents about half of the messages.

6. Three years ago Gene took up the cause of his fifth graders on behalf of early communion instruction. What a gift he brought to the congregation's children who now enjoy the blessings of the Lord's Supper years before confirmation.

7. Molly has written dozens of posters full of what she calls 'Little Liturgies' for her first grade congregation.
8. Miss Roberts has annually, for some ten years, had her children and parents come over to her apartment for a come-and-go Sunday brunch. They all come. They all go to church that day, too.

9. Mr. Mueller heads the school's spiritual life committee. His upper-grade cadre are a set of junior elders. They "honcho" chapel ideas and offering causes. They plan ways for the school community to grow in the Lord.

10. Every Thursday Mrs. Schaefer spends an hour after school involved in the extended day care program. It's her extra donation to children in a program she sees as crucial to the school's ministry. She plays with the kids and helps them with homework. Those from her own class are her biggest fans.

TOWARD MORE AND BETTER SHEPHERDING

Principals of Christian schools and directors of Christian preschools can make major differences in the growth and development of their teachers' shepherding roles. The expectations of administrators are crucial. Will the school's general job description for teachers list responsibilities that call for spiritual care? Are these tasks then explained or given further instruction and then encouraged to happen? Are the agendas of the year's faculty meetings going to provide time for sharing and discussion of shepherding concerns and procedures? Will administrators make certain to focus on their teachers as shepherds when they do their observations and evaluations? School goals and the annual goals of individual teachers need to point the way toward pastoral care of children and families.

Certain classroom activities will particularly lend themselves to faculty discussion and in-service growth. A good example is classroom worship.

Making Classroom Worship Joyful and Meaningful

Each day a teacher has a number of opportunities to involve the classroom community in meaningful and joyous worship. This means preparation. A plan is as necessary for a seven-minute devotion as it is for an hour-long church service. Having Bible words, a song, a message and prayer may be the typical elements of the devotion. How they are fit together and presented will matter a lot. The words involved can either be served up quite empty and near death or they can be warm and full and very much alive. The teacher-shepherd becomes the children's preacher.

One of the church's most outstanding and prolific authors and a presenter of Gospel messages for children is Rev. Eldon Weisheit of Fountain of Life Lutheran Church in Tucson, Arizona. After 15 years of writing children's messages, Weisheit has written "God's Word in a Child's World." It's a must for the Christian teacher's bookshelf. In it he asserts that "the key to understanding the need and purpose of children's messages is that the Word of God belongs to them. It is not our generosity that moves us to do the work and provide the time for children's messages. What we have found in God's Word belongs to the children."

While Weisheit's book (Augsburg, 1986) is focused on messages for children during church worship, his discussion about children and God's Word is highly appropriate for classroom teachers. The chapter on preparing the message is particularly valuable. He begins that chapter by stating that "A message for children does not start with an object looking for a truth; it is truth looking for a way to be proclaimed, understood and used."

The shepherd-teacher needs to periodically visit a Christian bookstore in search of new resources for children's worship. Devotion books, prayer books, and songbooks provide helps and good ideas. Records, tapes, posters, and poems are useful, too.

A congregation always has human worship resources to aid a classroom teacher. Inviting them in to assist with devotions can be exciting and very meaningful. That might include a youth with a guitar or a retired teacher with a kazoo. It could be a Sunday school teacher who does puppets or an adult Bible class leader who loves kids. It may be the church organist or a choir member, the pastor, the principal, a parent. Any of these might be that effective communicator that will make the day's Bible or doctrine lesson really come alive and have a power that touches and affects the children's lives.

The special hope of the Church is in its members who so love the Lord that they become teachers of His Word in the ways by which He can get through them to others. Often they have the spiritual gift of teaching. As with us all, that still means there are many ways in which each can become a better instrument or channel of the Lord. The teacher shepherd recognizes that there's much to consider in the matter of communicating God's Word effectively and well.

Jahsmann's "Power Beyond Words"

Although published some twenty years ago (Concordia, 1969) a book written by Allan Hart Jahsmann still stands as one of the most outstanding resources regarding the meaningful teaching of the Word. Titled "Power Beyond Words," the book is a study of the various systems of communication by which God speaks or could teach through human agents who are far from being divine. A school
faculty could do well to jointly study this stimulating treatise about how one can best communicate the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jahsmann emphasizes throughout his book that, if the communication of the Spirit is to take place, God's Word must be related to the interests and level of the learner. He stresses the importance of the pupil-teacher relationship and the creation of interaction, response, and participation. Improvements in traditional methods of storytelling and questioning are suggested. His is a call for creative communication in order to involve children in the Word. The book's list of communication helps include drama, art, music, directed reading, meditation, audiovisual experiences, group activities, and field trips.

The shepherd-teacher is indeed one who fosters personal communication. She'll be very interested in authentic, purposeful questions, asking them well and fielding those from her students with tuned-in ears and skilled response. Her whole being will invite children to initiate communication, participate in it, and do so with creativity and care.

**The Gospel Calls for Our Best**

It is the awesome and wonderful word of truth about God that is to be "shepherded" by the one that He has called to shepherd. The truth is centered in God and in His reality. It is the truth that He has blessed the world by revealing Himself fully and clearly in the person of Jesus Christ. He has given us Jesus' very own words and a great deal of additional truth by way of the Scriptures. In the Bible the Gospel comes alive as we come face to face with the meaning of Christ's incarnation, His action, His death and resurrection, and all that He taught.

It's a terrific story of good news. It's the Word of the Holy Spirit, the truth that sets us free and frees those whom we shepherd. The God who calls Himself love has always loved people. They are His. He will continue to love people to the end of time. The children of our classroom flock can be assured daily of this love. By this great love they become heirs of all the great promises of the Lord — forgiveness, peace and power, and heaven itself.

And so the Gospel calls for the shepherd's creative best. Nothing is more important to care for and communicate. The shepherd teacher has heard it, has listened, and responded to it. Others have spoken it in the language of Christian love and have lived it out in the real world of Word and Sacrament, confession and absolution, worship and prayer. Now the Gospel is the shepherd's to prize and present so that those of the classroom flock may receive it as theirs.

The Gospel will be that same pearl of great price the children too will pass on as they bless others through family, congregation and community. The love of their shepherding teachers will have made a difference, a love in the Lord that accepted, reached out, took in, held close, and let go. Varied roles will be ahead for each child. In the midst of those roles will be one that will call for the spiritual care of another and the shepherding will happen and go on and on.
About The Author

ERVIN F. HENKELMANN currently serves as superintendent of childhood ministries at St. John’s Lutheran Church and schools in Orange, California. A former president of LEA, Erv chaired and provided major leadership for the first two LEA education convocations in 1984 (Indianapolis) and 1987 (St. Louis). Concordia, River Forest, awarded the B.S. in ed. and M.A. degrees. The shepherding skills and insights Erv shares in this monograph are based on experiences as principal and teacher in Lutheran schools in Indiana, Missouri, and Illinois.

Credits: Thanks to the LCMS Board for Parish Services for permission to use the graphics from "Nurturing the Development of Faith," BPS Bulletin #39985. Children’s art, pp. 9 and 10, courtesy of Wheatridge Seals. Front and back cover art by Martin Noyd, member of Our Redeemer Church, Dallas, TX, and husband of Jean Noyd, Kindergarten teacher at Our Redeemer.

Additional copies are available for $2.00 each from the: Lutheran Education Association
7400 Augusta Street • River Forest, IL 60305-1499
Direct inquiries regarding bulk (10 or more copies) orders to the LEA office.
"Children:
A Gift from
the Shepherd,"

"Children:
A Gift
to shepherd."