



PLUS *** April 2017

Ten Ways to Share and Teach the Faith in the Middle or High School Classroom

By James Pingel

In his recent work, *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding the American Culture*, Anthony Rosen opines that “there are only two things wrong with our schools: everything that our children don’t learn there and everything they do.” To be sure, in most government-run schools across the United States, we know that students are *not* learning the Bible and the Christian faith. Conversely, Lutheran school students receive God’s Word, learn key attributes and distinguishing tenets of Christianity and a biblical worldview, and apply the Christian faith to their subject matter and daily lives. Indeed, as the Bible asserts, “how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Even the best and most dedicated Lutheran teachers, however, can become lethargic and complacent when it comes to sharing and teaching the Christian faith. Weekly chapel services, daily religion/theology class, and hourly classroom prayers can lull many into thinking that the kids are all right—they’re getting plenty of religion at our school. No need to worry.

Your students may not be losing their religion, but they might wonder if *you* have. They can tell when adult leaders are genuinely passionate and enthusiastic about something. So take a moment to self-reflect: Do you have a passion and desire to share and teach the faith? Can your students tell that you “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”? Without any constitutional constraints prohibiting you from boldly teaching or sharing the faith in your classroom or extracurricular assignments, your students might be curious and wondering why you do not do it more often.

Obviously God equipped you to impart your beloved content and subject matter. Moreover, no one is advocating that you present yourself as a self-righteous Pharisee who embraces a “look at me and how religious I am” attitude in the classroom. Nevertheless, no matter what you teach or coach, Jesus has given you a platform and a calling to “train up a child in the way he should go.” You have been set apart and called to teach Jesus and share God’s Word.

Research tells us that students respect and learn more from those who try to integrate humor in their lessons. Even if a teacher’s sense of humor or jokes fall flat, students still give their instructor credit for trying. The same can be said for one’s passion and devotion for sharing and teaching the faith. A teacher’s sincere intentionality for biblical applications and strategic preparation to integrate God’s Word or a biblical worldview impresses and inspires students. They get the message: My teacher truly cares about my faith, spiritual well-being and growth. This a powerful realization all by itself.

Dedicated Lutheran teachers deliberately practice and work to become skilled practitioners, or experts, in sharing and teaching the faith. They think, talk, and reflect upon their faith integration practice constantly. They experiment and try new approaches in class. They ask peers and colleagues how they integrate and teach the faith. Of course, they ready themselves for the teachable moments that inevitably and blessedly come. Teachable ministry moments, however, occur too infrequently or too randomly.

Thus you must be intentional, focused, and prepared to share and teach the faith each and every class period. You want God's Word to feed and spiritually nourish your students daily. You want the Holy Spirit strengthening their faith and relationship with God daily. You want to develop and improve as an instructor, especially in sharing and teaching the faith, daily.

To that end, here are ten different ideas or practices you can use and embrace in order to grow in your own confidence and expertise when it comes to sharing and teaching the faith. May these suggestions spur many other thoughts and ideas on how God can use you as his instrument for the spiritual benefit of your students.

#1 – Design and Implement the Great Lutheran “Twofer” One Lesson Plan

According to the revised model of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy, effective teachers not only get students to learn basic cognitive skills—remembering and understanding—but also the stickier, higher thinking skills—applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. So here's the deal: Why not make this best practice a grand Lutheran “twofer” one? As students learn your subject content, engage them in developing their higher thinking skills with a daily Christ-centered, faith integration approach. Instead of making irreligious applications to the subject matter, challenge your students to make *faith applications* to the content. Instead of analyzing information from a secular perspective, have them *analyze* subject material from a *biblical* perspective. Instead of evaluating work from a worldly viewpoint, make your students *evaluate* projects and assignments from a *Christian worldview*. Instead of requiring plans or tasks which promote secular or worldly causes, motivate students to *create* projects, platforms, and leadership opportunities which give a *Christian* testimony or promote the *Good News*. Students will not only learn your content and develop these essential, transferable, higher thinking skills, but they will also learn their Bible, “the way, the truth, and the life.”

#2 – Require Students to Write a Devotion for Each Unit

Even more special than you taking the time to write one original devotion for each content unit, require your students to write one (they can even do it with a partner if that helps). For example, if your class just completed a unit on the American Revolution, ask your students to create a devotion based on one of the main themes, ideas, individuals, battles, or concepts from the unit. They could search an online Bible for verses that speak to themes like liberty,

freedom, adversity, conflict, independence, leadership, separation, responsibility, loss, death, victory, sacrifice, etc. They then could evaluate and compare God's Word to the realities and themes you presented in their study of the Revolutionary War. You could encourage students to take a prominent Revolutionary War figure, like George Washington, and compare him to a biblical leader. Give your students a template or framework to help guide them in their writing process. You will be amazed at the biblical connections they make with the class content, and they will remember their faith association with the American Revolution for the rest of their lives. The really cool part: You can collect and save the exemplary devotions and use them in class next year.

#3 – Link and Connect Your Class Prayer to Something Specific in Your Lesson Plan

Many Lutheran teachers open their class with prayer, which is well and good. Sometimes these prayers, though, can become routine and monotonous. Students begin tuning them out because they all sound the same. Therefore, be intentional in crafting your class prayer based upon one or more of your specific learning objectives for the day. If students are to learn the process of photosynthesis—how plants get energy from the sun and release oxygen for our physiological good and survival, make an application to the Son of God, God's life-sustaining Word (our spiritual oxygen), and the faith-sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. Student listening and engagement may be at their peak during your opening prayer. So why not give them the good stuff right from the beginning. By keeping your prayers fresh, specific, and tied to the content and learning objectives, students will never tune them out.

#4 – List and Execute Your Faith-based Objective for Each Class Period

You might miss your metabolism and body weight from your college and teacher training days, but you surely do not miss the 14-page lesson plans you had to complete. However, you continue to lay out and plan your learning objectives, class activities, and assessments for every class you teach. As long as you are writing and thinking of the learning objectives for each class period, make sure one is faith-based. The teacher in the government-run classroom down the street does not have a faith-based goal, but you can and should. That is a prime point of differentiation. So go ahead and post your faith objective in front of the class or read it out loud to your students. Show them what is important to know or be able to do by the end of the period. Then execute your Christ-centered learning objective and assess it. Your students deserve the best as well as all the rest.

#5 – Don't Hide that One Slide!

Whatever your primary presentation instrument (PowerPoint, Prezi, Emaze, Google Drive, etc.), include one slide that shares or teaches the Christian faith or God's Word. This is such an easy way to incorporate the Most Important Thing (MIT)—the teaching and learning of God's Word—every day in your classroom. Make a faith connection or faith application with that one slide. For example, in your world history class when talking about the gold and treasures discovered in King Tut's tomb, you could post 1 Peter 1:7–8 and talk about how God clearly states that our faith is more precious than gold. If confounded and struggling to make a broader connection, insert a Bible verse in the presentation and explain why you selected the verse and how it relates with the topic at hand. Kids love to hear personal testimonies and insights from their teacher. God has given you everything. You can give him *one* slide in each presentation.

#6 – Insert and Integrate Faith Questions on Every Formal Assessment

“Will this be on the test?” Almost every kid in America asks that question at least once during their school years. Students know that if something is on the test, or specifically required in a project, it must be important. If teaching or sharing the faith is important and a top priority, then you should integrate faith questions in your formal assessments. In an essay, ask your English students how they would witness to or share the Christian faith with the lead character in the novel. Give this question to them the first day of the unit so they can think and reflect on it for days. In history class, list five Bible verses for them and ask them to apply one verse to a major historical character, concept, or event in the Civil War. If you have been teaching about the Great Depression and New Deal, ask them how God gives us (his children) a New Deal on life. Include multiple choice questions asking students to identify the mission of your school or a Bible verse that connects with a specific question or unit topic. What gets graded or assessed is important.

#7 – Complete Faith-Filled Warm Fuzzy Friday Notes

The first thing you can do every Friday morning is write three to five handwritten notes to students who demonstrate Christian leadership or profound faith applications on an assignment, in a discussion, in a small-group settings, or other school functions. Be especially complimentary when kids admit mistakes, confess their sins, or show the courage of their Christian convictions. Include a Bible verse that specifically accentuates your words. Friday is a great

day to discreetly hand out these personal notes because students will marinate on your kind, thoughtful words all weekend long. The point is you noticed and caught them doing something right or Christ-like and encouraged them in their faith walk. You will be surprised how many of these notes will end up as keepsakes and will be displayed on tables at their graduation parties.

#8 – You are What Your Walls Say You Are

Elementary teachers are generally much more creative and excited to put up posters, collages, pictures, and projects in a classroom compared to secondary teachers. You can be different. Invest in and hang some pictures that include Bible verses, powerful images of the Christian faith (e.g., the crucifixion, empty tomb, Jesus as Lamb of God, fisher of men, baptism, Last Supper, etc.), and other biblical themes. Design your own or have students, especially those gifted in art, make some for you. While these pictures and Bible verses can stay up year-round, perhaps you can set aside one area or wall in your classroom where you post new stories, images, or verses periodically. Students will be curious as to why you displayed them when you did. Take advantage of their curiosity or bring it to their attention before they ask. Post your personal mission statement and refer to it frequently in front of your students. Make a collage, or write a letter to yourself, that answers the question, “Why do I do this ministry?” Make it visible in your classroom. Showcase your students' personal mission statements or favorite Bible verses. Tell them to include a picture that connects with the verse they selected. There is only one of you, but most classrooms contain four walls. Be a good steward and let those walls, filled Bible verses and biblical images, reach and touch your students.

#9 – Reinforce Faith Integration in the Home

Once a quarter, give a faith-infused assignment that requires parental (or guardian) feedback. Perhaps this is nothing more than asking parents to write a reflection on their child's written assignment or project. Encourage students to take a selfie with their parents and the project and submit it as part of the assignment. Scan and put all those smiling faces on your weblog or on your classroom wall. The point is that you are getting parents and students to talk and discuss their faith and faith issues at home. Keep encouraging and building Christian community. This assignment also helps to affirm parents in their school choice, especially considering the financial sacrifice they endure to send their child to your school.

#10 – Go Public Assignments and Opportunities

Since students love their Social Media, encourage

encourage them to share, teach, and contend for the faith in cyberspace. Give them daily extra credit if they tweet (with a creative hashtag) or post a Christian leadership lesson they learned or a biblical application they made in class. Have them post a picture with a description of why that image signifies or reminds them of a faith lesson they learned in class. During Lutheran Schools Week, display pictures or post messages on why you teach in a Lutheran school, on the Christ-centered leaders and heroes of faith who inspired you over the years, on how your personal faith in Christ made a difference in a mountaintop or valley experience in your life, and how your faith stirs or compels you to act on certain issues. Then share all these with your students in class that week. Have them post positive messages about why they appreciate your school so much or how they have grown in their Christian walk.



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Of course, these ten ideas or concepts represent only a few different ways you can seamlessly integrate God's Word and the Christian faith into almost any classroom setting. Perhaps they will inspire you to try and seek out more approaches to engage and connect your students to the Bible and our loving Savior, Jesus Christ. The important point to remember is that the more you share and teach the faith, the more confident, enthusiastic, and natural you will become in doing both of these things. God equipped and blessed you with so many gifts and talents. He put you right where He did for a reason. So make an eternal difference each and every day. Be intentional in designing daily lessons for those precious moments when you can share and teach the one true faith. One final encouragement: I've never yet met any Lutheran teacher who regretted, even for a moment, sharing Jesus or teaching God's Word to their students. Live it and love it.

Anthony Rosen, *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding the American Culture*, 54.

Romans 10:15

Jesus speaking in Matthew 22:37.

Proverbs 22:6

See in particular Peter Jonas, *Secrets of Connecting Leadership and Learning with Humor*, 2004.

For an excellent and recently resource on how to use Bloom's Taxonomy every day in class, see Sandra Yancy McGuire's *Teach Students How to Learn: Strategies You Can Incorporate into Any Course to Improve Student Metacognition, Study Skills, and Motivation*, 2016.

John 14:6

Jude 1:3 !