Welcome to the 2019-2020 edition of the ELCA Schools and Learning Centers Devotional Guide

Blessed to Bless

As I come to the close of my 20 years of service as ELEA’s Executive Director, I do believe I have been blessed to bless in many ways. I have had the opportunity to visit many of our ELCA schools and early childhood centers and get to know many directors, principals, teachers, pastors, and board members along with some of the children that our programs serve. They are why we do what we do.

It’s been my hope that I have been able to be a blessing by providing support, advocacy, a listening ear, some suggestions and advice, and sometimes just a smile of encouragement to all of you who serve the youngest of God’s children and their families.

In my 20 years with ELEA, I have had the opportunity to serve with 5 different National Board Presidents under 4 different board structures from 4 different offices. In that time, I have traveled extensively, flying countless miles; have established the Regional Ambassador and other volunteer and leadership programs; and in general watched the organization change, grow, evolve, and then evolve again. The goal has always been to be of service to our schools.

This guide is intended to be used by pastors and administrators in doing weekly devotions with their staff. I am always blessed as I read the stories our writers share. The feedback we receive is always positive and what makes it really special is that the devotions are written by YOU—our directors, principals, pastors, and other friends of ELEA. Keep up the good work! I am delighted that every year we have had new writers volunteer and this year, I am especially delighted to be including 3 devotions written by Lutheran school staff from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land. I had the privilege of serving on the ELCJHL school board in 2018 and to get to know some of these amazing folks in Palestine.

So, as I retire and move to a new phase in my life, I want to thank you all for being good and faithful servants who make a positive impact in the lives of children and their families and nurture their faith and their very souls. I also want to thank you for sharing your lives, your faith, and your talents with me.

Gayle Denny, ELEA Executive Director
September 1, 1999 through August 30, 2019
July 3, 2018, will forever be a day I remember. It is the day my 5-year-old granddaughter left our home, never coming back. She had complained of a stomachache for weeks, so my daughter took her in for a doctor’s checkup from where she was rushed to Oakland Children’s Hospital with what was thought to be double pneumonia. After two weeks of care in Oakland, 11 medical personnel accompanied her to Stanford Children’s Hospital for an additional six weeks of attention and exploration where she passed away on September 3 from unknown pulmonary fibrosis.

Dahlila was a significant blessing: to her family, her teachers, and classmates. However, her greatest blessing was the faith and courage she showed during her illness, which brought others to the Lord while they followed her journey on Facebook.

“While Dahlila was at Oakland Hospital, the medical staff was inserting an IV into both arms. She asked her mom, ‘Was this worse for Jesus, or for me?’ Her mom answered, ‘I think it was worse for Jesus.’ The look on Dahlila’s face was, ‘I got this!’ What five-year-old relates her experience to Christ’s death on the cross? The lessons she is teaching us about courage and strength are deep, but nothing compared to the example of how loved she is by our God.”

These children who have been entrusted to us for such a very short time, whether given to us as students or family members, are here to teach us in more ways than we teach them. We believe we are their mentors when in truth they are ours.

Questions for the Week:
What children has God placed into your life? How are these children being used by God to bless others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you God, for the children you place in our care. We are blessed to be able to work with them so they are a blessing to others.

This devotion was contributed by Jean Bashi, Rohnert Park, CA, who has served Lutheran schools for 36 years.
At a training session I attended, the facilitator asked participants to identify the item we had with us that was most precious to us and place it on the table in front of us. Many people chose a wedding or engagement ring, other jewelry, or a picture of a loved one. The facilitator then explained that her assistant would come around to each table with a basket so we could place our item in it. We were told that the basket would be placed in the hallway, out of our sight, but that her assistant would sit in the hallway until we were dismissed later that day. Naturally, most participants were reluctant to place their precious items in the basket and refused to agree to do this.

We kept our treasured items, but the facilitator made the point that parents are leaving their most treasured children with us each day. We, as teachers, need to realize how blessed we are to be entrusted with the care of these precious children. We may also be surrounded by other treasures—perhaps a co-worker or supervisor who supports and helps us in doing our job better.

When we choose to see the value of those around us, our heart follows, and we can more easily treat them with love, kindness, and compassion. In blessing others with an attitude of love and respect, we, in turn, are blessed with a work environment that is positive and caring.

Questions for the Week:
Think about the children and co-workers you spend time with each day. What do you treasure about them? How have you been blessed by their presence? How have you been a blessing to them?

Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for the blessing of your co-workers and children you serve. Ask God to give all of you the ability to recognize the value of one another and to show love and kindness during the coming school year.

This devotion was contributed by Joanne Osterland, who is blessed to serve as Executive Director at Christ Lutheran Preschool in Dallas, TX.
August 18, 2019
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Hebrews 11: 29–2: 2

Some of you may be looking forward to the new school year while others may be reflecting on the first week or so. Wherever you are in your school year, I encourage you to focus on your faith this year. Focus on the faith that helped the “heroes” listed in these verses through amazing trials. Heroes “who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength;” (Verse 33, 34a).

While you may not face lions or swords this year, you will more than likely encounter colleagues with whom you disagree, parents who refuse to listen, or children who stretch you in ways that you would have never considered possible. You know the types of challenges I’m talking about.

As educators, we encounter parents who are even more disengaged (or overly engaged) and children with even more challenging behaviors than the year before. Instead of placing blame, place faith. Place faith at the forefront of every situation that you encounter. Through faith, you will be able to conquer problems, to-do lists, conflicts that once seemed insurmountable. What if you tried praying for wisdom and guidance before every meeting? Or reading the Word each morning before even heading off to school? Faith that will move mountains is something that must be built up over time with discipline and practice.

Questions for the Week:
How can you build your faith? What daily or weekly practices, outside of attending church, can you engage in that will help you strengthen your faith? Do you have an accountability partner who might help? Consider how you can place faith at the forefront of situations that you face now or have recently faced.

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Ask God to give you the discipline required to give your faith a good workout this year. Ask God for more faith than you’ve ever had and the wisdom to place it at the forefront of any situation you face. Thank God for giving you the gift of faith and the knowledge of how to use it.

This devotion was contributed by Kendolyn Pope, Houston, TX, who is the Director of Faith Lutheran Day School and Mother’s Day Out.
The first part of our theme is clear. We are blessed. We know and recognize that. Having received these blessings, however, do we always know how “to bless” in response? Our theme suggests that we receive blessings so that we can do just that, bless others. Our Isaiah text is familiar with “pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desires of the afflicted.” We “get” this kind of giving as being a blessing to others. Our kids also understand this form of blessing where individual acts define the blessing.

But there is another way we experience “to bless” that should also guide us. Each of us has “people blessings” in our lives, one or more meaningful, ongoing presences we don’t always fully appreciate or treasure until those performing the “to bless” upon us are lost to us. We can and should be a blessing, not just through our specific acts, but also by our presence as children of God in relation to others. Think of grandparents, parents, spouses, mentors. These people were there for you. They blessed us just by being there. Children especially sense this embracing proximity and respond accordingly to these images of Christ in their lives. In just this way educators are called upon by our Lord to bless our children with our presence from the perspective of our daily lives.

Not only should we act “to bless” but we should also act to treasure those by whom we have been blessed and emulate them in our own lives. In blessing we become participants in fulfilling the Lord’s promise in. v.14, “I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth.”

Question for the Week:
Consider people who have blessed you with their presence during their lives and lifted you up to new heights. How might you honor them by emulating them in being a Christ presence for your children?

Prayer for the Week:
Good and gracious God, you have most richly blessed us and we give thanks to you for those by whom our blessings have come. As Christian educators, lead us to move beyond being mere role models to becoming models of Christ and his presence in our lives, blessing with
our presence in the lives of our children. Help us to remember and treasure that we serve as “little Christs” for all of your children. We pray in the name and presence of the Christ who embraces us all. Amen.

In memory of Carole Feddersen, Christian educator, who was richly blessed in life and who lived her life “to bless” others, lifting them up to the heights of the earth. This devotion was contributed by Alan Feddersen, retired Lutheran educator, and Carole’s loving husband.
September 1, 2019
Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Luke 1: 7-14

The parable Jesus tells us in this text speaks of people attending a wedding and where they are to sit. Jesus tells them not to sit at the place of honor but rather sit at the lowest place so that the person who invited them might come and ask him or her to go to a higher place of honor.

Put yourself in the shoes of the person who has the ability to invite someone to a higher place of honor. If we are blessed to bless others, then the ability to honor someone is an important quality. The reality is we have that ability every day of our lives.

I have a friend who is a pediatrician. I remember following her around the hospital one day and when she introduced me to someone no matter what their status, she’d say something like “This person is one of the most valuable persons in the hospital, without him or her I couldn’t do my job.” She would take even the lowliest person and honor them. She told them how important they were to her.

What an amazing world we would live in if everyone honored others. Teachers have an extraordinary ability to honor children. Those little hearts and minds that hunger to be noticed and to have the adult in the room see value in their life. What happens when we lift another up is that we actually get blessed ourselves. When we bless we get blessed. Giving out honor is a gift God gives us to use every day.

Questions for the Week:
What is one way you can honor a child today? What is one way you can become a blessing?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for allowing you to raise up children, for putting you in such an important and valuable place in the world.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Marcia Thompson, The Villages, Florida. She is a retired pastor who worked with Zion Preschool, Flourtown, PA. She still works with children teaching puppet ministry.
Today’s reading from Psalm 1 tells us how to live and the results and consequences. The picture of the tree planted by a river of water that grows strong and bears fruit makes me think of the children that come to our schools. They hear God’s message of love and stories and scripture verses. God’s love will grow strong in their hearts. So they will bear fruit. The Psalm ends with a promise that the Lord looks over the righteous.

The theme for this year, “Blessed to Bless,” is like the tree in Psalm 1 that is bearing fruit.

It brings to mind a story that a parent told me one time. They said that what their child was learning came home because they couldn’t begin eating at their house until they had said a thank you prayer for their food. A child was “Blessed to Bless” in that home.

There are many examples of God’s love and caring that are shared by children in their homes, with friends, neighbors, and at school that shine out the message that they are “Blessed to Bless!”

**Question for the Week:**
How have you encouraged a student to share God’s love and caring with another person or student?

**Prayer for the Week:**
Dear Lord—Your love is so great for each one of us. Help us all to see opportunities to bless others by sharing that love. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Marge Robison, retired lifelong Lutheran educator, former ELEA National Board Member, and the 2010 recipient of the Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award.*
Persistence in working with students who seem lost can be exhausting. The strains and stresses become even more pronounced when a student’s difficulties at school are complicated by difficulties at home. Every step forward can be followed by a step back. Even so, in your devotion to teaching and in response to the love you have been shown in Christ, you “go after” students struggling socially or academically day after day. You persist with the tenacity of the woman who sweeps her house for a lost coin or the shepherd who anxiously searches for a lost sheep.

Remembering that you do not do this challenging work alone is one of the keys to keeping at the task. Even as the shepherd and the woman in the parable called their neighbors together to celebrate finding what had been lost, so too your persistence is buoyed when you engage your community of support. This, of course, includes seeking the advice and assistance of your immediate colleagues, but it also includes remembering the larger community of educators to which you belong. You are surrounded by thousands of educators whose wisdom is available through blogs, books, articles, conferences, and many other vehicles. You are not alone. Relying on your community even reaches to the recollection of persons from your past, especially your own teachers, who helped you along the way when you were flagging.

Wisdom learned from the cloud of witnesses of your past and support from today’s “communion of saints” in Christian education can help you to stand fast in the hard work of helping students who seem lost. And those same saints of old and saints of today will join you in rejoicing over even one student who succeeds.

Questions for the Week:  
How do you “go after” students who seem lost socially or academically? How do the parables of the shepherd and woman call you to deepen your commitment to persistently work with students facing difficulties? What collaborative relationships with other teachers or staff might enhance your work?
Personal Prayer for the Week:
Pray that God will give you strength to persist in the challenging task of working with troubled students and give you colleagues to accompany you in both the sorrows and joys of the work.

This devotion was contributed by Mark Wilhelm, Executive Director, Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities.
September 22, 2019
Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 1 Timothy 2: 7

“For this I was appointed, a herald and an apostle...a teacher of the
Gentiles in faith and truth.” 1 Timothy 2: 7

Some events in life are unforgettable. Even though it was some forty years ago, how vividly I can recall the feelings I experienced the first day my parents dropped me off at college! Can you recall your graduation day or your first day on a new job? Saint Paul could never forget being blinded on the road to Damascus. God works through these unforgettable moments to mold and shape us in discipleship. This prepares us to help others in their faith and life formation. As educators we have the special privilege of accompanying others in many of those unforgettable moments in their lives.

Questions for the Week:
Identify an unforgettable moment in your life. How did that moment and its aftermath prepare you for the work you do now? What role did this moment play in your development as a disciple of Jesus? What is it that you most want to pass on to the students that God has placed in your care?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for the students entrusted to your care. Pray that the Holy Spirit, who shaped you, will guide your work as you accompany your students through their life and faith formation.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Martha Clementson, who is co-senior pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Westminster, MD, home of Little Friends of Grace Preschool. She serves as the President of the Board of Trustees of Carroll Lutheran School.
“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.” Meanwhile, “at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,” but the rich man refused to help him (Luke 16: 19-21). The rich man was blessed with material things, but he did not know how to be a blessing to others.

At our preschool, many of our families are blessed with material wealth. Through our school and church—wide efforts, we encourage our children and families to bless others. We have a history of generous giving to our scholarship fund, which allows several children each year to attend preschool who otherwise could not. Each month we encourage families to bring donations to a variety of local charities, including those that help the homeless, the sick or hungry, and animals that have been abandoned. Our students make artwork and send cards to deployed service members and nursing home residents. No doubt your own Lutheran school does some similar activities.

Although the rich man in the story didn’t learn his lesson until it was too late, the children of our Lutheran schools are learning early in life how important it is to take what we’ve been blessed with and share it with others. As Lutheran educators, we have a wonderful privilege and responsibility not only to share the teachings of Jesus with our students but also to help them and their families live out the Christian faith and mission.

Questions for the Week:
In what ways are you and your students blessed? Who is nearby in your community that could use extra help in some way? How can you encourage your class or your school to share their blessings with others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Generous and Loving God, thank you for the many ways I have been blessed. Help me to be an example by sharing my gifts. Help me to lead my students in sharing with those around us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Melissa Roselle, Director of Education at St. John’s Lutheran Preschool, Springfield, IL.
October 6, 2019
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 2 Timothy 1: 1-14

How Firm a Foundation

What a blessing it is to stand on the foundation that God loves us! Isn’t it even a bigger blessing to share that love with the children in our schools? Not only do we teach the children in our schools their ABC’s and 123’s, which lay a foundation for lifelong learners, but we also teach them about God’s love. How God loves us no matter what. How we as God’s children should love one another. How God’s love is unchangeable.

We teach the children songs like “Jesus Loves Me” and “Jesus Loves the Little Children”. What other things do you plan in your class schedule to teach God’s love? Or are most lessons unwritten in our lesson plans. We redirect children in a loving way. We ask them to share and take turns, to be kind to their friends. Do you see that? Could you see more?

Questions for the Week:
Sit and think about that for a moment. What do you do on a daily basis to show God’s love? What changes can you make to show and share God’s love with the children in your school?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your love. Thank you for showing me how much you love me. Allow me to show that love to all of the little people in my school. Let that love overflow to their families. Allow them to feel cared for, shown mercy, and feel blessed by God’s Love for all of us.

This devotion was contributed by Renee Stinar, Director of Hope Lutheran Preschool of Eagle, ID and ELEA Region 1 Board Member.
The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson was quoted saying, “If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.” In the passage of Luke 17:11-19 Jesus teaches the important lesson of never overlooking the gifts showered on us by God.

As the group of ten lepers approaches Jesus and he asks them to show themselves to the priests to be made clean, they are obedient and are immediately made clean. Only one of the healed returns to praise God and thank Jesus for this amazing gift. The other nine, we can only guess, were appreciative but took the gift in stride and moved on to other tasks and thoughts.

In our schools and centers we are blessed to have the opportunity to share the amazing gifts that God has given us with the children. We do a great job of this, pointing out all of God’s creations and celebrating all the blessings bestowed on us.

Questions for the Week:
What is the difference between obedient faith and intellectual faith? When we pack up and leave for the day do we, as adults, carry with us the immense sense of gratitude we have demonstrated? Does our to-do list, like the other nine, take priority and do we forget to relax in His love?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
“Your faith has made you well” (17:19b) Be loud and be proud and proclaim your thanks to God. Be so loud that others feel compelled to thank God with unrestrained praise.

This devotion was contributed by Cory Newman, Carbondale, IL, incoming Executive Director of ELEA, former Early Childhood Director and lifelong Lutheran school advocate.
Begin by reading the full text of this beautiful psalm out loud. Read it from several translations.

The psalm begins with a question, “Where can I look for help?” The psalm is one of reassurance and a listing of God’s promises to be with us no matter the challenges of the day: to stay awake and protect, shield, watch over, guard, and keep us from harm. This psalm is God’s blessing upon us for our daily life and ministry at home and at school.

This psalm is also a beautiful description of all we are called to be and do for the children and youth in our care: protect from bullying, create safe physical environments so they will not trip and fall, to not get drowsy and stay alert in the classroom, to shield them from the sun (make sure they are covered with adequate sunscreen).

We are Blessed to Bless! As staff and children and caregivers depart one’s office, classroom, chapel, or parking lot – find opportunities to bless them by making the sign of the cross on their foreheads and say, “God guards you when you leave and when you return, God guards you now, God guards you always.” (Psalm 121:8 The Message)

Questions for the Week:
Who is that trusted friend, mentor, or other staff person to whom I go when I need help and guidance? How have they blessed me?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, constantly remind me that my strength comes from God, who made heaven and earth, and from those accompanying me in this calling. I am not alone. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Linda Staats, Phoenix, AZ, who serves on the ELEA Board as Regional & Synodical Advisor. Her lifelong ministry is HomeGrown Faith for new life in Christ.
October 27, 2019
Reformation Sunday
Thought for the Week: Psalm 46

“Be still, and know that I am God!” (verse 10). In the midst of storms of life—for us and for our students—these words bring great comfort. The children and adults around us may share their “storms” or we may never know the challenges they face. God’s power and love are incomprehensible. Through any challenge God promises to be with us. Despite our weaknesses, poor choices or failures, God’s forgiveness is always available through love that never waivers. God blesses us through deep, unshakable, unconditional love. God’s power calms the storms of our hearts when we rest in God’s love.

Knowing that tremendous blessing, how do we bless others? We strive to unconditionally love all the children in our care, and love their families, as hard as it may be at times. We listen with compassion and understanding. Our daily presence or smile brings comfort. As we nurture children’s growth, we model forgiveness and acceptance. What a blessing for a child to be in an environment where they are truly loved.

Question for the Week:
Have you seen a co-worker demonstrate God’s unshakeable love for others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Help us trust in your power and love as we faithfully love and nurture the growth of children in our care. May we embrace the blessings of love, compassion, and forgiveness you give us so that we may bless others with the same.

This devotion was contributed by Beth Coburn, Valparaiso, IN, presently serving as ELEA National Ambassador.
November 3, 2019
All Saints Sunday
Thought for the Week:
Ephesians 1: 15-16 & Luke 6: 21

“I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.” Ephesians 1:15-16

“Blessed are you...” Luke 6:21

Day after day, the little kids memorized hymn verses, Bible verses, and as they grew older, catechism sections. The teachers patiently listened to them recite. The kids learned to sing the hymns for chapel, sometimes in harmony. Patiently the teachers helped them learn to mean and trust the words they sang. “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.”

Many years later, the little kids, now in their 70s, 80s, and 90s may forget what they had for breakfast, but they can recite passages, sing hymns without the book, and “remember” the feelings they had when taught by loving teachers. This doesn’t happen always, nor everywhere. But when it happens, people are blessed!

You are teachers and administrators because you once had good teachers and administrators. You are carrying on their work. You have been blessed and now you are blessing others in Jesus’ Name. For this I give thanks.

Question for the Week:
Reflect on your own childhood education and on those who taught you. What will your students remember from you when they are old?

Prayer for the Week:
Give thanks for those who taught and loved you well, for those who model good work. Ask God to help you do likewise.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Beth Orling, who benefited from Christian Education for years and has served congregations with strong preschool programs. She gives thanks for the teachers she had as a young child.
November 10, 2019  
**Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Thought for the Week:** Psalm 17: 8a

“Guard me as the apple of the eye;”

In Hebrew, “the apple of the eye” is “the little person of the eye.” Looking into someone's eye you can see your reflection as a little person in their pupil. Your eye is a vulnerable part of your body and protected by blinking and instinctive turning away from danger.

Each of us is a precious reflection in God’s eye and God chooses to protect and guard us and keep an eye on us. We are blessed.

What reflection do our students see in our eyes? Since we are blessed by God as he loves and protects us, let us bless our students with the same reflection. Take time to welcome each student with godly love, showing them that you cherish them and you are proud of them. Our world is in desperate need of kindness so take time to acknowledge your students with kind words of support so that they may bless a hurting world.

**Questions for the Week:**
Where do you see your students blessing their world with kindness? How do you show them that you cherish them and are proud of them as “the apple of your eye”?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Gracious God, You bless us with love and protection. Guide us to reflect your love to the students you have placed in our care. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Gaye Rodriguey, Coupeville, WA, who served His Kids Preschool in Oak Harbor, WA for over 20 years.*
Thought for the Week: 2 Thessalonians 3: 12-13

12. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and earn their own living.
13. Brethren do not be weary in well doing.

It is almost Thanksgiving and for most people a time for a break, a slow-down, and a change of pace. Not so for those in classrooms, working with and for children. Excitement is amplified as turkeys and pilgrims appear, and Christmas draws near. The above verses remind that although there is certainly not much quietness in the activities of children and in classrooms, there is often little appreciation for the work and dedication of teachers and administrators. Many long hours go into preparation for each experience and day, and much time is spent after the children go on their way. Educators take their vocation home in their hearts and minds, not just the physical preparation, but also the mental and spiritual care for children and support for colleagues.

The vocation of Christian educators follows the command and exhortation to be the physical presence of Jesus, to be the voice, hands, eyes, and ears of one who loves all, even those who may for a time appear unlovable. The work may cause weariness and even despair. The well doing is planting seeds in young minds and hearts, and providing a safe and caring environment for them to grow. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to this ministry of the Gospel.

Question for the Week:
What makes you weary as you serve and what sustains and uplifts you in your calling?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord Jesus Christ, many days present challenges to time and energy. Help me persevere and set aside time that allows me to experience the joy and satisfaction of seeing growth and success in those I serve.

This devotion was contributed by Hugh Kress, who has served Lutheran Schools and Early Childhood Centers for five decades in many capacities.
November 24, 2019
Christ The King Sunday
Thought for the Day: Jeremiah 23: 1-6

It is said that Queen Marie Antoinette would disguise herself as a commoner and go from party to party to learn how people truly lived. But she was never able to get away with her disguise. They always figured out who she was. Why? Because she “walked like a queen.”

This passage from Jeremiah gives us two different descriptions of God in our lives...one as shepherd in verse three and one as king in verse five. What a paradox of descriptions...a shepherd for the common and a King to reign over the Kingdom.

We end this church year celebrating Christ as King, who rules the Universe. We then begin the next church year by celebrating the baby, born in a stable, placed in a manger, worshipped there by shepherds from the hillside and Kings from the Orient.

I am reminded of King Olav, the former King of Norway, known as the “People’s King,” for his personal connections with the people of Norway. He needed no disguise to go among his people. He just talked to them, showed interest in them, walked among them as friend and humble leader. As educators, we too must be mindful of those in our care, those we relate to, those who need us to know them for who they are, be they students, colleagues, or families.

We are called to walk like Christ. We need no disguise. We just need love. If we walk and serve in love, then those in our schools will see Christ, the true “People’s King.”

Questions for the Week:
Who reached down to you in your moments of feeling unvalued and made you feel valued and loved? When have you done the same?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Christ the King, may we strive to live like you; to love those lost and alone, like a shepherd tending lost sheep or a King tending people feeling devalued and afraid. For we are your children, needing a King to lead the way and a Shepherd to find us when we stray.

This devotional was contributed by Dr. Kris Meyer, Principal of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church & School in Waverly, IA, a preschool-6th grade ELCA Lutheran School that is cool and growing!
Thought for the Week: Psalm 100 (ESV)

A Psalm for Giving Thanks

Thanksgiving. Yahoo, a four—day weekend. A time for rest from the rigors of everyday teaching. A time for Thanksgiving family traditions. Take time to think of those family traditions. Take time to share one of your favorite family traditions. Give thanks for those traditions. Give thanks for family.

Give thanks this Thanksgiving that God has blessed you to bless others. Pastor Richard Hoyer has been and is blessed to bless others. Dick and I served Redeemer Lutheran Church and School in Northeast Philadelphia for many years. Pastor Hoyer led chapel each Wednesday for our K-8 student body. Pastor Hoyer was not only a gifted-blessed Pastor and preacher, but also a gifted-blessed teacher. For his chapel message he used filmstrips that he would draw on to illustrate the message. (this was in the 1970s, 80s and 90s). As principal, I would sit behind the 8th grade class. At one of the chapel services one of the 8th grade girls whispered to her friend, “This is my favorite part of chapel.” It was Pastor Hoyer’s message! I watched as they watched and listened intently. Thank you, Pastor Richard Hoyer, for being blessed to bless others!

The psalmist writes:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

Serve the Lord with gladness! (my emphasis)

Come into his presence with singing!

Give thanks for faithful colleagues, faithful administrators, faithful pastors who support and are involved with your school’s ministry. Share how you have been blessed or of someone you know and how you or they bless others.

Questions for the Week:
What do you give thanks for? What joys and concerns from your daily work could you include in your prayers?
Personal Prayer for the Week:
Heavenly Father, on this Thanksgiving Day we come before you with hearts full of thanks. We give thanks for your every blessing. Your generous goodness comes to us new every day. By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness. Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. We give thanks for your benefits and serve you in willing obedience. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Robert Federwitz, a lifelong Lutheran educator, retired, living in Dover, DE, and currently serving as ELEA Region 8 Ambassador.
December 1, 2019
First Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: Matthew 24: 36-44

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

One of the best things about teaching is every day is different. As educators we plan activities and prepare materials for each day and beyond. However, there are things we cannot know until the day is underway. Weather changes our plans, a child becomes ill at school, or another teacher suddenly needs support from colleagues. Changes are inevitable. We do not know what will happen, big or small, but often the day will change and evolve in its own way. We can simply be ready and prepare as best as possible.

The Advent season is upon us. A time to prepare for Jesus’ arrival. While many activities at school, home, and church help us prepare for the birth of Jesus, the reading surprises us with talk of what the future holds. We are reminded that we do not know when, but that Jesus will return. There is both uncertainty and certainty in this passage. This reminder encourages us to prepare and be ready for the time the Son of Man returns. Similar to the uncertainty of the school day, Jesus’ coming is not an item we can schedule. However, we can prepare today for what is to come.

Questions of the Week:
Think about events you prepare for in the coming month. What do you do to prepare? How can we prepare, be ready for Jesus’ coming? How can we help families, children, and other teachers prepare?

Prayer:
Heavenly Father, as we wait for your return, give us patience. Provide us guidance to be ready for you. We ask for your help in showing children and families ways to be ready. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Amy Cauble, Director of Spirit of Joy Preschool, Sioux Falls, SD.
In the reading of Isaiah 11 we learn that God promised the gift of world peace and the coming of a child. The prophet Isaiah used God’s words to show us that through the stump of Jesse a new branch, a second David, would be born to a world of peace and righteousness. The child would grow from a shoot to a strong branch for all of the world to see. The story of Jesse’s tree would be told for almost 700 years before the waiting faithful would know of the birth of the Messiah. Immanuel, the Prince of Peace, would be that gift, that renewal of God’s promise. Jesse’s tree would serve many generations as a preparation, a lesson on the heritage of Jesus.

Today, Christians prepare for the coming of Jesus during the Advent season by using an ornament laden representation of the Jesse tree. Many will celebrate Jesus as the Tree of Life. The traditions of faith and family are once again revisited. I am reminded of my grandmother’s faith and the traditions of God’s grace she taught my family. It was during those most troubling times, much like when the stump lay still, my resilient grandmother would tell us to “count our blessings.” She told us to remember that no matter what, God transformed the world into a new age of peace, promise, and everlasting love.

Questions for the Week:
How do you prepare your hearts and minds for the coming of the Christ child? What do you use to represent the heritage of Jesus? Do you take time to count your blessings?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for the visual reminder of Jesse’s tree; the gift of world peace and the birth of Jesus. Thanks be for allowing us to count our blessings and know that through God’s grace we will be fulfilled.

This devotion was contributed by Doug Boots, a speech-language pathologist with Central Rivers Area Education Agency. He has served at St. Paul’s Lutheran School in Waverly, Iowa, for the past 20 years.
Imprisoned by Herod and facing execution, John the Baptist poses this question to Jesus: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” As we draw near to Christmas, we might ask the same question. Our work with children and families may expose us to issues and problems that may seem insurmountable, and we could be forgiven for wondering what the coming of Christ can accomplish in the face of all these thorny challenges – in their lives, and in ours as well.

Jesus sends a message back to him: “Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

This is the unconquerable hope of Christmas—for the children and families we serve, and in the midst of our own questions and crises as well—even as the days grow short, the darkness deepens, and the gift of Light may seem ever more elusive. For “the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot grasp it.” Around the Manger, and beneath the Cross, we witness a hope beyond offense, trial, and adversity. Christ the Savior is born, and is arisen! In that hope, unlocking every prison door and every intractable woe, we can find strength to love all those in our care, whatever their prison or fear.

Questions for the Week:
What are the difficult situations your families and students are facing? What can you and your school do to be a light shining into those dark places, and how might the hope of Christmas be made known among these precious ones in our care?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for placing you in such a pivotal role in the lives of those you serve, and seek God’s wisdom and peace to activate and motivate your own ministry of encouragement and leadership.

This devotion was contributed by Bill Hurst, Senior Pastor of First Lutheran Church and School, Torrance, CA.
Thought for the Week: Matthew 1: 18-25

“But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream ...” (v. 20a)

A lot of things could have gone differently in the weeks and months leading up to the birth of Jesus. After all, you had an unwed mother, an unwed couple living together, the social and religious judgment and shame of the situation, and Joseph deciding to “dismiss” Mary – to break up with his pregnant fiancé.

The definition of the word “dismiss” includes to reject or send away. Either way, it’s not a pleasant or affirming thing to do or experience. It’s certainly not what you’d call a blessing.

But then there’s the angel – a messenger from God intruding into Joseph’s restless sleep. In that moment, with that visit, everything changes for Joseph and Mary going forward. It doesn’t magically change the difficulty of life or the discomforts and pain of pregnancy and birth, but it stirs in them the vision and faith that God is doing something amazing and important through their less than perfect lives – not just for their benefit, but for the sake of the world. They are blessed to bless!

Somehow, God stirred in you a vision and desire to be an educator equipped to be a bearer of faith and a blessing for the young people and families you serve. It may have been in a memorable moment, a series of events throughout your life, the influence of someone, or even a dream. However it happened, give thanks to God that you have been blessed to bless.

Questions for the Week:
Who has been a blessing to you, a person who has reminded you that you are loved by God and that your life has special meaning and purpose? How has it changed you? How do you bless and help other people?
Personal Prayer for the Week:
Run your finger down your list of students. Pause at each name and thank God for a particular way in which they bless you, inspire your faith or shift your view of the world and life. Pray that the Spirit will bless you with the words and actions to bless your students each day before they walk out the door, that they may be a blessing to others.

This devotion was contributed by Rod Boriack, Des Plaines, IL. Rod has served in youth and family ministry, outdoor ministry, and communications on the ELCA churchwide staff. He currently serves as an independent editor and writer for the ELCA and other ELCA-related organizations.
Christmas Day
Thought for the Week: John 1: 1-14

“He (John the Baptist) came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.”

We, as teachers, are extensions of John the Baptist, the first witness. We also carry the responsibility of passing the Word and the light to our students, especially during this Christmas season. Being a witness doesn’t mean just passing on the Word. It’s actively being an example for our students and those around us. Reflect for a few moments. In the past, how have you been a Christian example for your students?

The Christmas season is about love, joy, and hope. These feelings are not just for us, but for all who believe in Jesus Christ. As teachers, we should strive to always bring love, joy, and hope into our classrooms, not just during this time of year. Making them a safe space for all our students to thrive and witness the light in each other.

Questions for the Week:
How can you be a witness to your students in the future? How can you bring love, joy, and hope into your classrooms even more? How can your actions reflect the Word and the light?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for bringing His son into the world to be born in the flesh. Thank God for each of your students and the individual light that each of them brings into the world.

This devotion was contributed by Anton Nassar of Dar al Kalima Lutheran School in Bethlehem, Palestine. Dar al Kalima means “the house of the Word” in Arabic and is taken from this verse. Our students and teachers learn to live every day in our school values of love, peace, hope, justice, faith, teamwork, belonging, and constructive dialogue through our morning devotions and lessons.
What’s not to love about Christmas? The Christmas season can be an exciting time for many children…but not all. The present generation of students who occupy the seats in our classrooms come from an increasing number of broken homes, experiencing abuse, abandonment, and confusion. The life circumstances of many children are dismal. However, these words of God through the prophet Isaiah bring both comfort and reassurance, “I will recount the steadfast love of the Lord…in His love and pity He redeemed them; He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.”

As God’s people who work with children, we have the blessed opportunity to offer them hope in the midst of personal struggles and challenging family dynamics. Isaiah’s words were written at a destructive time in Israel’s history. Even through the eventual pain and suffering they experienced, God would lift them up and carry them, and they would eventually be restored.

The world sells Christmas with the promise of special gifts, twinkling lights, and a hiatus from work and school. And while we do anticipate those celebratory aspects of the season, they deem shallow to the depth of the message of God’s faithful and relentless love for all mankind as seen throughout history, and specifically, in the birth of Jesus. Our students need to know that no matter what circumstances they may be facing, there is hope. They are not alone. Jesus has come to save and restore.

Questions for the Week:
In what ways have you experienced the faithfulness of God through your life in both joys and hardships? How can you recount the steadfast love of the Lord and bring hope to your students during this season of Christmas?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Pray for awareness of and sensitivity to students who especially need to hear the hope of God’s faithfulness and love.

This devotion was contributed by Joyce Kortze, former Lutheran high school teacher and coach in Rockford, IL, and now freelance Christian writer.
January 5, 2020  
Epiphany of Our Lord  
Thought for the Week: Ephesians 3:1-12  

This grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ… Ephesians 3:8b

Here’s a fun riddle. Ask a group of children, what is something that grows, the more you give it away? You will most likely receive multiple answers, some of which may include love, friendship, forgiveness, and in alignment with our devotion today – grace. Grace is the priceless gift that grows, even in the most dire of circumstances, the more we freely live and share it with abandon. We who work with children know this gift firsthand as we simultaneously receive the gift of grace from our students who love us even on the days our lessons don’t go perfectly and as we share the gift of grace with our students who, for any handful of reasons, just aren’t having the best day. This gift of grace is not just an individual blessing, but one to be released out into the world so that we as community may live in constant response to the reality that we are blessed to bless!

Questions for the Week:
Who is one student or person in your life who especially needs the gift of grace today? How can you share it with them? Where can you give yourself some grace today?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you God for the gift of your boundless grace that allows me to live a life full of grace for myself and for others. Help me to remember this free gift is not dependent on me, nor who does or does not deserve it, but on who you are and your love for all of us. Let my life be a model of this grace wherever I go. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Casey Cross, the Young Disciples Director at Hope Lutheran Church in Eagle, ID. She is blessed by the students of Hope Lutheran Preschool every month during chapel time.
January 12, 2020
Baptism of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Matthew 3: 13-17

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

And a voice from heaven said,

‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

What does it mean to be a child of God? What does it mean to be a part of a family? When we are baptized we are brought into the family of Christ. Not only are we a child of God, but the water signifies that we are washed clean and our sin is taken away. It is in baptism that we remember that Christ died for us and that it is through the death and resurrection that we have eternal life. Jesus took on sin, death and the devil by dying on the cross so we no longer have to fight that battle.

Being a part of a family is exciting, fun, comforting, and sometimes challenging. We have a God who loves us so much that we are part of the family of believers. This family is one that lasts a lifetime. One that has many benefits, and one that allows us to be a part of it without having to do anything on our own. We are part of this family because of the love that God has for us—a love that is unconditional and no matter what we do, or how badly we mess up our heavenly Father will always be there for us with open arms.

As educators we need to model what it means to be in the family of believers. That means that we ourselves must show others the love that Christ has shown us. We need to show each other compassion, even when it is very difficult to do so. We must show each other forgiveness even when we are hurting ourselves. Being a part of a family is not always easy, but what an example we have in our Lord and Savior. We have a great task as we are called to be in the educational ministry in helping to raise God’s children. In doing so it is our responsibility to ensure that those entrusted to our care continue
to grow in their walk of faith. We need to model, challenge, inspire, forgive, and pray for our students so that they may continue to follow their Lord and Savior and show others what it means to be in God’s family. To God be the glory!

Questions for the Week:
How do you show others that you are a child of God? How do you follow Christ in a way that shows you are a part of God’s family? How will you show your students today, tomorrow, and always that you are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus and share the love given to you with others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Ask the Lord to help you as you show others what it means to be a part of a family. Also, pray that the Lord gives you the patience and strength to focus on the example of Jesus as you accomplish the task of being in God’s family. Pray for God to use you in a way that will show others you belong to the family of Christ. As you travel on the journey with Christ ask for God to be guiding you along the way.

This devotion was contributed by Michael Rottmann, Principal at Grace Lutheran School, Winter Haven, FL, and currently serving as President of the ELEA National Board of Directors.
January 19, 2020
Second Sunday After Epiphany
Thought for the Week: Isaiah 49: 1-7

“\(\text{I will give you as a light to the nations,}\)
\(\text{that my salvation may reach the end of the earth}\)”

Each of us comes to teaching by a different path. Some of us have always known that teaching is our destiny. Others feel the call after trying other careers. Some felt the nudge of a mentor to give it a try. However we came to our profession, our love of children and learning binds us together. We feel the call to work with children, to shape and change their lives. We are here to serve our students, their families, our whole school community. This is noble work!

But it’s January and the days are short and cold. Christmas is past and the decorations have long disappeared. The lesson plans that looked so good over the weekend when you wrote them really didn’t pan out. Everyone is sick, and the bus company cancelled your field trip because the weather is too bad. You really don’t want to clean up another kid who had an accident. Like Isaiah, you might want to declare: “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.” Today seemed a failure, and maybe it’s time to rethink the whole teaching thing.

Then, you sit down and check your messages. There is a note from a parent expressing her thanks for your attention to her child. The assessment that you thought everyone had bombed turned out just fine. On your desk is an art project, looking more like a monstrosity than art, and attached to it is a student note with a heart: “For you. Love, Me!” The cloud that has covered the day shifts and reveals the light that you have shone on your students today—the students of today who are the leaders of nations tomorrow. In your moment of epiphany, there is salvation for this day, and it reaches to the end of the earth. No matter how dark the day, you—whom God called and named before you were born—you have enlightened and delighted your classroom today, just as you do every day. “For I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength.”
Questions for the Week:
During your prayer time or while you journal about your day, reflect on a way that your plan for the day worked—or didn’t work—the way that you had planned. How do you now see that God was at work in this day? How can you use the events of today as a springboard for growth?

Personal Prayer of the Week:
Lord, help me to see that my strength as a teacher is like a bright, sharp sword hidden in Your hand. You have made me like a polished arrow pulled from your quiver. I shine with Your strength. I am Your servant to lead those in my care. May I always bring honor and praise to You by shining Your light onto the children in my charge, and may I see that same light of Yours reflected on me through the eyes and hearts of Your children.

*This devotion was contributed by Chris Comella, Principal of Pilgrim Lutheran School in Chicago, IL and serving as Vice President of the ELEA National Board of Directors.*
The opening verses of this text show Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that, through him, the people who sat in darkness would see great light dawning on their horizon. In this winter time of more darkness than daylight, perhaps we can relate to the longing for light, as we leave home for work and return at day's end in darkness. In our recent celebration of Christmas as God's epiphany, we, too, have seen the light of hope Jesus brings to our own dark places. As he began teaching and healing, Jesus invited others to follow him in his ministry of bringing light and life to a broken world. The first disciples must have believed the hope of the new life Jesus offered, for they left everything familiar and followed his call.

As we work with our colleagues, children, and their families, we know that there are dark times and brokenness in their lives, as in ours. Our calling is to share the hope-filled news of God's love to light the way to healing and wholeness. At times, our love and care might be the only evidence of hope in their lives. Like his disciples, let’s answer Jesus' call without hesitation, trusting his light to shine in and on us for all to see.

Questions for the Week:
Who has shined their Gospel light on you in your dark places? Can you identify times when God used your care to bring healing to someone troubled? What were your feelings in response to either situation?

Prayer for the Week:
O God of Grace, As you come to bring wholeness to our broken places, give us a sense of your healing presence so that we can comfort others with the comfort we have received from you. Give us eyes to see where healing is needed, and courage to sit with those in darkness. Wrap us in the peace that comes from knowing your abiding love. In the name of Jesus, who calls us by name, Let it be so. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Karen Kress, abiding in God's love in Waupaca, WI. Confirmation verse: John 15:5
February 2, 2020
Fourth Sunday After Epiphany
Thought for the Week: Matthew 5: 1-12

“Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

As a caregiver of children, while reflecting on this familiar verse I see children with the blessed qualities. I imagine “poor in spirit” as a child who is misbehaving and I am reminded that we are children of God. I need to see the “peacemakers” and acknowledge their efforts. What behaviors or habits exhibited by your students might be reflected as “blessed”? How can you change your mindset to see the blessings every day?

Question of the Week:
When you change your mindset, you will see behaviors and attitudes in a new way. How can you inspire change in the children and families that you teach every day?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you, God, for allowing me to see the best in your children and helping them be the best versions of themselves.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy White, Director of Barlow Little Palms Preschool, Palm Harbor, FL.

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Have you ever had days when you questioned if you were properly placed in the role you are currently serving? Questions such as “Am I ...to be a teacher...to be an administrator...to be a spouse...to be a parent?” For many of us, any or all these questions have entered our mind at some time or another during our adult years. The foundational question comes down to whether we consider any of these roles as a calling.

Consider Abram (later given the name Abraham in Genesis 17:5). God gave Abraham a calling to several roles in Genesis 12:1-3. Let us explore a few.

The first calling was that of dependency on God. This same calling comes to each one of us. As Abraham was called to depend on God – to the extent of even leaving his own country/land and family, so we, too, are called by God out of our land of being lost. Each day we should remind ourselves of our baptism and being brought into God’s family as a special chosen (called) child of God.

Another aspect of Abraham’s calling reminds us that if we are faithful to God, God has promised to bless us. This blessing may not always follow the course that the world dictates, but it does include the fact that you and I are not alone. We are part of a greater body of Christ – a “great nation” that has extended back to Abraham.

A final aspect of Abraham’s calling was that of being a blessing to “all families of the earth.” When you have those questions of purpose...of effectiveness...of calling in whatever role you serve, consider God’s call and promise to Abraham. As dependent, faithful workers in the Kingdom, God has promised that through us, “the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That certain promise means that whatever role we serve, whether it is our staff, whether it is our kids, or whether it is our individual family, each will be blessed by God.

Take comfort and grab on to the hope that comes with this calling from God. As such, you and I are called to depend on God. You and I are to daily remember and refocus on our calling. You and I are to hold onto the promise of blessing. At this time and place, you and I are called to be a blessing and to be blessed.

This devotion contributed by an Anonymous Writer who is a friend of ELEA.
February 16, 2020
Sixth Sunday After Epiphany
Thought for the Day: Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

Choose Life and Go Bless!

*Choose Life* sounds like one of those self-help mantras that one whispers or shouts to oneself upon waking up each day. *Choose Life*, we might remind ourselves as we prepare to face another week filled with unique students, passionate parents, and dynamic coworkers. In this early book of the Bible, God is setting up the covenantal relationship that will be the basis for the journey across all time. Loving God, and practicing love and caring service for others that leads to life is found from the earliest examples of relationship with God. This loving and living leads to God’s blessing and is foundational to how God blesses the world through the body of Christ.

God is the agent of blessing and when we choose life, we name and remember day after day the blessings that God provides. Choosing life affirms our call to consciously share God’s blessing with all those we meet along the way. Blessed to bless is the core of who we are as God’s beloved children no matter what age or place we find ourselves along this journey of living and growing together in life and faith. *Choose Life* is the place to start as we live for God and as God lives through us to go bless.

**Questions for the Week:**
When you make a conscious effort to *Choose Life*, how does that influence your day, week, year, and relationships with others? In what ways are you inviting others to *Choose Life*?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Pray for the wisdom to know God’s blessing for you and God’s blessing for others through your work and life.

*This devotion was contributed by R. Adam Berndt who is choosing life in Albuquerque, NM with Addison and Benny, who are both now on their journey with Lutheran Education at Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools.*
February 23, 2020
Transfiguration Sunday
Thought for the Week: Matthew 17: 1-9

“But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’”

Peter, James, and John, literally, had a mountain top experience with Jesus. They never expected what was about to happen. How could they? Jesus shone right in front of them. Moses and Elijah appeared, speaking with Jesus. Then, God spoke from a cloud. Understandably, the disciples reacted by falling on the ground, full of fear. Jesus responded with kindness and reassurance. What a Christ-filled moment!

Last week, I saw Christ in “Gary”, a two year old boy with severe sensory needs. During his first week of school, in January, he was non-verbal, screamed with each transition, grabbed toys and threw them across the room. He attempted to push and hit other children. He frequently fell down, kicking and screaming. Each time, when he was ready, we scooped him up off the floor, hugged him, then talked about what had happened, helping him act out gentle, safe requests and responses. We told Gary that he was safe and we were there to help him. Last week, a child fell down outside. Gary ran across the playground, bent over, rubbed the child’s back and asked his friend, “You okay?” Then he reached his hand out to help her stand up. What a Christ filled moment!

Question for the Week:
What Christ filled moments have you experienced lately? Describe when Christ has enabled you to lift someone up and comfort them.

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you, Jesus, for lifting me up, comforting me and taking away my fear. Help me to be open to you, so my words and hands may comfort others, too.

This devotion was contributed by Lynn Hess, who serves as the Director at The School of Grace, a parent participatory preschool, which serves typically developing children, children with special needs, and children from refugee families. The school is a ministry of Grace Lutheran Church in Raleigh, NC.
February 26, 2020
Ash Wednesday

Thought for the Week: Psalm 51: 1-17

It was one of our last days for Art Studio – preparation for our annual Art Show and Spring Concert, and I was working with our 3-year-olds to paint on old road maps with little cars. “Hi Zion,” I said as he came in from recess. “How are you today?” “Great!” he answered as he sat down to begin. After demonstrating how to paint with his cars, I asked him, “So Zion, what’s new?” With a puzzled look on his face, Zion looked at me, then said eagerly, “Everything is new!!!”

Zion’s words hit me like a ton of bricks. Did he mean everything was new because he was 3 years old and, well, everything was new? Or had he in his young years already found a secret to seeing each day as a new opportunity, without dredging up the baggage from yesterday?

I found myself grinning as I painted with Zion – if only I could find myself thinking, “Everything is new!” on a daily basis. When the alarm clock rings too early in the morning. When a parent is late with a tuition payment – again. When I need to strategically find a way to separate kids from sitting together at our morning meeting.

Zion’s words continue to come back to me daily, and I am now intentionally asking God to guide me in finding the new in my everyday.

Questions for the Week:
How is God creating a new and right spirit within you? What is “new” for you this day? In your teaching or work with children, what delights you on a daily basis? How can you make a commitment to look for the joy in the newness of each day?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Ask God to help you become more aware of the newness of everyday with a childlike spirit of joy and a thankful heart.

This devotion was contributed by Debbie Trafton O’Neal, an author of books and curriculum for children, families, and teachers. Debbie has been an educator for 40 years, and is currently teaching preschoolers at Grace Lutheran School in Des Moines, WA.
March 1, 2020
First Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Psalm 32

I usually conclude letters and email messages with the word “Blessings!” Unfortunately, as is the case all too often when I pray the Lord’s Prayer or recite the Apostle’s Creed, I’m in a mental state of auto-pilot when I do. So, a blessing of being asked to write this devotional thought is that it reminds me that when I end a note in this way, I hope the person 1) recognizes the blessings that God abundantly provides, 2) celebrates the gift of these blessings, and 3) is reminded to be a blessing to others.

Reminders about God’s blessing are, of course, a constant theme in the story of God’s love for us. A quick check of Bible Gateway indicates that there are 217 occasions in the Bible when God either blesses people or describes the qualities of people who are blessed. As the story of God’s love continues to unfold, this number is just a tiny fraction of the blessings the people of God have received through the centuries and still receive today.

We are blessed to bless! Enjoy God’s shower of blessings today and pass the blessings along!

Questions for the Week:
Who, or what, has been a sign of God’s blessings for you today? To whom will you be a blessing?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Gracious God, thank you for the abundant blessing of your love for me. Help me remind others of your love by being a blessing to others.

This devotion was contributed by Rick Herman, President Emeritus of the WeRaise Foundation and former Lutheran school teacher and principal.
March 8, 2020
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: JOHN 3: 1-17

No one knows for sure whether Nicodemus came to meet Jesus on his own or if he was acting on behalf of the rest of the Pharisees. The conversation could have been contentious, but because Jesus had a knack for seeing through the surface of a person and examining the condition of their heart, I believe that Jesus saw Nicodemus as a man that wanted to know him and his Way better. And though it isn't obvious in this passage alone whether or not Jesus reached Nicodemus, he surfaced again after Jesus' crucifixion to give Jesus' body a proper burial. This action would have come at great cost in his role as a Pharisee and leader of the Jews. But obviously, he was changed by his interaction with Jesus.

This is how it is for many of us in the teaching vocation. We encounter children who want to learn. We do the best we can and we often do not know the impact we have had in that moment. I hope that each of you has had the opportunity to be visited by a former student, and have been told how you were a blessing to them, and because of your love and patience, you made a difference.

Yes, we are blessed to be in the teaching vocation. Our job does indeed have its blessings and frustrations. But it is especially sweet when one we have cared for and taught comes back and tells us what we meant to them. That's when we realize that we are blessed to be a blessing.

**Question for the Week:**
Do you carry out your vocation of teaching and caring as if you are aware that you are shaping a person's life?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Lord, your call on my life is to be a blessing to others. Let that call be ever-present in my daily interactions with my students and parents.

Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Duane Jesse, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church and executive director of Zion Christian Early Learning Center in Youngstown, OH.*
March 15, 2020  
Third Sunday in lent  
Thought for the Week: John 4: 5-42

Think of all of the talking you do on any given day—in person, in the classroom to students, parents, and colleagues, the talking you do at home in person, online, or over the phone. We fill our days with communication, which is useful…but what if instead of just talking, we actually focused on being a blessing to others through true conversations?

In our gospel reading from John, Jesus models for us how to have these kinds of conversations. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus shows us how faithful and holy conversations happen and how conversations can be a way that we are a blessing to others.

Jesus is real with her. From the very start of his interaction with her, he makes it clear that vulnerability is key to real conversation. He begins by asking for her help. It’s about noon, it’s hot, he’s thirsty, and he asks her for water. Then, as they continue to interact, he shows that he’s listening to her, that he sees her as a human being who deserves attention, respect, and care from him. He blesses her through this conversation and through his love for her.

Think of this as a guide for the kind of conversations you should be striving to have every day. Slow down and pay attention. Pay attention to what you’re saying. Are you speaking with kindness and empathy? Make sure to listen carefully and to understand what you’re hearing and where it’s coming from. Maybe a student is going through something difficult or maybe they have something they’re excited to share with you.

Jesus blessed the Samaritan woman by showing her that he was wiling to be present with her and to take the time to make a connection with her. Remember that in your conversations as you strive to be a blessing to others.

Questions for the Week:  
How are you listening to your students? How are you showing family members that you care about what they’re saying? How are you showing empathy for your colleagues?
Prayer for the Week:
Gracious God, Thank you for knowing us, loving us, and blessing us. Help us to find ways to have deep conversations today. Help us to be mindful of everyone that we talk to and to find ways to bless each other through those conversations. May our words be more than simply words—may they be a way of connecting with each other and caring for one another. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Megan Hunt Fryling, Senior Pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church & School in Granada Hills, CA.
March 22, 2020
Fourth Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Psalm 23

Did you memorize Psalm 23 in childhood, perhaps as a requirement for Rite of Confirmation, perhaps out of devotion? Did you know that the grammatic structure of Psalm 23 is itself a faith-expressive element. The psalm divides into two distinct parts, the first identified by its use of the third-person pronoun (“he/she/it”) to refer to the shepherd, the second identified by its use of the second-person pronoun (“you”) to refer to the shepherd.

Though there may be other ways to think of the difference between third—and second—person pronouns, one way to do so is to think of the third-person pronoun referring to someone who is distant, removed, far-off, less-than-available. One is a “she” or “he” if they are at a distance. One is referred to with the pronoun “you” if they are close-at-hand, within your presence, face-to-face. The shepherd/Lord of Psalm 23 is referred to in the first part of the psalm in the third-person: “he” makes me lie down, “he” leads me, “he” refreshes my soul, “he” guides me. The Lord is removed, distant.

But that changes in the second part of the psalm, where the Lord is referred to in the second-person: “you” are with me, “you” prepare a table, “you” anoint my head, “your” goodness and love will follow me. Remember I told you that grammar is important.

Think now about the “hinge” that connects the first and second parts of the psalm: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley.” It is the psalmist’s experience of “the darkest valley” that changes the psalmist’s relationship to the shepherd, from distant to close-at-hand, from removed to imminent, from far-off to face-to-face, from less-than-available to intimate, from third-person to second-person, from “he/she” to “you.” From “it” to “You.” The shepherd, the Lord, becomes “You” through the experience of dark valleys.

This movement from the Lord as distant to close-at-hand is at the heart of Christianity, at the very core of our spirituality, at the center of our faith-relationship with the Lord who is our Christ, our Messiah, our Savior. The movement is from “knowing about” Christ to “knowing Christ.”
Questions for the Week:
Have you and your students been through “dark valleys?” Have you come to be in relationship with the Lord, the shepherd, who is “You”?

Prayer for the Week:
Open our hearts, O Lord, to know you as the shepherd who accompanies us through life’s dark valleys, and who journeys with us on the other side of those dark valleys ever deeper into the Almighty’s salvation and righteousness. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Donna Braband, former ELCA Director for Schools and lifelong Lutheran educator, now retired.
Thought for the Week: John 10: 2-3

“But the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen for his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out....”

The main characteristic of the good shepherd is that Jesus loves us so much that he is willing to die for us; he is willing to die for the sheep. He doesn’t want us to just have an ordinary life, he wants us to live a plentiful life. Jesus wants us to come out on top in any situation that we face. In our country, the country where Jesus was born, we struggle a lot since we have many day to day difficult issues to handle, be they political, economic, or social ones. When the sheep get into trouble, when the enemy comes, when the wolf (the devil) strikes, they flee, leaving the sheep to fend for themselves and Jesus will call them back.

Jesus called us in the Christian schools to help others in getting out of their problems by caring for, and sharing with, the students at school with their problems. So students usually are waiting for us in the schools to be the second parents to them and if they are in trouble and we appear, they notice that we care for them and we can see in their eyes the happiness reflected from their love to us. They are delighted to have someone to support—not only to teach or provide academic skills, but also to empower them, they expect us to give them good things in every situation that they face.

Question:
What Jesus is calling you to do in this life?

Prayer:
Now may the God of peace, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant make me perfect in every good work to do his will, working in me that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ my Lord.

This devotion contributed by Georgette Hazboun Rabadi, Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour’ Principal. I feel that God had called me to be a second mother to the students in ELS school, to care about them, share their needs and problems and for the future to prepare them.
March 29, 2020
Fifth Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: John 12: 45

“. . . whoever sees me sees him who sent me.”

These words were spoken by Jesus as he cried out in frustration that so many, even his closet followers just didn’t “get him.” I know this feeling. Parents, kids, and even peers often can’t see beyond my job description. Even those who watch me closely may not fully understand my foundation and my motivation.

The most simple and most powerful goal as one fuels the spiritual growth of God’s youngest children is that . . . whoever sees me sees the one who sent me. My great desire is that my students may see Jesus in me. As each day begins, students should feel the small spark of transformation that encourages growth. When new concepts are introduced and their eyes are opened to the wonders of the world, they should see the Creator. When we act as the reconciler for the conflicts of classmates, students should know that Jesus is the one who reconciles us to God.

The NRSV translation of the Bible uses the word teacher 71 times in the New Testament. The greatest teachers, the ones with the most impact in the lives of their students, are the ones who know that our role model is the greatest teacher who ever lived. Our days are stacked with details and deadlines. Our great challenge is to keep our focus on the one who sends us into the classroom and in front of God’s children.

This devotion is contributed by Don Gillingham, Executive Director of Rockford Lutheran Schools, Rockford, IL, and a frequent ELEA conference presenter and volunteer.
April 5, 2020
Sunday of the Passion
Thought for the Week:
Psalm 31: 9-16 from The Message Bible

“Be kind to me God, I’m in deep, deep trouble again.
I’ve cried my eyes out; I feel hollow inside.”

Sometimes we do not feel good; and we cry. Crying helps our bodies, hearts, and minds experience our hurt. And even though we usually do not want to hurt, it is a natural part of life’s ups and downs. Not everything we experience makes us happy.

Noticing when we do not feel good, and letting ourselves experience what we are feeling actually helps it to go away faster. Those times when we physically feel hollow inside are times when we can pause, recognize what we are experiencing, take a deep breath and talk to God.

The Holy Spirit promises to be with us, even understanding our groans as prayers. So next time you encounter something sad; perhaps like today when we read the Bible story about Jesus’ death, remember that your sad feelings are okay. We don’t want to pretend we are not sad. We simply want to notice our feelings, and trust that the Holy Spirit notices us too. Thankfully, just like people from a long time ago who were sad when Jesus died and even longer back, when the Psalm writer was sad, we can trust that God chooses to show kindness to us.

Question for the Week:
When you feel sad do you think you could say a few quick words to God, asking God to show kindness to you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Spirit of God, Spirit of Wisdom, when I don’t feel good and I cry, be kind to me. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper, Program Director for Ministry with Children for the ELCA and mother of two.
April 10, 2020
Good Friday

Holy Week is for Christians the darkest week of the year, culminating in the last words and death of Jesus.

It happened more than 30 years ago in Holy Week and each Good Friday I recall it. A woman friend who was a preschool teacher and who I thought was always upbeat and happy confided to me, “Mel, I just read all of Psalm 22 beginning with the same words Jesus spoke on the cross: ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ I could have written that psalm. Sometimes I get so down it feels like God has forsaken me.”

That’s what Jesus felt and cried out. So Jesus understands when our bad days have stretched into weeks. Nothing works. The critics are loud. The finances are tight. The professional and personal issues are overwhelming. The soul cries out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus said it. We say it.

But for Jesus and for us, those are not the last words. Jesus also said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” We echo those words and Good Friday becomes a good Friday even for overwhelmed workers in Lutheran early childhood centers and schools.

Questions for the Week:
Have you ever felt forsaken by God? At what age can children first experience that feeling? Comment on the relief one experiences when saying, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Crucified Lord, when I feel down, alone or forsaken, assure me that as I commit my spirit into your hands, it’s all going to be bearable and come to a good end. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Melvin M. Kieschnick, who served Lutheran Schools nationally and internationally for 60 years.
Easter Sunday and the 50-day Easter Season—what wonderful times to get to nurture and teach young people! Jesus raised from the dead shows us that despite the world’s fear and violence, love prevails in the end. Indeed, God was with Jesus then (v.38c) and is with us all today and always. You as teachers, staff, and administrators have a unique calling from God in your baptisms to instill this hope in young people who might be frightened or disheartened by what they see and hear around them. I daresay that you “were chosen by God as witnesses” (v. 41a) to the risen Jesus Christ, and that through your words and deeds, you too, can preach and testify to Jesus’ hope, forgiveness, and healing to those in your care. Not only that, your students will take your faithful examples and teachings into the world as they in turn preach and testify to the new life in Jesus Christ that offers hope even in the face of death. God has chosen you as “blessed to bless” others through this holy, year-round Easter calling!

Questions for the Week:
Are there natural openings in conversations to describe to young people and others in ordinary language how your hope in Jesus Christ helps you in difficult and frightening times? How might you also watch for, be open to, and celebrate the encouragement that you experience in the faith of the young people around you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for your special calling to witness to the hope of the Risen Jesus Christ with the young people in your charge. Remember that God is with you just like God was with Jesus. Perhaps even give a shout out: “Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!”

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Karl Biermann, assistant to the bishop for the Northeastern Ohio Synod. Rev. Biermann, who previously served as a parish pastor for 10 years—including with a vibrant daycare ministry—enjoys learning alongside young people during congregational visits and special events!
April 19, 2020
Second Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: John 20: 19-31

Whenever I come across this passage, I always have a sense of curiosity. What else did Jesus do for his followers and others? What don’t we know? If other acts were recorded, how might that change our perceptions of Jesus and faith?

But really, my curiosity misses the mark. The point is that we don’t need to know every minute detail because we have faith. Curiosity is a valuable trait, especially among the children and youth we serve. It leads to new discoveries, better understanding, and certainly should be encouraged. Yet simply because we don’t know everything, that doesn’t mean we can’t believe. Just like gravity existed before curious scientists figured out what it was, we can know the love and true life of God before we understand every detail that may be revealed to us when we finally meet God face to face.

Doubts and questions are normal. We’re all Thomas more often than we may like to admit. Yet the not knowing can actually lead to greater belief. Instead of resulting in doubt, curiosity can lead to a sense of wonder! If we know that all things are possible through God, and that Jesus did many more things than are recorded, then we know that no matter what happens we always belong to God because God can do anything we can imagine, and even that which we can’t fathom.

Questions for the Week:
How can you maintain a healthy dose of curiosity while growing in faith? How can you encourage those you serve to have a curiosity that leads to wonder and love?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, please help us to believe in your grace and love no matter what we experience, or don’t experience. Guide us to a strong trust built upon faith in you. May we walk by faith even if not by sight.
Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jon Nelson, Beloit, WI, who is Associate Director for ALDE: inspiring, educating, and mentoring the Christian fundraising community to spark generosity for mission. He is also Principal of Nelson Business Communications, LLC.
April 26, 2020
Third Sunday of Easter

“. . . and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

An ending, or a beginning? Lost, or found? The walk to Emmaus was a long one, especially for two disappointed disciples of Jesus. They had lost their hope, the hope that Jesus was “the one.” The one who would redeem Israel. The one who would defend them against their enemies, restore balance, bring peace, and rule forever. These hopeless disciples had given up, and they were returning to the lives they had left.

This is an exciting and exhausting time of year for educators. All of a sudden, we are barreling to the end of the school year – ready or not! You may be feeling a little hopeless, underappreciated, and worn out. The year may not have turned out the way you planned. That student may still have the same troubling behaviors that you were sure you could change. That family is still unhappy, no matter how hard you’ve tried to accommodate their needs. Another new member on church council doesn’t understand why the church needs to be open during the week. Is it time to give up and go home?

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we often don’t realize that Christ is with us. He is with us on every road we travel. After Cleopas and his friend welcomed the stranger to a meal, their eyes were opened, and they recognized that this was Jesus. Jesus helped them understand that this wasn’t the end – it was a beginning! Christ gives us the courage to follow and see where God might be leading, and how we are called to be a part of it.

You are an educator – you are “Blessed to Bless.” The school year may be wearing you out, but your passion for children and your call to share Christ is keeping you in. The disciples walking to Emmaus were shown how God was at work in the hopelessness of their daily lives — and no matter what the circumstances, they had nothing to fear and everything to embrace. Just as God made their hearts burn within them back then, God continues to do the same for us here and now.
Questions for the Week:
How are you experiencing a sense of hopelessness as an educator? When the disciples were at their lowest, Jesus found them and picked them up. When they were the furthest from God, God in Christ came to them. When they were on the road away from Jesus, Jesus found them on the road. How can you find your passion again?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
We thank you Lord for setting us free to experience life with nothing to fear. Thank you for new beginnings, when we think we are at an end. Thank you for always finding us, and reminding us that we make a difference every single day. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Linda Burrier, director of Memorial Lutheran Chapel School in St. Augustine, Florida. Linda is a former Secretary of the ELCA Schools and Learning Centers National Board, and a former ELCA Early Childhood Director of the Year.
One of my favorite images of Jesus is that of the Good Shepherd. This is a great visual, helping us to see just how much God loves and cares for us. We are like sheep, lost without someone to show us the way. From what I know of sheep, they are dumb creatures. They tend to wander without direction, wanting to go their own way, though they do know and follow the voice of their shepherd.

Psalm 23 is a favorite. It conveys many ways in which the Shepherd cares for his sheep. The shepherd guides us so we won’t get lost, provides for us in many ways, and comforts us when we struggle with life. A good teacher does the same for his or her class. Our job is to instruct our students in the ways of the Lord. We don’t just pass off knowledge, but we also teach them to problem solve so they can make wise, Godly decisions, now and in the future. God provides us our daily bread. How often do we make sure each child has sufficient supplies in their desk? Daily we share Jesus and His great love. Through our words we give our children hope as they struggle in dysfunctional families, with classmates that bully, or with violence in the world about us?

**Question for the Week:**
As a teacher, are you teaching your students to live as children following the Good Shepherd? Remember, we don’t know what kind of world these children will be living in 25 years from now.

**Prayer for the Week:**
Father, help me to care for my little flock and share the work of your Son. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Carol Felderman, Oregon, OH, who served Lutheran schools for 35 years.*
Isn’t May a marvelous time of year? This is especially true at our Lutheran schools! Nearly a full school year of achievement has been navigated. The finish line is in sight and summertime R & R beckons. But May is also one of the busiest and most stressful times of the year around a school. These weeks are stacked with so many events: concerts, worship services, plays, tests, tournaments, galas, meetings, dances, parties, ceremonies, retirements, hiring, graduations, and a myriad of preps for next fall. Whew—this whirlwind of activity can be overwhelming in many ways.

So in this crazy and joyous season, I recommend that you give yourself a gift. Just take a few quiet minutes in prayerful meditation to remember exactly WHY it is that we do what we do. Read 1 Peter, Chapter 2 and celebrate that those of us who teach in and lead Lutheran schools are indeed “chosen” to proclaim God’s mighty acts to our children, families, colleagues and communities. What a privilege we have to be part of a “royal priesthood” and “God’s own people”—even when you’re feeling squeezed and stressed.

May you continue to be “Blessed to Bless!” You are doing holy work. And hey, enjoy the ride!

Questions for the Week:
What things happen around our school that make people feel chosen to be “God’s own people?” What things bring people down? What can we do about them?

Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for calling you, your colleagues, and school to share God’s “marvelous light.” Ask God for wisdom and energy to help you grow in your personal ministry impact—and to help others to do so, too.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. David Hahn, Executive Director of the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools. Dave has served as a called Lutheran teaching minister for over four decades, including 28 years as Head of School at Long Island Lutheran Middle & High School in Brookville, NY.
May 17, 2020
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Psalm 66

“Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard.”
(Psalm 66:1)

This week we celebrated my son’s birthday and every moment we were awake there was no doubt whose birthday it was – his. How did we know? He made it known loud and clear! For the other 51 weeks, does my son have to make his presence known? Of course not, I’m his mother. Today the world is filled with racket; unlimited information and endless opportunities to forfeit silence so if your pace slowed down who would you hear? Would it be the voice of God and his presence in your life or would it be woes of frustration, others’ opinions, or negative self-talk? When you look throughout the windows of this world do you see God’s creation and the sound of his praise? Every day, every week, all the time our Creator dwells in everything we see, hear, and touch. God is love and continually in our presence. As you speak truth into your students’ lives, listen to them, let them be heard and celebrate together our God. Listen for the sound of God’s praise.

Questions for the Week:
Are you having a hard time feeling or seeing God’s presence in your life? If you slowed down and looked at everything through the eyes of God would that change your perspective? Do you hear the sound of God’s praise? If not, why?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
God, in this busy world let me slow down enough to hear your quiet whispers of praise. Let me be thankful that I serve a God who blesses God’s children. Give me grace to return those blessings to my students who need to be heard. May I be a teacher who blesses because I am blessed!

This devotion was contributed by Page Walwik, a wife and mother of two boys who went to preschool at Memorial Lutheran Chapel School in St. Augustine, FL.
"... the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

You made it to the end of the year, you can take a deep breath and know you made a difference. Can you think back to when school began and remember the children who you knew were going to require some “soul searching” to get to know them better? You needed to be able to understand how they could best learn. What made them “tick”. It took some work, but you persisted and were able to watch them grow and mature in their understanding. Wouldn’t you love to instill in each student that same yearning to get to know Jesus better like you had to know them better?

As you end this school year you can look at each face in your class and know our Lord knows everything about each of those children. Every strength, weakness, joy and challenge they will have. Have you given them the yearning to know more about their Savior? We never know what might spark their interest to wonder and get to know more. Maybe it was the songs you taught them, maybe the pictures they made, maybe it was the chapel visits, or maybe it was just YOU.

How blessed each one of you are to have the opportunity to plant the seeds of understanding, which will lead them to life everlasting. Yes, you are “blessed to be blessed” God chose you to be that person.

**Question for the Week:**
Each of these children will be faced with many challenges through their school years. What is the one thing you were passionate in teaching your children about Jesus that will help them deal with their journey through life?

**Prayer for the Week:**
Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for the blessing to teach your children. I pray that you will send your Holy Spirit to follow them as they grow and mature and give them the yearning to know and understand You better and know how important Your Word is.

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This devotion was contributed by Candy Rickard, former ELEA staff and lifelong Lutheran educator.
Blessed to Bless

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

A school, much like any other organization or community, functions because of the contributions of many individuals. The efforts of teachers and students alike are paid off by academic achievement. How wonderful it is to be a part of such a community. To be one of many pieces in a well-oiled machine that chugs along towards growth in knowledge of the world. Students learn from teachers and teachers from students. Each with their own unique and useful gifts.

My dad always used to say that he was confident my siblings and I would eventually contribute to society. While I knew what he meant, I now realize that I was contributing just as well as a student. The reality is that God calls each and every one of us, whoever we are, wherever we are, and to do whatever we will do. The beauty of the call is in our acceptance. It is in the way we use our gifts to serve God and each other. What a blessing it is to serve each other as members of a school!

Questions for the Week:
What might someone who is close to you say is a unique gift of yours? How could you use that gift in a school setting? In your general community?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord God, please continue to call us as we are—to be teachers and learners in your kingdom.

This devotion was contributed by Eli Yackel-Juleen, a volunteer English teacher at an Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) school called Hope in Palestine. Before coming here, Eli was a high school English teacher for a short time and is a long-time member of the ELCA.
June 7, 2020
Trinity Sunday
Thought for the Week: Matthew 28: 16-20

“Make disciples of all nations...baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything that I have taught you.
And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This is my favorite Bible verse and always reassures me that God is with me. Although we may not always feel it or recognize it, God is present with all of us and with the children in our charge. God is present and watching, not as a demanding judge, but as a loving and encouraging parent. God’s presence gives us a special kind of inner peace, a special kind of assurance that the world cannot give us. We are all called to be ministers to each other to share God’s peace and love. In addition, we are needed to be models for our children, acting in God’s love, and showing examples of acceptable behavior and the love of learning.

Do we live each day knowing that we are connected to God’s great power and encouragement? Do we live each day acknowledging that God has embraced us as God’s own children and called us to serve God by serving others? Do we share God’s steadfast love with the children we work with?

Jesus gives a powerful command and makes a powerful statement to us here. We are not expected to fulfill this all alone, but with God’s help. This gives me great comfort, even in the most challenging of times.

Question for the Week:
How have you experienced God’s presence in your daily life?

Personal Prayer:
Thank you God, for your presence and inspiration in my life, giving me many gifts and the courage to share your love and knowledge with my students and fellow workers. Thank you for your promise to be with me always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Deacon Joy Gerhart, Reading, PA, who has served the Lutheran church for 38 years in congregations with preschools and child care centers.
June 14, 2020
Second Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 100

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.” (Psalm 100:4-5)

This Psalm is one of praise. The school year is near an end or may have already ended. This is a good time to reflect on the past year and take pause to praise God and give thanks. Whether there were hard times or easy times, we are reminded that “the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever” (v. 5). We are blessed with a love that has been faithful to all generations.

It is through our relationship with God that we can bless others with our actions and words. Every day we have the opportunity to do this through our work with children, youth, and adults. In Psalm 100:1, we are reminded to “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.” It is important to find joy in our work and share that joy with others. Finding gladness in our relationships with others forms long-lasting memories. It is a blessing to be blessed with the opportunity to make a positive difference daily in the lives of children and youth.

Questions for the Week:
Think of ways you have been blessed during the past school year. In what ways have you blessed others? In what ways have others blessed you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Praise God for an unending, all-generous love. Name the blessings you have encountered over the past school year and give thanks to God. Pray that you both give and find joy through work with all ages in response to God’s gift of steadfast love.

This devotion was written by Debbie Streicher, Past President of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA and Co-Director of Milestones Ministry.
No one likes to think about children ever being hurt, but educators, youth workers, and pastors know the reality that some children face difficult life circumstances like abuse by family members, neglect, hunger, or food insecurity. Abuse can happen in families across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Scripture does not neglect to bear witness to pain within families, even Abraham’s family. When his young son Ishmael and Ishmael’s mother Hagar were cast out of Abraham’s household and into the wilderness, God did not abandon the child nor his mother. Indeed, God heard their cries and intervened to provide for them and preserve their lives.

God still hears the cries of those who are hurt, and sometimes God puts ordinary people—like teachers and pastors—in the position to provide help and to preserve life. Educators can play a crucial role in their classrooms by noticing their students’ behaviors and being ready—emotionally, spiritually, and mentally—when a student chooses to tell them about painful events at home. It’s up to us to remember that vulnerable people like children are not to blame for the things they suffer. It’s not for us to pass judgment but to preserve life. Jesus cheers us on in this work: “Do not be afraid!”

Martin Luther wrote a “Sermon On Keeping Children in School” where he says this: “God will have what is rightfully God’s—and [children] are more God’s than yours!” What precious gifts are children, entrusted by God to our care!

Questions for the Week:
Are there children in my classroom or in my school who are in need of help? Am I aware of what community resources exist to help families in crisis? If I suspect abuse, do I have the phone number for my local child protective service agency? Could my school contribute to a local family crisis center, whether donating items or services?
Personal Prayer for the Week:
Loving God, give me ears to listen for the cries of your children in need. Grant me the grace to fear you more than I fear whatever consequences may exist for protecting people who are vulnerable. You are always with me. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Cheryl Walenta Gorvie, pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Dallas, TX, which includes the ministry of Bethany Lutheran Child Development Center.
June 28, 2020
Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 89: 1-4

“I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.”

Preschool teachers and leaders have the privilege to be the ones at a beautiful crossroads of connecting and bringing blessing to the generations. As you teach and lead you get to see the smallest interacting with one another, their parents, their grandparents, and others. Your life of teaching is a gift and opportunity to sing of God’s love, declare God’s love, and open up God’s love across the span of ages. And in this opening you are creating space for the newest generation to walk in God’s love and know that they are held steadfast by a faith God who loves them—and you!

Reflect for a few moments. What generation are you a part of? How is it unique from others? Who are the people in generations older than yours that have made an impact on your life? How did they show you God’s love and faithfulness? If you are with others, tell about a person who has made an impact on your life. If you are alone, journal.

Questions for the Week:
How have you experienced God’s faithfulness and steadfast love? How have you shown this loving through blessing others? Repeat the mantra, “God, your steadfast love endures forever,” each morning when you arise.

Personal Prayer for the Week:
God, your steadfast love endures forever. Guide me in remembering your love as I teach and comfort, as I interact with children, parents, and grandparents, and as I bring your blessing each day with my words and actions. Thank you for your love! Amen

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Leta Arndt Behrens, who serves Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church and Preschool in Fort Collins, CO.
July 5, 2020
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Romans 7:15-25a

Many educators are familiar with the Stanford marshmallow experiment of the 1960s. Psychologists presented kids around age 4 or 5 with a marshmallow and struck a deal: if the child left the marshmallow on the table while the researcher left the room, the child would get another marshmallow when the researcher returned. If the child ate the first marshmallow before the researcher returned, no second marshmallow. A long-term study followed. Over the next four decades, the few children who could delay gratification (avoid eating the first marshmallow) were more successful in all areas of life.

I’m pretty sure I would have been a first-marshmallow-eater at age 4 or 5. The truth is, when posed with the choice to eat the ice cream now or be thinner later, I still choose ice cream more often than I’d like to admit. The majority of subjects were first-marshmallow-eaters. You, dear reader, might also have been a first-marshmallow-eater.

We are in good company. I have taught and loved many first-marshmallow-eaters. You likely see similar scenarios play out in your classroom every day. The apostle Paul, in Romans 7:15-25, describes his struggle to tame impulses, particularly sinful ones. “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it... Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

What a blessing then, to be educators who share not only the law, but the Gospel. As our children learn and struggle and strive to develop self-regulation (a good thing to be sure), we can also remind them of the constant renewal gifted to us in Christ Jesus to keep us from hopelessness, death, and despair. We fail, and Christ makes us new, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we try again.

Is that not sweeter than any treat? Savor it right now. Don’t wait a moment.

Questions for the Week:
Where is Christ calling you to be willing to try and fail and try again? Where is Christ calling you to show compassion to those doing the same?
Prayer for the Week:
Thank you, Lord, for your boundless mercy given to me in Christ. Grant that your mercy may encourage me when I have failed, and grant that I may show your mercy to those around me.

This devotion was contributed by Helen Casselberry, principal of Messiah Lutheran School (PK-8) in Fairview Park, OH.
The Parable of the Sower contains so much depth and richness. As educators, we sow seeds every day—in our conversations with families, in our greetings of children, and in our lessons themselves. We concentrate thoughtfully on our effort of sowing. We take classes and examine ourselves to find out how to improve our teaching. We consult other professionals to help us reach the hearts of the children entrusted to us. We shoulder more and more responsibility to help the message get through.

We work so hard that we forget that learning doesn’t only depend on us. God asks us to go deeper. Sometimes, the qualities of our sowing are not as important as the soil into which we sow. We must analyze not only our responsibility as sowers, but the state of our children’s soil. Reflect for a few moments. Are the children you serve getting to hear your message before it is snatched away by others? Is the message drowned out by trauma and adverse childhood experiences so that they can’t even hear it? Is the message nurtured and encouraged so that the children can develop roots and hold onto it as they get older?

God knows the specific population you serve and how best to reach them. Think carefully about what they need from you. God will equip you for this task!

Questions for the Week:
Are your children ready to hear God’s Word? What holds them back? How can you help prepare them to receive?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Ask God to show you how to reach the children in your care, and to prepare their hearts and soil to receive the message.

This devotion was contributed by Allison VanLoon, who teaches and directs preschoolers at Acorn Academy of Oak Haven Church in Ham Lake, MN.
July 19, 2020
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Romans 8: 12-25

Two great verses within this reading I love: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” and “But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

The first reminds us of who we are...children of God. That means we have God’s spirit within us to enable us to be the teachers we need to be. He has given us tools throughout our faith lives that now are a part of our being and show us the way and give us the words. And those very beautiful faces before us who look to us for assurance and guidance are the very essence of God’s presence within the world. They are innocence and vulnerability just waiting to be formed into loving and giving adults. We are the first step in this creation.

The second verse reminds me how to answer children when they ask how we can believe some of the stories we read in the bible or why certain things happened as they did (especially to Jesus). I remind them (and myself) that this is the very core of faith. We believe what we read and hear in the bible even though we cannot see Jesus or understand why some things happened in the past and today. We just accept that God is God, and He is good and His mercy endures forever. It is for all of us and the answer for our questioning nature.

Questions for the Week:
Can I look around me this week and see the face of God in my co-workers and in the children before me? And even though it is hard to believe in something you cannot see with your own eyes, isn’t it wonderful to have and be able to share our faith with each other?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord, you lead me every step of my day. Even though my eyes cannot see you, my spirit finds you in every corner. Help me to see your face in everyone I encounter today. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Deacon Sharon Brennen who was a preschool director at Christian Pre-school in Dobbs Ferry, NY for 35 years. In 2008, she was named Early Childhood Director of the Year by ELEA. She has been a Deacon of Dobbs Ferry Lutheran for 16 years.
God loves us. A lot. Paul describes this in Romans:

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

At school we might add: “neither tardiness, nor absences, nor runny noses, nor ‘accidents,’ nor hitting, nor biting, nor late tuition, nor late pick up, nor inappropriate shoes for the playground, nor running away, nor interrupting, nor hiding at cleanup time, nor acting out during chapel will be able to separate our students from the love of God in Christ Jesus or Lord.” (And hopefully from the love of the teachers serving God in our school ministries).

God’s love is big, generous, unearned, and for every one of us. This is the basis of Christian education, especially preschool. It permeates each classroom and every lesson. It comes out during snack, outdoor play and all the in-betweens. It is hard. Loving as God loves, seeing the divine during the daily struggles and centering ourselves in that love can challenge the most experienced teachers. First, we must accept God’s love for us and consciously choose to pour out God’s love to those around us. If every little heart in our care can open and feel this message, they will have learned the most essential lesson.

Question for the Week:
What things challenge your love of (or liking of) your students? What helps you keep God’s love toward all a priority? How have you felt God’s love in your own life lately?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
God of love, thank you for my role in spreading your love to children and families in my community. Help me to feel your abundant love constantly pouring over me. Bless me to love each student as you do.

This devotion was contributed by Janean Moriarty, Poulsbo, Washington, who serves as director of Vinland Lutheran Preschool, a ministry of Vinland Lutheran Church. “Honoring God by nurturing children’s relationships.”
The Evangelical Lutheran Education Association wishes to thank all of those who took time from their busy schedules to provide devotions for the 2019—2020 Devotion Guide for early childhood education centers, elementary and junior and senior high schools. Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

Jean Bashi
Leta Arndt Behrens
Adam Berndt
Karl Biermann
Doug Boots
Rod Boriack
Donna Braband
Sharon Brennan
Linda Burrier
Helen Casselberry
Amy Cauble
Martha Clementson
Beth Coburn
Chris Comella
Casey Cross
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