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Evangelical Lutheran Education Association (ELEA),
an ELCA-related organization

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You may download a copy of this guide at www.eleanational.org



ELEA is proud of our heritage and is celebrating our 50th birthday. We began in 1961 as ALEA—the American Lutheran Education Association, becoming ELEA with the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988.

Services to member ELCA congregations who sponsor weekday schools and early childhood programs have expanded over ELEA’s 50 year history from teacher conferences and accreditation to include a host of other services, including employee benefits plans, standardized testing programs, school board and administrator training, discount programs on school supplies and programs, and much more.

In 2010, restructuring of the ELCA Churchwide organization and elimination of school program staff at the Chicago offices transferred responsibility for all services related to schools and early childhood programs to ELEA. Those responsibilities include the publication of this devotional guide, as well as administration of the Principal of the Year and Early Childhood Director of the Year program, the Ministry of the Congregation Recognition program, and other services.

Thank you to all of the dedicated teachers, administrators, and congregations who so faithfully serve children and their families through these all-important ministries, which provide an opportunity to share God’s love with so many. We also offer heartfelt thanks to ELEA members who have supported the organization through the years and urge all schools and centers to consider membership.

You may learn more about ELEA and its many membership benefits, as well as make a gift in honor of our 50th birthday, at www.eleanational.org or by calling 800-500-7644

August 7, 2011
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 85: 8-13

“Let me hear what God the Lord will speak. . .” I confess that I was in a rush when I first read these words. I initially understood them in a sense that one might associate with someone who is in a rush: “Be quiet! I can’t even hear myself think! Now God’s talking to me, too?”

However, my understanding of and appreciation for what God speaks into existence in this psalm grew as I slowed to read and reread the text. What wondrous gifts God offers us all—peace, salvation, love, and faithfulness! Indeed, as the psalmist also writes, *“The Lord will give what is good. . .”* Such hope-filled news cries out to be heard and shared! It rightfully demands our attention.

You have been “chosen to teach” young people. Your God-given gifts and role uniquely qualify you to educate and nurture coming generations in God’s love. No matter the subject, the way that you live out your peace, salvation, love, and faithfulness in the midst of life’s challenges will serve as the most powerful of object lessons. Permit yourself to slow down enough to appreciate all the good that God will speak into existence for your life and your students’ lives, so that you can model and share it.

You are more important to God for the sake of coming generations than you can ever realize. I daresay that is why you have been “chosen to teach”! May God the Lord bless you in your education ministry.

Questions for the Week:

What do you feel “chosen to teach”—in word and deed—about God’s peace, salvation, love, and faithfulness? What do you think others are learning from you? What for you about being “chosen to teach” makes teaching worthwhile?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Perhaps try a silent, centering prayer. Begin with the spoken or silent petition, “Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,” and then remain silent. Don’t give up! It could be amazing after a number of sessions what God is saying to you!

This devotion was contributed by Karl Biermann, pastor at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in Cuero, Texas. Biermann also serves as chair of the Southwestern Texas Synod Commission for Communications and as a freelance writer.

August 14, 2011
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 67

Psalm 67: 3 & 5: *“Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee!”*

In my fourth grade class, we begin our school day with devotions. After devotions, we have joys and concerns. At this age, we start distinguishing between things we pray for, thank God for, and things we don't. During prayers each day the children need to think of something for which they are thankful.

At this age, they don't realize all the blessings God has bestowed upon us. And so I read statistics from “Count Your Blessings”. Some of these include: 500 million people around the world are imprisoned or know what starvation is. Thirty-five thousand children under the age of 5 die every day from starvation. Three billion people cannot attend church without fear of being arrested, tortured, or put to death. If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish some place, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. Two billion people in the world cannot read. If you can hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

As the year progresses, the students become more cognizant of the many ways God blesses us all, and we praise God by giving thanks. I give thanks that I have the opportunity to teach in a place where, as a class, we begin our day with a prayer, share a prayer before our meal, and end the day with prayer.

At a graduation this past spring a few staff and myself went to a reception for a former student. The mom met us in the receiving line and expressed gratitude for coming. She then went on to say how wonderful St. Paul's was for her child, and what a strong foundation it gave her son. I am often humbled by the expressions of gratitude from parents. And I reflect again on the saying, “God doesn't call the

qualified; he qualifies the called.” I have been called to teach. I am blessed to be teaching in a school with so many wonderful people whom God has qualified. And so, as the psalmist in chapter 67 says, “Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee!”

Questions for the Week:

How do you respond to the many blessings God has bestowed upon you? How do you use those blessings to help others less fortunate?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, Thank you for all the things we take for granted: my family, friends, food, clothing, and shelter. Continue to show me Your ways and guide me. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jo Groth, 4th Grade Teacher at St. Paul’s Lutheran School, Waverly, Iowa

August 21, 2011
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Romans 12: 1-8

"...so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching, the exhorter in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."

Every day I look around our church and school and am amazed by the gifts that abound. God has put together a symphony of people to transform our small world one step at a time. He has called us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12: 1) and as we move toward this calling, He gathers our gifts and talents to create a work of art.

As I walk down our preschool hallway and hear the teachers interacting with the children it gives me great peace knowing that God has called each and every one of us to be here at this time. He has provided an array of wonderful gifts for us to use as we work together as members of the body of Christ.

God has brought us here to this place to use the gifts that he has provided. What joy to know that we share in His work together.

Question for the Week:

Are you using the gifts that God has given you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God, thank you for the many gifts you have given me. I ask that you show me how to use these gifts for your honor and glory.

This devotion was contributed by JoAnne Gustafson , Director of Normandale Preschool, Edina MN and an ELEA National Board member.

August 28, 2011
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Romans 12: 9-21

“Love: must be sincere; hate what is evil; cling to what is good . . . be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. . . bless those who persecute you . . . live in harmony . . . be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone . . . overcome evil with good.”

This powerful text spells out what genuine (sincere) love looks like to believers, unbelievers and our enemies. It is not a passive quality but an active righteous quality that hates evil. Genuine love doesn't say one thing and then do another.

You will soon be opening the doors of your school to welcome another group of students and their families, many having little or no knowledge of Jesus and His love. This year will be no different than other years, filled with anticipation, hard work, joy, and of course some challenges along the way. Throughout the year remain centered on Him and let this text guide you in your daily walk so you can be an example of how genuine love in action helps you deal with the joys and challenges of this ministry.

You have been CHOSEN TO TEACH!
Rejoice and be glad for all God is planning for you.

Questions for the Week:

Can you recall someone who taught you by example what genuine love in action was? At a staff meeting have everyone share the story of how they were Chosen to Teach.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you for choosing us to teach the children & for giving us the gifts and talents to use in service to you and others. Help us to stay focused on you and your genuine love as we share your love with the children and their families. Guide us and give us the wisdom to encourage the children and their parents to know and love you more each day. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Pat Garrett, retired Director of Trinity Lutheran Preschool in Enumclaw, WA, now serving on the ELEA National Board.

September 4, 2011
Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Matthew 18: 15-20

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Verse 20

Many years ago I attended a Church Council retreat. Our leader for the event made a statement that has profoundly influenced all that I have done in the church, “You may have been selected by ‘men’ to serve in your current position, but you were chosen by God for this task!” How wonderful! God has chosen each of us to lend our talents to work with God’s children. We have many small centers where there are only two or three staff members. We know that even in these small centers, God is guiding our efforts. At the same time, we have many large schools and centers which have staffs of thirty or even forty or more. These staffs have also been chosen to serve God. The size of the staff is irrelevant. What we do know, as stated in today’s Bible verse, is that God is with each of us as we teach.

The most important message that we teach is God’s love for each of us and, in return, our love for our neighbor. We lead by example. Because we communicate that God is with us, our students are able to convey that understanding to their friends and families. Our students are comfortable telling others of God’s love, in small or in large groups, because we are comfortable conveying that message.

Question for the Week:

How do we as teachers and staff communicate to our students that God is always with us?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Loving Father, thank you for choosing us to be your hands and voices as we work with your children. Help us to remember that you are always with us even when things are difficult. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Mary Ann Pollock. Mary Ann is a retired principal of an ELCA preschool and elementary school in Baltimore, Maryland. She is the immediate past president of the ELEA National Board of Directors.

September 11, 2011
Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Romans 14: 1-12

All of the texts this week have something to do with forgiveness. The Old Testament is the story of Joseph forgiving his brothers for selling him into slavery; the New Testament is the parable of the man who owed the talents and forgiven by his master, he fails to forgive. The lesson I chose from Romans talks about placing our trust in God to deal with others and their beliefs and actions.

I am a lifelong New Yorker who experienced firsthand the atrocity of September 11, 2011. Writing this devotion for this day ten years later brings lots of emotions to the surface. I still can't think of the day without a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. Many people I know suffered terrible losses and the thought of forgiving those who launched the attack still seems an impossible task to many.

And yet, God commands us to forgive as he has forgiven us.

There is a wonderful documentary called, ***The Art of Forgiveness*** which chronicles amazing acts of forgiveness by people who were terribly wronged. The film's basic message is that only by forgiving those who have done us harm, can we be healed. I'd recommend it highly to those of you who teach older children or adult forums.

We as teachers have such a wonderful opportunity to teach children the art of forgiveness. As you begin this school year make it a priority to help children mediate conflicts and to ritualize the act of forgiveness. The simple words "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you" can be powerful ways to change our world one person at a time.

Questions for the Week:

How do you as a staff handle conflict? Can you agree to confront issues and to forgive one another when conflicts happen? How will you model forgiveness for the children in your class? How will you foster the art of forgiveness with your children?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

This week we pray for all of the families who lost a loved one on 9/11. We pray that God will teach us to have forgiving hearts. We pray for forgiveness for those we have hurt in any way. We pray that the children of our world will learn to foster a world filled with forgiveness, understanding, tolerance and love.

This devotion was contributed by Marlene Lund, Executive Director of the Center for Urban Education Ministries, an initiative of Wheat Ridge Ministries.

September 18, 2011
Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Matthew 20: 1-16

How many times have you heard the children in your classrooms say *"IT'S NOT FAIR!"* *"He has more crayons than I got... she got more turns than me ... he got chocolate milk and I didn't!"* And have you ever heard your staff members express the same feeling? *IT'S NOT FAIR!* *"She gets more time off than I do ... I've worked here longer than him, I should get the closer parking space."*

The parable in Matthew tells the story of the workers in the vineyard....they all received the same pay no matter how many hours they worked that day.....8 hours, 3 hours, 1 hour. I'm sure that those that worked all day said *"IT'S NOT FAIR!"*

In this story, Jesus is showing us the great depth of God's compassion and forgiveness for us. Those that have just recently come to recognize Christ as their Savior are just as special in God's eyes as those of us who were baptized, confirmed and served God our whole lives.

What an example for us! Just as God blesses us with his compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation, so should we also do the same to the people we come in contact with daily. Every conflict between staff members or children, and every parent issue that comes up is an opportunity for us to bring the Gospel of Christ into those situations. Using Jesus' example, we give freely of His love and compassion, no matter whether it is *"FAIR"* or not. God loves us all, whether we deserve it or not. Let's do the same.

Your heart challenge for today: Take a minute to think about a conflict you have had to deal with recently ---between children, between teachers, or perhaps involving a parent. How could you have handled it differently, using the example of Jesus' compassion and forgiveness we see in Matthew 20? Take some time to plan now how you will deal with the conflict next time it comes up.

This devotion was contributed by Shirley Becker, Director of First Lutheran Early Education Centers in Torrance and Lomita, California. Shirley serves as National Board President of the ELEA.

September 25, 2011
Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Philippians 2: 1-13

It isn't always easy to teach the will and grace of God. (Deuteronomy 4:9) The admonition to humility and obedience in today's passage, Philippians 2:1-13, is one of the more challenging teachings, and yet the self-emptying that Paul encourages contains life for those who have obtained the grace to practice it. When we are baptized, we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ. The dying part of that two-fold promise is the hard part. Who among us willingly follows Christ into his humiliation and death? Who among us can easily set aside our own Ego and "regard others as more important" (vs.3)? And yet that is Paul's plea and encouragement in this passage. Paul trusts that an encounter with Christ will transform us and enlarge our consciousness to make room for the other.

How will you teach toward that kind of transformation today? Educational theorists will tell you it isn't possible to ask children/adolescents whose egos aren't fully formed to die a little bit so as to make room for another, but those of us who work in the church know better. We know that Christ made it possible for each of us to locate ourselves inside a larger story that transforms our orientation to the world, no matter our age.

Questions for the Week:

What disorienting dilemma will you present to your students today that will cause them to do some critical self-reflection on their prior assumptions? How will you facilitate their reflection on their new insights? What action of theirs gives you evidence that transformation is happening?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God, use me to wisely and cautiously disorient my students this week so that they can locate themselves in your story and glimpse the part you have for them to play in that story.

This devotion was contributed by Heidi Hagstrom, Chicago, Illinois, who was blessed to have many teachers who disoriented her. Heidi has served as director for the ELCA Youth Gathering for the past 15 years.

October 2 2011
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Matthew 21: 33-46

As a classroom teacher I would often remind my students that while the classroom was certainly their classroom, it was I who was in charge. It was important for maintaining a sense of direction and control. Maybe you feel the same about your classroom or office.

“Who is in charge?” seems to be the heart of the parable in Matthew’s Gospel. The landlord demonstrated that he considered himself in charge. The first part of this parable speaks of trust. God blesses us with opportunities and then places His trust in us to be good stewards.

As teachers and administrators in our Lutheran schools and centers, you are in charge of your school and/or center. Your Call is to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. This acceptance is to let Him be in charge of your life. You are the ones who bring hope and love into an otherwise dark and cold classroom as you share the Easter message.

When we lived in California, my wife and I often drove the 5 miles to the beach after dinner for me to walk and she to roller skate on the path along the beach. The expansive ocean afforded time for lengthy meditation and gratitude for the glory and grace of God.

We were joined on the path by the many bikers, roller skaters, runners, and other walkers. Our time at the ocean was planned so we could watch the beautiful sunset. At each sunset I marveled that all those bikers, roller skaters, runners, and other walkers would stop what they were doing to watch the sunset. It was like a magnet – something more powerful was drawing them to STOP!

You see, God is in charge. It is His universe. We are Called to be Stewards of what God has given us – to be servants, teaching those in our charge.

Question for the Week:

How is it that God is “in charge” in your classroom?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O Father, always help us remember that we are called to follow you. We have chosen to Teach. As such, show us the way you would have us to go. AMEN

This devotion was contributed by Robert Federwitz, former ELCA Director for Schools. Bob has served in Lutheran Schools for more than 40 years. He is retired, living in Dover, DE near his children and grandchildren.

October 9, 2011
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Philippians 4: 1-9

Let's not go there. This Biblical reading sounds like too many Lutheran schools and centers with which I had contact. There is staff discord. Sometimes (like in this text) it is between women who have worked together a long time but still can't quite always be on the same page. I also know from experience that we male teachers do not always model the staff peace which Paul points to as "the preferred option." But I won't dwell on this verse other than to join in prayer with Paul (and Jesus) that we be of one mind.

Instead of focusing on that which divides us, let us find in this text what unites us. These verses lay out a full curriculum for Lutheran education from preschool through grad school. It's all there: art, music, social behavior, writing and reading skills, Christ-centered beliefs and practices. And in the middle of it all is gentleness, devotion, prayer, competence and patience.

Paul really could have been a director/principal for a Lutheran center. He had the vision, he was painfully aware of what comes in between dream and reality, and in the midst of it all he kept his great joy. Let us go and do likewise.

Question of the Week:

Paul preserved for all ages the names of two women in the church who had their differences. When the history of your school/center is written and your name comes up, what would you like for the historians to say about you as a staff member?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Master Teacher, help us to live in mutual support and peace. Give us the vision, the skill and the patience to create a school community full of that which is pure, pleasing, excellent and worthy of praise. We pray this in your name, our Prince of Peace. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Melvin M. Kieschnick who served Lutheran schools nationally and internationally for 60 years. He continues to teach Christian education classes while living in retirement in Carlsbad, CA.

October 16, 2011
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10

“For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you,…”

When I became an ordained pastor the concept of being called by God was something mentioned frequently. “How is it you know you are called by God?” I was asked. When I interviewed I was told I had to know whether or not I was all being called. Unfortunately, the clergy is the only profession that uses this kind of language. I believe all professions need to understand themselves as receiving a holy calling, especially those who teach.

Teaching is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It’s not something everyone has been given. There are then those who teach with passion and joy. They know they are called and chosen by God to teach.

Reflect for a moment on how God called you to teach or work within the field of education. Who were the people who God used to get the message across to you? What instruments did God use to open your heart to the possibility of being in education? What teachers impressed you as one’s who were called by God?

Questions for the Week:

What children with whom you work test your patience the most as a teacher? What is something concrete you can do to help you to love them? Try each day lifting up a child who is in your school or class.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, help me to see the goodness in all my students. Help me to be faithful to all you have taught me in your Word and especially this day help me to see how much you love _____ (name of a student). In Christ’s name I pray. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Marcia M. Thompson, Flourtown, PA. She has worked with Zion Lutheran Preschool for twelve years. She has many years as a pastor working and teaching children.

October 23, 2011
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8

It's hard to imagine a more perfect selection for the theme "Chosen to Teach" than the reading from First Thessalonians. Paul has the grace and insight to acknowledge that God has entrusted him to declare the message of the gospel. His selection by God for this privileged and sacred task is not unlike how God chooses teachers to spread the "good news" to the children in their care. What a privilege, what a sacred trust! To be sure, the challenge may be daunting and well beyond our meager talents. But the strength, courage, and capacity to declare the gospel does not have to come from us, but from the God who entrusts us. Like Paul, we must let ourselves be used by God. This means stepping out of the way, inviting God to take charge, and letting the Spirit accomplish what we could never do ourselves.

It also means prayer—an opening of our heart to God, a deepening of friendship with God, and a willingness to be more like God. It means saying yes to God and allowing God to use us as a vessel. That connection with the loving God will help us to take with our students the same approach that Paul took with the Thessalonians: "[W]e were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children." And like Paul, we may come to care so deeply for those in our charge that we will be determined to share with them not only the gospel of God but also our own selves. In other words, we may come to regard them as God regards us.

Question for the Week:

What extraordinary action can you take this week to demonstrate to your children your deep care for them?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that God grants you the grace to be open to the Spirit's wisdom, courage, and guidance in letting go of your own narrow interests and opening yourself to full communion with the Spirit so that you might be a more effective instrument to spread the Word to the children in your charge.

This devotion was contributed by Joe McTighe, executive director of CAPE, the Council for American Private Education.

October 30, 2011
Reformation Sunday
Thought for the Week: John 8: 31-36

³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” ³³³⁴³⁶So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

Each day teachers have the exciting privilege and responsibility of molding the hearts and minds of their students. The John 8 passage is one of the most awe-inspiring for those who are chosen to teach. The promise that the Gospel frees us from our sin is reason for celebration. The fact that teachers play a role in that faith development is extra reason for celebration.

When I attended Immanuel Lutheran School “back in the day”, the Christian environment, including memory work, religion class, chapel, and teachers who lived lives of love and service, spoke “the truth” to me in various ways. May God be with you each and every day as you continue to speak the word.

Questions for the Week:

How might our faculty and staff “know the truth”? What kind of freedom comes from continuing in God’s word? Why is that important to our school community?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that God would keep us all passionate about our calling, energized each day, and full of love for our children and their families.

This devotion was contributed by Brian Becker, Vice President for Ministry Programs, Wheat Ridge Ministries, Itasca, Illinois. Brian says, “Lutheran schools are much more than education of the child. They’re about faith and character development, safety, strengthening families and communities. Quality Christian education is one of the most important elements contributing to a sound society.”

November 6, 2011
All Saints Sunday
Thought for the Week: 1 John 3: 1-3

My grandson, who is eleven, has started taking guitar lessons. Having learned my own rudimentary guitar skills at about the same age, I decided to make a gift to him of my first guitar. Within the case I enclosed a note about the guitar's history and the people, family and friends, who had "played" a part in that history, so that he would know the meaning and significance behind the gift. I don't know if he will stick with the guitar lessons, but the gift of the guitar and its significance – the importance of the relationships with family and friends -- will go with him wherever he goes. Maybe one day he'll even pass it on to some young guitar player in the future.

We are called children of God, and so, like a family passes on their history, we are called as teachers to pass on that incredible story of Jesus Christ to others. The saints accept that call – whether their witness is within the home, in church or school, in the community or in the world. Each year for All Saints Day at chapel a class dresses up as the saints we know – Saint Patrick, Saint Francis – Martin Luther, too – and also as ordinary saints: a doctor, a plumber, a pizza delivery person. You don't have to be a theologian or a teacher to tell someone about God. Even a little child can tell the story if a grown-up will listen. That's what it's like being in a family.

Questions for the Week:

Who has been a saint in your life? Who taught you about the Gospel? Who would you *expect* to teach you about the Gospel? To whom have you, or will you, be a saint?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray to live out your calling as a child of God, and to inspire others to do the same, for example: "Holy God, we give thanks that you have called us to be your children, and pray that you will guide and help us to tell your story to others through the generations, calling each other brothers and sisters in Christ, and living as family by your grace. Amen."

This devotion was contributed by Barbara Krumm, former Director at Saint John Lutheran School, Norfolk, Virginia, presently attending the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

November 13, 2011
Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

I would bet you a cup of coffee that all of us, at one time or another, have heard our alarm clock go off and have had the thought, “I just want to roll over and go back to sleep.” But, unlike some professions, being a teacher means you have to be in your classroom awake and ready to greet every student as they run or straggle in morning after morning, day after day.

Paul’s encouragement to the Thessalonians to “keep awake” has special meaning for teachers. It’s not so much about waiting for a special moment or an end to occur as it is an admonition to stay awake and live as “children of the light.” Every moment counts. Every day is important. Every child—yes, every—is worth waking up to greet. You were chosen and called to teach. When you wake up and crawl out of bed each day, put on your work clothing of faith, love, and hope. Be wide awake and surround your students with the encouragement that they are also children of light living in Christ.

We are people of the light. We are people of the day. Wrap yourself in faith, love, and hope knowing that you are called to live boldly right now as a teacher and child of God who is confident in the eternal life given to us through Jesus Christ.

Questions for the Week:

When did you wake up to the possibility that God was choosing and guiding you to be a teacher? What do you hope to awaken in each of your students?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Give thanks for the ways in which your students and their parents encourage and affirm your faith and your call to teaching. Ask for God's help to be awake and energetic in your teaching and in every realm of life.

This devotion was contributed by Rod G. Boriack, Des Plaines, Illinois. Rod has served as a camp director in Northern California and as associate director for the ELCA Youth and Outdoor Ministry programs. He currently works as a freelance writer and consultant.

November 20, 2011
Christ the King Sunday
Thought for the Week: Matthew 25: 31-46

"and the King will answer them, as surely as you did it unto these little ones, you did it also unto me." As adults, it is sometimes hard for us to admit when we don't know something. Our ignorance can put us at a disadvantage. We can feel vulnerable and unsure of ourselves. Especially for those of us chosen to teach. We are paid to know the answers, after all. Though the truth is that teaching is really an exercise in shared ignorance. Most of us, despite our carefully prepared lesson plan still fly by the seat of our pants in the classroom. The final lesson plan is only finalized in response to the situation in class that day.

Our students can feel like they are at a permanent disadvantage, forever expected to be moving beyond their natural state of ignorance. No one likes to know less than someone else. Ignorance makes you feel small. Insignificant. How much acting out in our classrooms is the result of that sense of worthlessness?

Jesus identifies with the small ones. The ones easily overlooked. So much so that even the ones who gave them help never gave them a second thought. As ones chosen to teach, we are feeding hungry minds with knowledge, we are extending care and comfort for those who may feel insignificant and overlooked. As those who have accepted the challenge to teach, we must never lose sight of what we do not know, nor that we may be ministering to our Lord and King in our classroom today.

Question for the Week:

How have you encountered Christ the King in your students this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

You have told us Lord, that when we minister to the ones easily overlooked, we serve you as well. Help me not to overlook your presence in these little ones who sit in my class every day. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Charles Oberkehr, pastor of Epiphany Lutheran Church and Weekday School in Alexandria, Virginia.

November 27, 2011
First Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: Mark 13: 24-37

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”

Just as our nights are growing longer during this time of year—Mark speaks to us about promises that the signs of the coming of the Son of Man will include the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars. Because we live in the generation that is between Christ’s resurrection and God’s full restoration of the creation, we cannot know when that final day may come.

As Lutheran educators who are chosen to teach, we are called to utilize every situation as a chance to demonstrate faith in the love of neighbor. “Keeping awake”, should not be about living in an ultra-heightened sense of preparedness, but about using this time to share the power of the risen Christ in our lives for the sake of the world.

Questions for the Week:

How do you “keep awake” to the spiritual needs of your students?
How has preparedness helped you during difficult times? In what ways can you share the power of the risen Christ with your students?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for being chosen to teach and share the power of Christ, and trust that our home is God’s home, and that God is returning once again to dwell with us.

This devotion was contributed by Linda Burrier, Director of Memorial Lutheran Chapel School in St. Augustine, Florida. Linda serves on the ELEA National Board of Directors.

December 4, 2011
Second Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: 2 Peter 3: 8-15a

It's Advent! We are preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. This second week the candle on the Advent wreath is the Bethlehem candle—the humble town where Jesus was born. As your children and staff prepare for the excitement of Christmas decorations and gifts, guide them to remember we too have a promise.

In this season of waiting, we are reminded that we too are waiting—waiting for the coming of the day of God. Waiting is hard for children and adults. The Lord is slow because he is being patient with us. On his return, we will all be judged. God is deliberately slow in bringing this destruction so all will have a chance to repent.

The Bible passage in Second Peter reminds us that as we wait, we should strive to be found at peace with God. We are waiting for the new heaven and the new earth! Advent needs to be a time we take a look at how we are living our life. Are we ready for the day of the Lord? The Bible says it will come like a thief, not on some day a human predicts. Do we only wait for Christ's birth at Christmas, or do we remember we are also waiting for the promised return of Jesus?

Our children need to be reminded that they too are waiting. Jesus promised us he will come back. When he returns, he will take us to heaven. What a celebration to look forward to!

Questions for the Week:

How are you preparing for the day of the Lord? Would you be ready if he came tomorrow? What can you do to make Advent more meaningful for your students and staff?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you for the gift of your Son. Thank you for your patience with us. Guide our actions and thoughts so that we will be ready to enter your new heaven and new earth when they come. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Kay Nickelsen, kindergarten teacher at Solomon Lutheran School, Woodville, Ohio, and a member of the ELEA National Board.

December 11, 2011
Third Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: John 1: 6-8

⁶ *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.”*

What a wonderful blessing, to be chosen by God for your life’s work, but really, isn’t that blessing yours too? Through John’s words, his work, his life he continually pointed to Christ, to God’s love for each person, to the LIGHT. We have been chosen to teach the children that God has put in our classrooms. It is through our words, our work, our life that we touch each of these children. They look to us for so much more than the knowledge that we impart to them. They look to us to make a difference and we too can make that eternal difference by testifying to the LIGHT of Christ.

Questions for the Week:

How will you reflect God’s light to the children in your care today? Will your care, your words, your life reflect the one true LIGHT that each of them need? Remember-they are watching – it’s your time to testify to the light.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear LORD, be with me today in all that I do so that I am a reflection of your love for each of the children in my care. LORD, I ask that you use me to touch someone today with Your love, let them see Jesus in all I do and I thank You that You have chosen me for this great calling.

This devotion was contributed by Barb Wigstadt, director of TLC Early Learning Center since 1989. TLC-ELC is a ministry of Transfiguration Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Minnesota.

December 18, 2011
Fourth Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: Luke 1: 26-38

After Mary had recovered from the angel Gabriel's visit, thoughts of how her life would now change must have gone through her mind. What she knew, what she understood and what she had become comfortable with, would now have to change. Have you considered how we all become comfortable with what we know and how we have done things in our schools and centers for years? Have you been asked to do something you fear because it would mean a change in the routine which is a comfort level for you?

Many of our schools and centers are facing financial crisis, they are suffering in many ways. Are your prayers to God for rescue from your problems or resurrection with new ideas? As faithful leaders of your school, it is important to adapt to the changes in your community, technology, curriculum or staff. Maybe it means you have to add different classes, change or extend your class time, or find a way to purchase the equipment your school needs to stay educationally sound. Don't let the comforts of the past dictate changes that need to occur in your schools future, positive changes that would keep your classes full and your instruction progressive. God has promised to never abandon you in your ministry. Go forward in faith as Mary did. Follow your calling to the ministry you have at your school and to God's children who you care for, nurture and teach. The promise that was there for Mary is there for you. *"The Lord is with you."* Luke 1: 28

Questions for the Week:

Are there things you know just have to change, even though you have done them the same way for years? Do you fear what that change may mean?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, we easily become overcome by our fears, doubts and our small thinking. Free us to see you are with us at all times and allow us to move forward in our ministry. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Candy Rickard, ELEA's Membership Coordinator and former early childhood teacher and administrator.

December 25, 2011
Nativity of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Titus 3: 4-7

Titus 3:4-7 – *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

“...not because of any works of righteousness that we had done...” Isn't this great news! God loves us so much that he sent us his son, Jesus Christ, to save us. What love! Each day you provide love, care, leadership and knowledge to our children. And you do it, not in return for works that they have done in order to receive it, but because of your love for our children and because of the love you have for you call in this ministry. What you give of yourself is priceless. You are, in fact, helping shape a generation. The unconditional gifts you give of yourself, time, patience, skill and love, in turn, will be carried through and shared with generations to come.

Questions for the Week:

Think back to your childhood. Who was influential in your life? Who helped to shape who you are today? Was there a special teacher that sparked that interest in you at a young age to become an educator one day?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for our educators, our mentors, our family systems. Pray for schools and educational institutions and those that lead them. Give thanks for the love and mercy God gives.

This devotion was contributed by Andrea Young, Program Director for Assignments and the Domestic Horizon Internship Program, Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA Churchwide office, Chicago, Illinois.

January 1, 2012
First Sunday of Christmas
Thought for the Week: Psalm 148

“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights. Praise him, all his angels; praise him all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!”

Children can be wonderful reminders to us about all that God has created. We can take for granted the sun, moon, and stars so purposefully placed in the sky. It can become a part of every day to simply ignore the mountains, hills, and animals around us and that their very existence in nature is praising God, their creator. But children look very closely and they allow the time to appreciate. Children are also excited about sharing what they find; a ladybug, snail, or roly poly. “Look!” they will yell to anyone who is willing. They will comment on the details of color, spots, legs, movement, holding the object or creature inches from their eyes, and use words such as, “cool,” and “awesome!” Everything the Lord has created *is* awesome and great, deserving of praise, from the angels in heaven and the precious children on our play yards. What a blessing it is to teach and take the moments to look with children at creation and give praise to the Lord.

Questions for the Week:

Take a moment in each day to see things as a child would see them. Are you looking closely with wonder and amazement at what God has created including each child in your class? Are you reminded of God’s Glory in all you see? Do you remember to give God the praise He deserves?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you Lord for the children we teach and how they can remind us of your glory displayed through all you have created. Help us to be thankful and appreciate the details in your handiwork from the tiniest bug to the beauty of the stars in the nighttime sky. May we always remember to give you praise. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Kelly Catlett, Poway, California, Program Director of Incarnation Lutheran Preschool.

January 6, 2012
Epiphany of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Matthew 2: 1-12

“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”

Ah, if only that were Herod’s real intent. We live in a world where it sometimes seems that crime is rampant and the bad guys outnumber the good guys, and we often are naïve enough to think this is a new thing! Bad guys abound in the Bible, as they have all throughout history, and Herod was one of the baddest. As Christians, we celebrate the wonderful birth of our Savior and the ensuing days of Christmas and Epiphany, sometimes forgetting the danger that lurked all around Jesus and his parents, even at the beginning of his life! But the wise men, and then his parents, listened to the warnings they were given through dreams, in order to keep Jesus safe so that his true calling might be fulfilled in God’s own time. What a testimony of faith to listen to a dream, to know that the message came from God above and to actually heed the message. Soli deo Gloria!!

Questions for the Week:

Has there been a time when you have received a message or a vision in a dream or just had a “gut feeling” and felt certain it was from God? Did you heed the message? What do you think would have happened if you hadn’t?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Gracious God—I ask that you guide and protect my loved ones and colleagues, my students and their families, and me as we make our way through this world of sin and danger. Help us to remember to celebrate the joys that come our way in spite of whatever we may be facing, and help us to listen to your Spirit. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Gayle M. Denny, Executive Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association, the national membership association of ELCA schools and early childhood programs.

January 8, 2012
Baptism of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Mark 1: 4-11

Out of the Wilderness

John the Baptist was one wild and crazy guy. His wildness took on many aspects, where he lived, what he wore, what he said, and certainly what he ate-not gummy locusts, but the real ones. He not only lived off of the land, he was of the land in his rough and earthy coloration. In the midst of this burned a bright glowing fire of baptismal mission washed in the flowing waters of the Jordan. Added to this was the thunderous voice of God and the fluttering wings of the Spirit pointing to the Savior. Out of the wilderness came salvation.

- ✦ Lutheran educators serve in the wilderness of modern life with its challenges of overactive children, over committed and stressed parents and dwindling temporal resources. Just as John met the challenges of his wilderness to prepare the path to Jesus, we work to prepare this way for children and families, by sharing the Gospel, the Spirit and the Beloved Son in the life of our early childhood centers and schools.

Children experience Jesus in the ripples of the water table, the voices of teachers and their caring and healing touch. Prepare the way every day and every way.

Question for the Week:

What is your wilderness, and what challenges do you overcome to prepare the way to Jesus?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God works in the midst of all wildernesses. Pray for a full measure of the Spirit and the personal and professional resources to joyfully point the way to Jesus.

This devotion was contributed by Hugh Kress who has served Lutheran education in a variety of roles for over 40 years. He presently serves as the Accreditation Coordinator for ELEA and directs the Centers of Wellness Project.

January 15, 2012
Second Sunday After Epiphany
Thought for the Week: Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18

Psalm 139:14 & 16 (NIV). *“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. ...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

You were fearfully and wonderfully made to live a life of service to God. You were “chosen to teach!” As a Christian educator you serve God daily as you shape the lives of your students. Teachers have a part in God’s plan to encourage and nurture children’s growth academically, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually. God uses our knowledge, experiences, words, actions, and attitudes as we teach.

By now in January we probably think we know our students well. We know many of their strengths and weaknesses. But only God knows what they will do with every single day of their lives. Begin each day by praising God for choosing you to teach, and humbly offer yourself for God to use as you teach each wonderfully and fearfully made student.

Questions for the Week:

Was there someone in your past, other than your parents, who saw the best in you? Did that person encourage you to use your gifts for the Lord?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the people in your life that helped shape you for the profession of being a Christian educator. Pray for guidance as you are used to shape the lives of your students.

This devotion was contributed by Beth Coburn, Director of Little Lamb Preschool at Christ Lutheran Church in Valparaiso, Indiana.

January 22, 2012
Third Sunday After Epiphany
Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31

“For the present form of this world is passing away.”

Within Paul’s passage about marriage, he reminds the Corinthians not to get too attached to their worldly goods and ways of living because the *“appointed time has grown short”* (7:29) and the *“present form of this world is passing away.”* Nearly 2,000 years later, the present form of this world continues to pass away. Change is all around us in the world, perhaps most noticeably in the proliferation of technology and social media. How does this affect us as educators and how can we use this in our ministry to children and families? We are comfortable in our routines, including in our teaching lives. Sometimes we teach the same lesson in the same way for years, because after all there are new students each year who will not have had that lesson. Our values and goals may not change, but the way we impart them to children needs to keep up with the times. Our calling as educators compels us to continually seek ways to connect with this generation of students. Sometimes this requires us to just drop our comfortable way of doing things and go a new direction.

Jesus called on his first disciples, the fisherman brothers Simon and Andrew, to drop what they were doing and follow him (Mark 1:17). They trusted in Jesus enough to leave behind their old way of life. God will always walk beside us on the new paths as well as the old, so why not take that first step?

Questions for the Week:

How does your teaching (or leadership) style reflect an understanding of today’s generation of students (or staff)? How ready are you to drop what you are doing and follow Jesus?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, thank you for walking with me every step of the way on my faith journey.

This devotion was contributed by Karen Freeman, preschool director, San Marcos Lutheran Church Children’s Center, San Marcos CA.

January 29, 2012
Fourth Sunday After Epiphany
Thought for the Week: Psalm 111

“The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.” As explained in the Lutheran Study Bible: God’s commandments are good. We keep them because they are good, not simply because God has ordered us to do so. What great words to live by. This is the lesson that we as Christian educators are instilling into the children that come through the doors of our schools.

Looking at today’s world it is more important than ever that we are good role models to not just the children in our schools, but role models for the families also. Ask yourself, “How am I doing the work of God?” Yes, I am teaching Christian values, but am I really walking the walk?

The phrase “good works” encompasses a large array of things. It is not just the physical caring of one another, but it is also the anonym for good things we do for others.

Question for the Week:

Will my fellow teachers and the children in my care learn from my example for doing good for others? What is a new “why” to express good works for others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you God for all the good things you sent our way. Help me to pass these good things on to others. Help me be a good example to the children and families in my care. In your name I pray. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Michelle Schaffer, Norwalk, Ohio, who is Preschool Director of Christian Day Nursery School.

February 5, 2012
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 9: 16-23

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Paul reflects on his own calling as an apostle. Paul does not think of his vocation as something motivated by heavenly reward, or even something in which he takes personal pride. His incentive is simply the joy he receives from serving Christ and proclaiming the Gospel. The very act of preaching the Good News is his reward, his obligation and his compensation.

Paul provides us with one understanding of what it means to be called by God and chosen to serve. Read the text again and this time substitute the word "teaching" for "preaching." Reflect upon how you have been "chosen, called and sent" to share the Good News in your role and setting.

Each person is unique and has God given gifts, abilities and talents in order to serve like Jesus and make a difference in the world. As a teacher, director or pastor, find opportunities to impress upon each child and student that he or she is created by God for a purpose, not just when they grow up, but now!

Questions for the Week:

What other vocations have you considered? What motivates you for the work you do? Name the ways God has "designed you" for interacting with and caring for children. How do you experience your work as proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you God for calling Paul and calling me too. Let me serve with the joy and conviction that was Paul's, so that I may share the everlasting, never failing, forever love and forgiveness of Jesus at home and school.

This devotion was contributed by Linda Staats, who serves as Assistant to the Bishop for Children, Youth & Household Ministry in the Rocky Mountain Synod-ELCA. Linda's passion is equipping others to nurture faith from generation to generation.

February 12, 2012
Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 9: 24-27

Teaching can feel like a race. There is so much to do and so little time. The end of the day comes quickly and you go home feeling exhausted. We know from the health and fitness experts that it is important to be fit to clear the hurdles of the day. The apostle Paul likens life to a race and being well prepared to run and win. As a teacher it is important to be fit physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Runners prepare daily and so should teachers, keeping up daily with the teaching tasks. Just as runners choose the best gadgets for their individual needs, so we should choose the best methods and materials to match our teaching styles.

Not everyone can be first but Paul urges us to run like we will win. We need to remember that just as King David wanted to build the temple, Solomon was chosen for the assignment. God has a plan for us and we need to remember His support and how He lifts us up, Psalm 30. So, run the race feeling confident that you have the best support and can do your best. After all, the finish line is sharing the Gospel with your students and their families.

Question for the Week:

What is the most important way you prepare yourself for teaching?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Oh, Lord, grant me an open heart, a willingness to see each student as a precious, loved child with much potential and choosing the best methods to teach each child.

This devotion was contributed by Carole Feddersen, PhD. Carole has taught in Lutheran schools for 22 years and as an instructor for teacher education for 9 years, 5 of which were at California Lutheran University.

February 19, 2012
Transfiguration of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Luke 9: 28–36

(See also Matthew 17: 1-9 and Mark 9: 2-9)

To “transfigure” is a verb that means to transform, to metamorphose, or to change. In the case of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ it means to change the outward so that it matches the inward reality of Jesus' divine nature. That the Transfiguration of Jesus is an important event in the life of Jesus is reflected in its inclusion in three of the four Gospels.

Though the details differ, the message is clear: Jesus, both human and divine, is the bridge between God and creation, the eternal and the earthly. Jesus' glory was revealed by his changed appearance and by God's voice claiming Jesus as his Son.

We, too, have been claimed as children of God by Jesus' redeeming love. That claim is transformative for us. In truth and in action, we are changed to live as the people that God would have us be. We see this especially in our work as Christian educators. Both we and our students are challenged by our limitations.

None of us is able, on our own, to live up to our potential, except by God's grace. When we recognize God's presence within us, it is possible to transcend our human nature, to love the unlovable in ourselves and in our students. That God-given transformation makes the seemingly impossible, possible. We are freed to teach and to learn in a climate of unlimited forgiveness, acceptance, and possibility.

Questions to Ponder:

When confronted by your own or others' limitations, what is your first response? How can you recognize God's presence in the challenges you encounter in yourself, in your colleagues, in your students, in their parents?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Loving God – We believe that your Spirit is all around us and within us. We know that you equip and strengthen us daily for your work. Give us new eyes to see you in each of the lives we touch – especially our students, staff, and parents. Create in us new hearts to love as you love. Grow our faith to know and trust your presence. In the name of the One who transforms us from the inside out, Amen

This devotion was contributed by Karen Kress, who was claimed as God's child by her baptism into God's family on February 10, 1952. She has been a lifelong learner and a lay teacher of adults and children in Lutheran schools and congregations. She currently serves as a Stephen Leader in Amherst, Wisconsin

February 22, 2012

Ash Wednesday

Thought for the Week: Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

³*But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,* ⁴*so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* Matthew 6: 3-4

Chosen To Do The Right Thing

When you donate money or other gifts to help those in need, you are giving alms. Jesus teaches in our text that you should give alms so freely that your left hand does not know what your right hand is doing. Why? Because it's the right thing to do. We give because the need is there, not because of some good that will come to us when we give.

Sometimes it is hard to give freely because we worry about whether we can afford it. But often our desire to find a reward for ourselves through giving gets in the way of freely giving. We hesitate, we think it through, we analyze, we make certain that our left hand knows exactly what our right hand is doing to ensure that we will get something out of our almsgiving. Perhaps we seek the praise of others. More likely, we give selectively because we restrict our giving to causes that give us personal satisfaction.

Personal satisfaction in giving is not wrong, but receiving personal satisfaction through giving must not dictate our giving. Jesus warns that we are to give freely because God wants us to give, because the need is there, not because we "get something out of it," even a sense of personal satisfaction. We give because it is the right thing to do, because God, our Father, calls us to give.

Questions for the Week:

How can those of us chosen to teach help instill a sense of generosity, faithful to the Gospel of Christ, in our students? When did you first learn that God desires a cheerful giver, who gives because it is the right thing to do?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord God, you have freely given me eternal life and all that I need. Engender in me a spirit of generosity that reflects, even dimly, your spirit of self-giving through Jesus Christ. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Dr. Mark Wilhelm, Program Director for Schools in the ELCA's Congregational & Synodical Mission unit. Mark serves as the ELCA liaison on the ELEA National Board of Directors.

February 26, 2012
First Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Genesis 9: 8-17

“God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations; I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.’” Verses 12-13

In Genesis 8, we heard of Noah’s sacrifice and now in this text, we learn of God’s response: a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature to sustain and preserve creation. This covenant was unconditional, unilateral, and everlasting. God took a familiar sign – the rainbow – and used it to remind Noah of God’s care and concern for him and of the care and concern that he and his descendants, as God’s stewards, have a responsibility to care for others and all creation.

We too hear God’s promises to us. We too see the rainbow as the sign of those promises and as a reminder of our work to be God’s stewards. What are we stewarding? What are we managing? As teachers and principals, as Board members and pastors, how do we respond to God’s great promise?

Many are the days and weeks when we grow weary of our tasks. We start the day out enthusiastic and energetically and soon all the worries and reactions of others burden our souls. God is there in those tough times. God is there in times of celebrations too – when the poor reader suddenly grasps a full sentence, when a gift from an anonymous supporter provides the extra needed to purchase supplies!

Rainbows remind us of God’s abundant grace and love. God supports us no matter what. As leaders and supporters of places of learning, we support children no matter what, showing our love for them and for what we do for them.

Questions for the Week:

Where have you seen rainbows this week? What can you do this week to respond to God's covenantal promise of care and abundant grace? How will you be a steward of God's promise in your work and play?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God of rainbows and grace, be with us today as we carry forth in our responsibilities. May we demonstrate to others the many blessings and love that you have given to us, using those gifts to care for those in our lives. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Phyllis Castens Wiederhoeft, Executive Director of ALDE—the Association of Lutheran Development Executives, and Stewardship Key Leader -- ELCA.

March 4, 2012
Second Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Romans 4: 13-16

“For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendents, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham.” Romans 4: 16

As educators, we often focus on the rules. Administrators must enforce the policies of the school. Teachers must enforce classroom rules. We deal with behaviors, rules, and laws every day. This is not only true in our schools, but in our society. Rules and laws are necessary to provide a safe environment for everyone.

Our text, however, reminds us that we must also live by grace. We must learn to practice our faith and offer the grace that was given to us. It is our faith in Christ’s sacrifice that brings our salvation. We do not enter God’s kingdom based on the rules we follow or the good deeds we do. The children in our care make mistakes. The parents of these children make mistakes. Staff members make mistakes. We all make mistakes. It’s a wonderful blessing to be forgiven and to know we are still loved.

It is our duty to offer forgiveness and grace to others. In this way, we show our faith in our Lord Jesus, believing that we have been forgiven and are heirs of His kingdom.

Questions for the Week:

How do we teach faith to children? How do we show our faith in Christ in our daily lives?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Consider how you practice your faith in your classroom. Ask God to help you forgive others’ transgressions and to live gracefully.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy Eckroth, Fairfax, Virginia, who serves as Preschool Director at King of Kings Lutheran Church and Preschool and on the ELEA National Board of Directors.

March 11, 2012
Third Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Exodus 20: 1-17
The Ten Commandments

These Ten Commandments may seem daunting. Your work, too, may seem daunting. It may seem that there is so much to do and so much to which we must adhere – it feels like we have so many expectations placed before us. But let us remember that we have Jesus. Jesus is always present, always drawing us nearer to God and always lifting us up when we fall short of the expectations set for us. In fact, we cannot reach the expectations laid out for us alone. That is why we have Jesus. That is why we have the Spirit. They intercede for us, and Jesus made the greatest of sacrifices for when we are inevitably human and cannot live up to all our expectations.

Surely, we must still give our best and do our best both for the utmost among us, God, and the least among us, God's children. But truly, if your heart is in the right place, your hands are in the right place and your mind is in the right place, all will eventually turn out well. Let us rejoice knowing that we are never alone as we work to spread the love of God to the Children of God. After all, you have been *chosen* – better yet, you have been *called* – into this line of work by the Lord, and certainly the Lord will always be with you, seeing you through the work you have been called to perform.

Yes, God has seen you through so much. God has brought you through so many trials and granted you so many blessings. So may you never forget during times of trial that there is no way God, Jesus or the Spirit will ever, ever leave you or forget you. May you never forget who you are or whose you are.

Questions for the Week:

When you feel overwhelmed by your work and the expectations set out for you, what do you do? Do you just keep plugging away, forgetting to take healthy breaks and forgetting other important matters? Do you ever feel like giving up? Or do you ask God to help you? Do you ask Jesus to walk with you and be your guide and support? How can you remember to ask God for help? How can you

help your colleagues remember to ask God for guidance, and how can you also support them?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, please help me to always remember your presence and guidance, and to feel that presence as I go through my daily work. Help me to remember who I am called to serve and to use my gifts for your glory and your children. What's more, thank you for your constant presence in my life and my work. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jon Nelson, Beloit, Wisconsin, who works in Communication Services for the Association of Lutheran Development Executives (ALDE). He is also Ministry Coordinator at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Beloit, and Principal of Nelson Business Communications, LLC, where much of his work is for Lutheran and Christian organizations.

March 18, 2012
Fourth Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: John 3: 14-21

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Martin Luther called John 3:16 the 'gospel in miniature'. This small verse essentially simplifies the Bible to only a few words that even a child can understand. I delight in the small wonders that children can find in things I may overlook everyday.

Winter here in Wisconsin can be long, dark, cold and seem to have no end, yet children seem to enjoy every one of those winter days. It was one of those days that we had all bundled up, which can take a lot of time and patience with preschoolers, and headed out to the playground for a few short minutes of fresh air. The snow was fairly deep and the children stepped up and sank down with each step. Some of them headed for the climbers and a few to the protection and bare ground under the evergreen tress. Two of my little friends were out in the open with small sand shovels. They were very intent on digging in small intentional scoops. I wandered over and observed before asking, "what are you digging for?" Both girls stopped and looked up at me and then at each other, then one replied, "we are looking for science". They soon found the earth below and were ecstatic. That day God reminded me that sometimes the most simple things are remarkable.

Question for the Week:

When was the last time you stopped what you were doing to delight in the simplicity of discovery with a child?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, help me not to strive for perfection in the eyes of those around me but to be still and listen for the small voice in my heart that will help lead me to a life that pleases you.

This devotion was contributed by Cory Newman, Director of St. James Preschool in Verona, Wisconsin, and a member of the ELEA National Board.

March 25, 2012
Fifth Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: John 12: 20–33

As a teacher we have many moments that remind us of why we were called to teach. Those special moments motivate us to continue on, to plant seeds and to help draw the children closer to God. We also have those moments that leave us with frustration, questions and even sadness. We bandage skinned knees, hug their tears away and do our best to help them with their struggles. Sometimes we aren't able to help and, in fact, feel helpless.

I identified with those feelings when one of our precious four year old little preschoolers died suddenly. I had never lost a student in my career. I was flooded with questions, What do I do? How do I handle this with her parents and the parents in the class? How do I tell the children? Why did she have to die?

God brought me great comfort. God showed me what to write to the parents. God gave me the words to tell the children in her class. I still see the puzzled looks on the children's faces as they tried to process the news and how they struggled to understand that their friend was gone. I was comforted with the wisdom of one little girl who said, "You go to Heaven—then you're remade." That's what we have to look forward to one day, being remade. I still don't know why she had to die so young, but I do know that she is with our Heavenly Father.

At this time of year we ponder what Jesus endured on the cross and how those that loved Jesus tried to understand his painful death. Then the news came of the Resurrection and how they must have rejoiced!

We remember the joy of Jesus being remade and how Jesus still lives today. Thanks be to God.

Question of the Week:

What can we do to help someone who is grieving?

Personal Prayers for the Week:

Dear God help us to be a source of comfort when one of our colleagues or students is hurting and experiencing the death of a loved one. Empty us, fill us and use us for your glory. Help us to draw close to You today and everyday. Thank you for the gift of life and for always being with us. Amen

Sherri Bishop has been in the field of early childhood education for over 30 years and is currently the Director of Central College Preschool in Westerville, Ohio. She is active in Region 6 of the ELEA and has served on the National Board for the past 9 years.

April 1, 2012
Sunday of the Passion
Thought for the Week: Mark 14: 1-5, 47

“While Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of a very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over his head.”

A costly alabaster vase was broken to release a fragrant and expensive perfume. The vessel broken beyond repair, yet the perfume covered Jesus and permeated his hair, beard, and clothing. The fragrance would linger through the agonizing prayer in Gethsemane. It lingered as Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate. It would waft up as He stumbled and fell on the way to Calvary. The perfume would rest on the cross and fill Christ’s nostrils with a reminder that He was the anointed one, dying for all. We remember that Christ is the costly vessel that was broken for us; that the fragrance of the Holy Spirit would spill from Him onto us.

Questions for the Week:

Do you sometimes feel broken? Will the Holy Spirit be flowing from you to minister to the children in your care?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Father in heaven, Thank you for allowing your Son to be broken for us. As we allow ourselves to be broken, may the fragrance of the Holy Spirit be released from us. Help us to minister to children and parents whose lives need mending. Give to us your compassion and love to share. We ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Gail Hayman, Church of the Savior, Paramus, New Jersey. Gail has served for 23 years at Church of the Savior as a teacher, teacher assistant, and director of Church of the Savior Nursery School.

April 8, 2012
Resurrection of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Mark 16: 1-8

What do you think motivates people to their highest level of achievement? Money? Glory? Power? These traditional motivators can be powerful—but, in the end, always leave people dissatisfied and wanting more. According to studies conducted by leading educational consultant Alan November, the greatest motivation for high achievement is “a sense of purpose.” In other words, people are willing to work hard, sacrifice and strive for excellence when they feel that their work matters and has value.

As Lutheran educators, we often get caught up in the day-to-day grind of developing lesson plans, disciplining students, grading papers, on and on. But how often do we take the time to thank God for the unique, lasting opportunity we have to fulfill the true purpose of Christ-centered education—planting the love of Jesus in the hearts of our students? Easter is the ideal time to rededicate ourselves to the high purpose of our calling. After all, the Lenten journey and Easter embodied Christ’s purpose in living, dying and being raised again! As he went through each step of His ministry, Jesus provided the ultimate role model of sacrifice as He fulfilled His goal of salvation to all people. What a privilege we have to share His story with our children, families and colleagues every day. Alleluia, He is risen indeed!!

Questions for the Week:

What is your “purpose” in being a Christian school teacher? What sense of purpose are you trying to instill in your students?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the opportunity to teach young men and women about the love of Jesus. Help me to stay faithful to this high calling so that future generations will come to know you as Lord and Savior. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. David Hahn, Head of School at Long Island Lutheran Schools, which serves 850 students Grades N-12 in New York.

April 15, 2012
Second Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: John 20: 19-31

So where was Thomas? This was a pretty close knit group, and they had experienced a loss; a tragedy. These were grown men who knew the ways of the world. They were a community of followers that had lost their beloved teacher. Now there were stories; sightings of a risen Jesus. Were those just an emotional response to the loss? But, where was Thomas?

Maybe Thomas had just about had enough; the magnitude of the crucifixion, the sadness, the perplexing questions, the absurdity of a risen Jesus. So he removed himself and wondered. His doubts were evidence of a thinking, reflective, realistic mind that's not fooled. Could that have been me or you?

When he joined this community of disciples one week later, he saw Jesus with his eyes, touched him with his hands. It was real, and that made it his own as he said, "My Lord and my God!"

Questions for the Week:

As a teacher, how can you help a child or students' doubt become an experience of discovery?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

It is in the presence of others whom we love and value that we find answers and work through doubts. For our community of teachers, friends and family, we thank you, Lord.

This devotion was contributed by Sharon Koplinski, Director of Celebration Children's Center in Naperville, Illinois.

April 22, 2012
Third Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Luke 24: 36b–48

"Peace be with you." James turned to see Jesus, his hands open, sleeves falling aside to reveal wounds healed yet unhealed — the memory of nails written with crude marks. James stared, bewildered. He had seen Lazarus awaken from death; Jesus had done that himself. Why was this harder to believe?

He had heard the news: the tomb was empty, Mary had seen him in the garden, two others had broken bread with him on the way to Emmaus. Now James was seeing Jesus, too. Old stories from childhood seeped in his mind a moment and James wondered if he was seeing a phantom.

Jesus spoke as if he could read James' thoughts. "Why do doubts rise in your mind? It's me. See the nail marks? Touch me. A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones." James reached for the sleeve of Jesus' robe. He wasn't ready to touch the skin, to feel living muscles move within Jesus' arm. Jesus smiled at James, and joy spread through James' body like flames. "Do you have anything to eat?" Jesus asked. Andrew grilled some fish. Only Jesus ate anything; everyone else was too excited to eat. It was then Jesus explained everything. He pointed out the words of the prophets and revealed how they foreshadowed all of this. James listened intently, feeling as if a curtain was drawn aside and light flooded his soul. There was a mission that came with understanding, Jesus explained, and James felt his heart tug towards Tarshish.

Question for the Week:

What mission do you feel called to do as you grow in understanding of God's plan?

Personal Prayer of the Week:

Lord, Guide me on your path, so that as my eyes are opened to your will, I may find the courage and confidence to follow you. Amen.

Benjamin Chandler is the art teacher and junior kindergarten teacher for Grace Lutheran School in River Forest, Illinois.

April 29, 2012
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: John 10: 11-13 and
Psalm 23

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11 "He restores my soul." Psalm 23:3a

A new toddler came to our center. He spoke no English and was inseparable from his blankie. For the first three days of his time with us, Kristin carried him around on her hip. Eventually he learned to play happily with the other children, but he desperately needed those first hours of carrying.

The oldest image we have from early followers of Jesus is not of Christ on the cross, but of a young shepherd carrying a sheep on his shoulders. Yes, the Good Shepherd!

As you work with the lambs (and their parents, the sheep!) day by day, you may find yourself carrying them "on your shoulders," – or hips -- literally or emotionally. Chosen and called, you serve the Good Shepherd. When the burden of carrying a sheep or lamb, an issue or behavior, becomes heavy, hold fast the promise from the Shepherd psalm. The psalm-writer knew that God "restores my soul." Ask God to restore your soul each evening, each morning, so that you can continue to shepherd the young children, teens, students, parents, whom the Good Shepherd entrusts to you. God bless your efforts!

Questions for the Week:

Think quietly about a burden you carry today. Can someone help you? How can the Good Shepherd restore your soul?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Restore my soul, O God, so that I may continue to shepherd your children and their families in the green pastures of grace and love.

This devotion was submitted by Pastor Beth Orling, Port Ludlow, Washington, who continues to care about and pray for the children and teachers entrusted to her care over the years.

May 6, 2012
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Acts 8: 26-40

You, like Philip, have been called to teach. And, maybe, just like Philip, you are teaching in a place you never thought you would or have students you couldn't in your wildest dreams, have imagined. Notice that Philip lets the Holy Spirit guide him to Ethiopia. Philip can hear and observe things that help him in his teaching. Your challenge is to look and listen for cues from your students that can open doors to discussion. This story is an invitation to all Christians to be aware of "teachable moments" where a student has just a fabulous question or observations and you get to be the presence of God with him or her. Your role as a teacher is to help guide (v.31), to ask questions, encourage, and (v. 30), to explain. This is true for any subject you are teaching, really, but what an honor to be able to help students find their questions and answers about faith in a safe and welcoming environment.

Maybe, just maybe, you, like Philip, will witness an awakening of faith in your students. And, maybe you, like Philip, will also be transported to continue to bring the good news to others (if not physically, spiritually).

Questions for the Week:

Who was a great faith teacher for you? Why? What about him/her have you incorporated into your faith journey? Who is the least likely person you think God might put in front of you this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for opening of mind, eyes, and ears to the questions of students toward faith and God. Pray for acknowledging that God can use you where you are in very powerful ways.

*This devotion was contributed by Renee J. Kallenbach Jefferson, A.I.M.,
Director of Education, Transfiguration Lutheran Church, Bloomington, MN.*

May 13, 2012
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Psalm 98: 4-6

“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn-shout for joy before the Lord, the King.”

The Word tells us to shout for JOY, but how many times in the course of our day do we shout with upset, anger, discuss, or frustration because someone (child, parent, another staff member, church member) has done something to you or your plan for the day that has turned you upside down. It is hard to think about praising God sometimes. We don’t have to be thankful for all the things that life throws at us but we do have control on how we are going to react to things that life gives us. Let us encourage ourselves and our co-workers to walk in the spirit of joy and sing it out loud to those around us. Count how many times in the day you can burst into song about what the children or staff are doing.

Questions for the Week:

How do you react when your fruit of joy is squeezed? What are the children witnessing about your life as they watch you walk out your faith?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Precious Heavenly Father help me to walk in the spirit of joy with the children, parents, and co-workers each day. Fill me with your spirit and walk close to me as I do ministry in your name.

This devotion was contributed by Rose Moore, Belfair, WA, Director of Christ Lutheran Child Care Center for 14 years. Rose served on the ELEA National Board representing Region 1 for 5 years. Her center is an ELEA accredited site and Rose serves on teams to help other schools achieve this milestone.

May 17, 2012
Ascension of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Luke 24: 44-52

Christ's Ascension and Great Commission—these events are joined together, standing together for all who would embrace the Resurrection hope, and pursue the calling of Christian education. Jesus' parting words to his followers and friends recap his own mission and message. Serving and suffering, dying and rising—we remember the core of his earthly work and heavenly purpose. And there's more: Repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed to all people. His life, his passion and his victory become the compendium of the Church's message for all. Christian educators are called to forming young, impressionable minds, to the many diverse tasks of learning, maturing, caring and shepherding. But these words of Christ remind us to go beyond syllabi and lesson plans—we are also commissioned to shape disciples in Jesus.

As with the first evangelists, our work is a tapestry to be woven in word and deed. We speak the awesome grace of the Gospel, and model it in our daily interactions. Repentance and forgiveness—these are more than concepts to be taught, but lifestyles to be emulated and inculcated in the lives of those we serve. Beginning with us. Christ the Ascended One, at God's right hand, alive and reigning, through the Spirit yet abides with us each and every day, in all we do, among all we serve. For the one in whose name we teach and live promises, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the Age."*

Question for the Week:

How does the story of Jesus' Ascension shape our work as Christian educators and evangelists?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O Risen and Ascended Christ, help us hear and heed your Great Commission to seek and make disciples in your liberating and life-giving Gospel. Teach us to be your witnesses and servants in all we do, to your glory and the world's good. In your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Bill Hurst, Senior Pastor of First Lutheran Church and School, Torrance, California. Bill also serves on the ELEA Board of Directors.

May 20, 2012
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Acts 1: 15-17, 21-26

“Lord you know everyone’s heart.” What a wonderful text for teachers as they come to the close of the school year. In the midst of all the year-end needs, Lord, you know what is important. Just as Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, you have chosen me to be a witness – to teach in your name.

Help me to remember to teach with the heart of a child; with love, wonder and trust. It may not always be easy, some children may test my patience or stretch my thinking, yet as we give we also receive. By God’s grace we are blessed with the gifts of these little seeds of faith & hope!

Questions for the Week:

What does it mean to be partners in Christ’s service? What gifts have you given me that will help me with the families I serve?

Personal Prayer for the Week?

Thank you God for choosing me to teach, to share and model the love of Christ each and every day with the students and the families I serve.

This devotion was contributed by Deb Bigley, Eden Prairie, MN who has served as the Early Childhood Minister for St. Andrew Lutheran Church for the past 23 years and is also the ELEA Region 3 Chairperson.

May 27, 2012
Day of Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Acts 2: 1-21

Before I became principal, I taught eighth grade for 14 years. Ah – junior high school – what a “miraculous” age! There were many times during my tenure that I had prayed that I would be so filled with the Holy Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost, that I could begin to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled me to speak. For it had been my experience that junior high students usually have difficulty understanding the language of learning.

The message that did get through to these “hormone-challenged” children of God was the divine learning that our Lord Jesus Christ had such passion for us that he died for our sins and rose from death to prepare a place for us with him. After being a part of a Lutheran school’s faith community for a number of years I believe that the power of the Holy Spirit fills the students with this message of hope and love.

Through the dedication of faculty and staff, as well as guidance from an administration and board of directors, these children come to understand that no matter what, God loves them unconditionally and allows them to be part of a caring, Christian community. The message they do hear and understand enables them to grow into well-equipped servant leaders. Praise God for the gifts of the Holy Spirit!

Questions for the Week:

How can you celebrate the gifts of the Holy Spirit with your students?
How has being a part of an educational ministry changed your life?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and all its many gifts – comforter, advocate, messenger, and strength. May we be filled to overflowing, enabling us to share God’s love with those in our care.

This devotion was contributed by Christine Hauge, Associate in Ministry and principal of Leif Ericson Day School, Brooklyn, NY

June 3, 2012
The Holy Trinity
Thought for the Week: Romans 8: 12-17

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.”

Children of God. We are ALL children of God, and we need to remember these encouraging words! Sometimes we may only think about the children in our classrooms being those children of God. What freedom we have been gifted with! The text says NO FEAR.

Questions for the Week:

Reflect for a moment about any unspoken fears you might have. And then ponder what an infant is fearful of—nothing. An infant has no fears, and yet due to the love of the parent, the child is cared for. Our “Abba! Father!” is trustworthy and loves us. Can you see yourself as God’s heir? Can you let that truth sink into your heart? Can you let this truth encourage you as an educator who is Chosen to Teach?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for God’s powerful love and grace.

Thank God that we can cry, “Abba Father!” and that we are children of God, and if children, we are heirs. Pray for this knowledge for your school family and the children in your classroom.

This devotion was contributed by Nancy Bond O’Neal, ARM, Monrovia, California. Nancy is an ELEA Board Member and Benefits Administrator. She is the Granddaughter of a Lutheran School Principal.

June 10, 2012
Second Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Genesis 3: 8-15

“He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate.’” Verses 11,12

So Adam is too lazy to get his own dinner, and he eats what Eve has put in front of him, even though he knows he’s not supposed to. And then he blames the whole thing on her. Hmmm . . . And then, of course, the buck doesn’t stop with her, either. She blames it on the snake—a classic example of no one wanting to take responsibility for their own actions. No wonder the problem persists today; we’ve been dealing with this since the beginning of time!

While God forgives us for our actions (or lack of action), He doesn’t let us off the hook. There are consequences—in this case, Adam, Eve, AND the snake all discover the consequences of their behavior; a lifetime of toiling over the food supply, pain in childbearing, and being cursed above all animals and destined to eat dust.

Questions for the Week:

Think of a time when you have been tempted to break the rules—have you expected to be disciplined when/if you got caught? How do you explain forgiveness versus consequences to the children in your class? Does this present an opportunity to explore natural consequences versus what we sometimes perceive as logical consequences?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Gracious Lord, Forgive me for not following your rules. I know in my heart that they are in place to keep me safe and happy, but I, like Adam and Eve, have pushed the envelope. Be with me as I walk in this world of temptation. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Gayle M. Denny, Executive Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association, the national membership association of ELCA schools and early childhood programs.

June 17, 2012
Third Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Mark 4: 26-34

With another school year ending and children on their way rejoicing toward summer break, the parable of the mustard seed offers us a powerful truth about growth. Think for a moment about how growth happens in your life. For me, it has been the blessed ordinary seeds of love, care, and concern planted by all the people who have touched my life. I call these mustard seed moments. These ordinary moments are easily overlooked and discounted because we live in a society which is enamored with the extraordinary. God's mystery of growth is the polar opposite because it happens by way of small and ordinary events, e.g., a conversation with a friend, dinner with your family, a smile. These blessed ordinary moments are vessels that God uses for extraordinary growth.

Reflect on the students, past and present, you have taught. What kind of moments contributed to their growth? The next time you find yourself wondering about a student and whether you are having an impact, just remember the parable of the mustard seed and thank God for the blessed ordinary seeds you are planting in their life.

Question for the Week:

What ordinary moments have made a difference in your life and contributed to your own growth?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for all the blessed ordinary things in your life and the people who have sown these seeds in you.

This devotion was contributed by Jeffery S. Gallen, Goodyear, Arizona, who is currently serving as pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church.

June 24, 2012
John The Baptist
Thought for the Week: Luke 1: 53-67

On this day set aside to remember John the Baptist and the part he played in preparing the way for Jesus' work, our Gospel text focuses us on the announcement of his birth and his naming. People were startled and surprised - "None of your relatives are named John," but his father was insistent: "His name is John."

Zachariah had an intense vision regarding his child, knowing in his heart that God was going to do something amazing through him. So strong was his belief that people wondered aloud, "What then will this child become?"

Thought for the Week:

As we each live out our calling, and empower others to discover and live out their calling, we join John the Baptist in preparing the way for Jesus to draw others to him to experience his love, life, peace and joy. All are called, all are chosen, all are invited to live an amazing life engaged in the work of the work of God's Kingdom.

The "call to teach" for us who are followers of Christ is more than an opportunity to work in education. It is an invitation to be involved in what God is doing in the lives of the children entrusted to us. Each encounter with a child is an opportunity to help them know God's love in such a powerful way that they know without a doubt that they are loved and special, they are chosen by God for something wonderful, and are also called to be a part of what God is doing in the world: healing the hurting, feeding the hungry, freeing from the power of sin through forgiveness and reconciliation, welcoming the outcasts, and confronting injustice and oppression in the world.

Question for the Week:

As we each live out our calling, and empower others to discover and live out their calling, we join John the Baptist in preparing the way for Jesus to draw others to him to experience his love, life, peace and joy. All are called, all are chosen, all are invited to live an amazing life engaged in the work of the work of God's Kingdom. How can you

encourage your children, especially those who are a challenge to you, to be open to God's work in and through them?

Personal Prayers of the Week:

May God give each of us who is entrusted with the care, nurture and education of children, the grace to pray over each child: "What then shall this child become?" How, Lord, can you use me to help this child become your instrument of grace and peace in the world? Having this sense of hope and expectation about **each** child entrusted to our care will help us be open to what God might be doing in every child to "prepare the way" for Jesus to do the work of God's Kingdom in the world.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Larry Becker, Sr. Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, school and preschool, of Hawthorne, California.

July 1, 2012
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: 2 Corinthians 8: 7-15

“Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you – so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.” Corinthians 8:7

As Paul addressed the church in Corinth, he wanted them to realize how wealthy they really were. Although rich in material goods, first and foremost Paul wanted the people to realize how wealthy their lives were in Christ. Because of Christ.

Paul stressed that by first giving themselves to God, they would be more able to share generosity in all areas of their lives. He points out that as God blesses our lives, we are enabled to give to others.

God has given you many gifts, most of which you probably don't even think about on a regular basis. Take a moment to think about which gifts you find yourself using in your classroom. Do you listen patiently when a three-year old stumbles over his words to tell you about his dream last night? Are you gifted with clarity in explaining a difficult math concept to junior high kids? Does your prayer list regularly include the families of your students as you know the struggles they are having with employment or health issues?

How do you share your gifts with other staff members? Sure, it's important and collegial to share great teaching ideas and materials, but do you share your faith with them? Can and do the people you work with come to you for wise counsel and prayer when their lives seem to be falling apart?

Because of Christ, we are rich. And with this wealth comes the pleasure and joy of sharing generously with the people in our lives. Amen.

Questions for the Week:

What are three gifts that God has given you that you use regularly in your role as an educator? How do those gifts bless your students, families and other staff members?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O Lord, your gifts to us are as many and as varied as the students who sit in our classrooms each day! Thank for you for that variety, Lord. Help me as I go through the often mundane and day-to-day routines to celebrate and use the gifts you have given me, offering you the praise and glory! Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Debbie O'Neal. Debbie is the Co-Director and former Kindergarten Teacher for Grace Lutheran School in Des Moines, WA. She has been in the field of Christian education since 1978, as a teacher, trainer, curriculum editor and author of over 55 books, with over 30 years of curriculum development, creating, writing and editing.

July 8, 2012
Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 123

*"To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
As the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their master,
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us.*

*Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.
Our soul has had more than its fill
of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud."*

Reflect on this text as an educator. On first reading it is simple enough; we humbly have need of God's mercy and can call on him at any time. But when we put on the educator cloak we can see how the psalm specifically calls out for us when we feel emotionally overwhelmed and unappreciated. How often does that happen to you? I know there have been many afternoons I've left school and felt like that. How your whole life can be great but that one 7th period class can get to you until you question why you even teach anyway? The psalm calls out that it's okay to feel that way and that God is there for us to take our burdens! And he does every time. Because whenever I leave that school day with a storm cloud of frustration over my head and stop to reflect for a minute, I always remember the children.

So many of my kids are the ones who really have had more than their fill of contempt and scorn, who don't have enough to eat when they get home and may not even have a good regular place to stay. But so many of these same children keep coming to school, keep living their best life. And these are God's children. We need to remember that, and feel blessed for the privilege of being part of their lives. We need to remember that we are charged with showing the light to our students and not being part of the despair that can fill their souls. And when we have had enough ourselves, we can ask God to have mercy on us too and help again put things in perspective.

Questions for the Week:

When have you felt like your “soul has had more than its fill”? Can you imagine one of your students speaking this psalm?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Merciful God, there are times when we feel overwhelmed with stress, unappreciated, our souls full of worry. Please help us to remember you are there, to take our worries and grant peace and understanding. Help us to be more understanding of others too, and to be a light to them and a solace in their own struggles. Empower us to live fully in you and to keep you with us as we humbly walk through our lives, keeping you in our daily path.

This devotion was contributed by Monica Beckwith Hicks, Christian Education Director at Memorial Lutheran Church in St. Augustine, Florida. She has been a teacher for ten years. She currently teaches English at a public high school and is a big supporter of her church’s early childhood education center where both of her sons attended.

July 15, 2012
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Amos 7: 7-15

Amos 7:15 *"And the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to my people Israel.'"*

Amos' message to the people was unpleasant and unpopular. Amos did not see himself as prophet but a humble herdsman, yet he followed God's command to prophesy. Amos' message never changed. He was presented with obstacle after obstacle after obstacle. He faithfully delivered the message God gave him despite the personal opposition he faced, despite the verbal misrepresentation, despite the temptation he faced. God gave him a message of holiness, love, repentance, grace and redemption and he was faithful to deliver it.

What about you? What message has God given you to deliver to the very young, pre-teens and teens you are currently teaching? Probably the same one God gave to Amos. Except the message God's given you to deliver has all the blanks filled in. You have the benefit of having the whole story of salvation—the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, not just the message of national redemption available to Israel.

The message of redemption is available to the world within your classroom. What are you doing with that message? Are you holding on to it for fear of someone twisting your words? Or, because you've succumbed to the temptation to stay in your comfort zone? If, for whatever reason, you are holding on to the message God has given you; if you are not delivering the gospel like He has called you to do, you are disobeying God. Like Amos, today is the day to present yourself before God and receive forgiveness and then boldly recommit to being his witness.

Question for the Week:

Occasionally it takes an Amos to come into our midst to make us realize our faults. How do we creatively demonstrate to our children, their parents and ourselves that we may be blind to the direction we are taking?

Prayer for the Week:

O God, may the hymn title "*Lord Speak to Us, That We May Speak*" give voice to our longing to speak your words of truth with conviction. May we as teachers remember to teach our children that words are powerful tools and thank God for opportunities to learn.

This devotion was written by The Rev. Adisa Armand Miller, pastor of United Lutheran Church of Oakland, CA. The Kids of the Kingdom Child Center is a dream realized for the community at large.

July 22, 2012
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week:
Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56 and Psalm 23

Why do we teach? The answer may not be quite as clear in July as it was last September. Maybe right about now you are thinking, "I must have been chosen to teach. Why else would I surrender my life to the stress and strain of teaching when I am often made to feel less than the professional I know that I am, and in a Christian environment no less?"

Superiors, fellow staff, parents, and even kids can often be thoughtless and unkind, the love and passion for what you know is a calling, can be lost. Like a moth drawn to the flame for the warmth and beauty, not expecting the burn, ah, the burn.

Jesus and His disciples were no strangers to the need to escape, to be alone to refresh mind and body for personal reflection, quiet prayer, healing and forgiveness. Mark 6: 30-34 tells us about the apostles gathering to report to Jesus all they had done and taught. Jesus knew that these mighty men were in need of a secluded place to rest and gather strength. He knew that there had been so many people coming and going that they had not even had time to eat. Sound familiar? Jesus knows. He was there, too.

Jesus offers us our quiet place. Does the 23rd Psalm sound familiar? *"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters."* Jesus knows that we walk through the valley. He knows that we struggle and crave His protection. *"Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me...surely goodness and loving kindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

Yes, you were chosen to teach and you were chosen to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, the spa of quiet waters.

Question for the Week:

When you find yourself at your wits end and ready to “wash your hands of it all” where do you turn for the refreshment and renewal that you so desperately need? Even in my struggles, will I allow others see the hand of God upon my life?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you Lord Jesus, for knowing what I need and for giving me the permission to care for myself. Help me be strong and honorable in the profession for which you have called me. In You, Lord, I stand on Holy ground.

This Devotion was written by Susan Lande, St. Luke’s Director of Christian Preschool, Long Beach, California.

July 29, 2012
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: John 6: 1-21

"It is I, do not be afraid."

Has fear ever kept you from accomplishing great things in your classroom or life? Are you a person who lives out of scarcity or abundance? Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and walking on water gives us a glimpse into overcoming fear and living abundantly.

Need more proof? Abraham lied about his wife, Sarah—fear. Moses argued with God at the burning bush about his inability to speak well—fear. Jeremiah told God he was only a boy—fear. How about Jesus' disciples who never seem to get what the master is trying to teach—fear. And finally, there is us. Are we living our life in fear or faith, in scarcity or abundance?

The next time fear is about to sabotage another opportunity for you, stop what you are doing, close your eyes, take a deep breath and picture Jesus saying to you, *"It is I, do not be afraid."* Claim the promise of his love that casts out all fear and start living the life of abundance he desires for you.

Questions for the Week:

What fears keep you from living abundantly? Is it difficult for you to trust the promise of abundant living in these tough economic times?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to help you bind all fears that keep you from living a full and abundant life.

This devotion was contributed by Jeffery S. Gallen, Goodyear, Arizona, who currently is serving as pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church.

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