

The Vital Role of Christian Education As a Blessing to Our Synod

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In the 22nd chapter of Proverbs the Holy Spirit caused King Solomon to record words of divine wisdom that are indeed precious to us in directing us to a guideline that has as much to do with the earthly future of our Church of the Lutheran Confession as it does with the eternal future of our children. Although we know that passage well, we can never hear it too often: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." That word of God sums up the whole purpose of Christian training. There is only one way to salvation, through the Christ of the Scriptures. That is the one and only way we want our children to go. And the most precious thing we can do for them in this life is to teach them that way so thoroughly that they will not have departed from it before the Lord calls them out of this life. It also follows as a natural deduction that the more Christian training we can give our children, the greater is the chance that they will never depart from God's way of salvation.

In families where this concern is foremost, that training already begins while the child is sitting in mother's lap and on father's knee. This is an important time. These are impressionable years. What children learn during these years they will never really forget. And should they ever wander from the one path later in life, who knows but what the early training of these childhood years may again unite them with their Savior on their deathbed.

But after only too few years of this intimate home training, formal education outside the home begins, and with it come increasing dangers and temptations to depart from the path. Other influence besides that of the parents begins to make itself felt upon the children. Fortunate indeed are those parents who have a Christian day school available. If this is not possible, then parents must be especially alert, following up carefully on everything their children learn in public school, helping them sort out the good from the bad, both correcting them and directing them. At every turn Satan will use the public school philosophy to distort and dilute, yes to destroy, the truths you parents have taught your children. Humanistic thinking and morality, already surprisingly prevalent in the early years of elementary public education, will do its best to wipe out the saving truths and the morals you have inculcated.

in your children. Therefore the home must always be the hub and communications center—sifting, filtering and guiding—so that your children continue to see clearly the Way of Life. You want nothing to lead them from that path so carefully impressed upon them in their pre-school years at home.

Even when children are attending a Christian day school, the home remains critical in the child's spiritual direction. True, the day school serves as a most wonderful aid to the parents. But they dare never for one moment forget that God's finger points right at the home. He lays the responsibility on father and mother.

In fact, no Christian parents dare ever relax their concern and consider the battle won or their children safe. When parents become negligent, Satan shouts with glee, as Luther says, for that escalates his chances of getting those children to depart from God's way and walk in the devil's way.

These dangers increase sharply as the elementary education is completed and the high school years begin. Children spend more time away from home, at school and with their friends. For some, peer pressure becomes overwhelming, but even the strong cannot escape it altogether. The sinful flesh exerts itself more powerfully, independent thinking begins to make itself felt, often in the form of rebellion against parental authority. Remember how at that age we often thought ourselves wiser than our parents? Times have not changed. At no time is a solid Christian home more important than during these teen years, as the immoral morality of humanism begins to exert itself with full pressure, seeking to convince the child that doing his own thing is doing the right thing. The "situation ethics" taught today knows no ethical code. The student is told that in any situation, whatever it may be, he is to think about it, decide what seems to be the best solution, what will give him the most pleasure, etc., and then his decision will be ethically right—for that time. Next time the answer could be just the opposite, but it would be right because that is what seemed the best answer. God and the moral code of the ten commandments are trampled under foot and supplanted by fickle human judgment.

It is during this time in their children's lives that truly consecrated parents in our CLC give thanks to a gracious God for providing us with two Immanuel Lutheran High Schools, the one at Eau Claire, the other at Mankato.

By no means do these schools offer a way by which weary parents can lay upon someone else's shoulders the responsibility for the Christian education of their children. That responsibility remains right where God put it—on father and mother. On the other hand, for those parents who are committed to doing all they can, no better assistance can be found than the influence of these high schools, where God's Word is not only the guide for all moral behavior but is also the chief tool of the dedicated teachers who are devoting their energies to helping the parents establish those teenagers so firmly on the path of salvation that they will never depart from it.

However, at this point we often hear a grave concern being voiced by parents: "Oh, we want so much to send our child, but we really do not see how we can afford it. There just seems to be no way." And so very often this financial concern indeed seems justified. For parents who face this dilemma, I have no practical solution to offer other than fervent prayer. By this time in my life, I have accumulated many years of observation. Not once have I seen it happen that parents who approached this problem with prayerful determination were unable to fulfill their dream of sending their children to a Christian high school and college. When the time came, taking it day by day, they were always able to pay those bills which had looked so staggering when they had been thinking about them a few years earlier. Our flesh plays its part here too. Even for the most disciplined Christians, it is still a matter of planning for our priorities. There are always some plans that can be set aside, some things that can be done without. At any rate, if your desire is for continuing your children's education on the high school and college levels, pray about it with them, talk about it with them, strive for it with them, and then trust that the Savior will bring it to pass.

By the time high school years are finished many, perhaps most, students have decided upon their vocation. If it is to be a pastor or teacher, they will naturally continue at ILC. If they have chosen another field, then whether they have been attending at Immanuel or a public high school, there is so much Christian training to be gained and little or nothing to be lost in scholarship credits by taking the two-year college course at ILC.

Thus by concentrating on Christian education for their children, our dedicated parents have done their best to assure that their God-given offspring will not depart from the path of salvation on which they have established them.

However, in all this we have not yet said one word about that to which the title of this paper points: The Vital Role of Christian Education As a Blessing to Our Synod. In reality, it is not necessary to say much about that. If our concern is for the souls of our children, such concern automatically also serves as a blessing to our synod. Namely, even if our parents are not aware of it, in their desire for Christian education for their children, they turn out a by-product that results in a very great blessing to our CLC, to all its members, and to those still to be gathered through our mission work. Or it could be said this way: the greater our dedication to Christian education, the greater is the chance that our CLC will survive in its present form as a conservative, Bible-oriented church body, clinging to the unadulterated Truth and continuing to possess the Gospel of salvation as a precious message for successive generations.

In this 500th anniversary year of Martin Luther's birth we would do well to remember that he always saw the grave danger of falling away from the Truth and the all-encompassing need to remain a people faithful unto God's Word. As such he always stressed Christian education as the answer. Here is such a statement from one of his sermons:

If this misfortune (of becoming a false church body) is to be prevented, it can be done only by teaching and training our precious youth in the right and Christian manner. Then, when presently we lay down our head and sleep, they will step into our place and will not only set forth right doctrine to the people and impress it with all diligence but will also uphold it against the sectarian churches and false teachers. It is a very great grace when our pulpits and schools are supplied with persons who preach and teach the Word aright and purely. But besides these there must also be lay people who defend the doctrine and oppose heretics, so that the doctrine is not adulterated by them. For this purpose schools must be maintained; from them come the people who can contend for doctrine.

[Plass: What Luther Says, #2975]

This lays before us a reason, at once practical and also important, for seeing to it that ILC is maintained in our midst. We speak about it often at conferences and Coordinating Council meetings, but do we bring this concern to our people as much as we ought to? We worry about the decrease in enrollment at ILC during the past few years. The cost of operating the school remains about the same, but as tuition revenues decrease our synod's subsidy to the school must increase. That robs precious dollars from our mission program, but we have to maintain ILC. If our synod is to survive it needs ILC; and that is not a statement of pride but a concern for sur-

vival. We need to do everything possible to preserve our heritage of the Truth for future generations. Luther knew only too well how quickly the Gospel pulls stakes and moves elsewhere when a particular area or country begins to take a lackadaisical attitude toward it. When that happens, there may be many churches remaining and much preaching—but no Gospel to bring the news of Christ's redemption. The last thing we want is for our CLC to deteriorate into a heterodox church body with nothing of value to offer to our own or to others.

But there is also another reason that makes ILC so vital to the very existence of the CLC, the need to prepare future teachers and pastors to replace those who on account of age continue to leave the scene. Ours is not the only small church body that has been formed by such as left their former association due to doctrinal errors that crept in. There have been many. If such groups do not soon establish their own higher schools and seminary, they gradually disintegrate. Some of these groups have at times sent their young people to schools and seminaries of less conservative churches for Christian training. But history shows this to be disastrous. Either a physical disintegration sets in [If we can go to school there, why should we be separate?], or a gradual slipping into false doctrine takes place. Obviously, we need to do our own training of future workers, yes, and also of future laymen in the church.

As concerns the activity of our lay people in the church, pastors throughout the CLC generally report a similar observation, namely that people with good Christian training in their youth or with ILC background seem to become the reliable and active members of their congregations, whether it be out of concern for preserving true doctrine, for the many tasks that need doing right within the local congregation, for missions or for contributions.

As with all such generalizations, there are exceptions and disappointments. But praise be to God, such disappointing exceptions are more than balanced by other exceptions—happy ones. Time and again some member who had little or no Bible training in childhood, or who may have become a Christian as an adult, will be led by the Holy Spirit to show a very joyous dedication to upholding the Truth and proclaiming its message.

Nevertheless, the general rule still applies, the greater the amount of

Christian training poured into a child during the adolescent years, the more productive will he be in fruit-bearing during the later years.

Therefore, no matter from which angle we approach the matter of Christian discipline and education, ILC and its continuation is indeed an important and a most necessary blessing for our CLC—a blessing that follows as a result of our dedication to Christian schools. Let us never forget our prayers of praise to almighty God for permitting our small church body to have the wonderful opportunities for Christian education that are to be found within our CLC at ever level, whether elementary, high school, college or seminary.

We can think of no more suitable closing statement than another word of wisdom from the pen of Martin Luther:

When schools flourish, matters stand well, and the church is saved. Let them call us doctors and masters if they please, but youth is the seed and the foundation of the church. Where would other doctors and masters come from after we are dead if there were no schools? We are compelled to have schools in the church. God preserves the church through schools.

[Plass: What Luther Says, #5557] ---

Truly God has richly showered His grace upon us through our schools and through Christian parents willing to make personal sacrifices in order to send their children to these schools.

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