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Disciples for Life

by Heath Trampe

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, the resurrected Jesus tells His followers: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV). These verses are often referred to as the Great Commission. While several verbs are present, there is only one true imperative: to make disciples. Jesus encourages His followers to accomplish this by going, baptizing, and teaching. He also promises to be with them—*and us*—through it all.

In my role as the Director of Discipleship Ministry for the LCMS Office of National Mission, I often begin presentations with these words from Jesus. I then highlight the two primary aspects of my work: gathering the scattered and shepherding the gathered. This distinction captures the heart of Jesus' words in Matthew and provides a great foundation for our own lives in Christ.

My family attends a church with a vibrant and growing Lutheran school. Both of my boys currently attend Lutheran schools, and I have served in multiple parish settings that included Lutheran schools. My wife is a product of



Kathryn Brewer

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an LCMS grade school, and I am a graduate of the Concordia University System. These schools, along with the educators who make them so special, played a significant role in preparing us to serve the church as adults. My hope for this article is to highlight what made these experiences so transformative and to encourage current educators and students to "encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11, ESV).

One way our Lutheran educators have blessed us is by nurturing their own lives in Christ. In his seminal book on evangelism in the LCMS, *Every One His Witness*, Rev. Dr. Mark Wood writes, “There is no better preparation to be a witness than to be active in the Word and Sacrament ministry of your congregation” (Wood, p. 147). The work of many Lutheran educators often leans more toward educating Christians (shepherding the gathered) than sharing the Gospel with non-Christians (gathering the scattered), but both activities certainly occur throughout a career. A great starting point is time spent in God’s Word.

Being in the Word can be as simple as reading the Bible privately, studying it with others, and hearing it read and proclaimed during worship. It can also be as vibrant and complex as reading the Bible in its original languages or studying commentaries written by experts. However you choose to spend time in the Scriptures, this practice is essential for Lutheran educators. Your students will benefit greatly as the Word flows through you and into their lives: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10, ESV).

Jesus encourages baptizing in addition to teaching, and for good reason. In Baptism, we find our identity. Pastor Ted Doering, in his book *Walking Together: Simple Steps for Discipleship*, writes: “In a life of discipleship, we will struggle with losing track of our identity. There will be many things that seek



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to step in and tell you what makes you, you. Baptism lays hold of that claim and will not let it be wrestled away” (Doering, p. 84-85). Baptism is a physical reminder that we belong to Jesus (Romans 6:3-5). Teachers who are baptized and who speak openly and biblically about Baptism as God’s gift will help students understand its importance for their lives as well.

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One common lament from parents, and a phenomenon I've observed in the lives of my own boys, is the modern pervasiveness of information. Our children are digesting so much information—much more than we experienced growing up. While I applaud parents' efforts to reduce the amount of time spent watching television or using tablets or smartphones, it can be an uphill battle.

We postponed buying our son a smartphone until he was 15. By that time, he found it challenging to keep up with his classmates due to the vast amount of information shared through various apps. So, if we cannot keep technology away from our kids indefinitely, how can we still raise them to be disciples of Jesus?

While much of the media created for and consumed by younger generations is less than savory, we have an opportunity to first fill ourselves with the good things of God. This happens most effectively when the home works in tandem with the school and the church.

Children and teenagers need the Word of God just as much as adults do. Although this statement may seem obvious to write (and to read, I would wager), it is also an encouragement for how we should spend our precious hours each day. Paul encourages the church in Galatia with vibrant language: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23, ESV). This fruit is good to eat! While much of the media created for and consumed by younger generations is less than savory, we have an opportunity to first fill ourselves with the good things of God. This happens most effectively when the home works in tandem with the school and the church.

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My family's experiences attending Lutheran schools have enabled each of us to share vivid stories of Scripture being taught with authority and enthusiasm. For my wife and me, these Bible lessons and Gospel encouragements echoed the wisdom of our parents at home and our pastors at church. They created a beautiful rhythm in our lives that reinforced our Biblical worldview in the face of many alternative messages. We work hard to provide the same environment for our own boys.

Some children (or rather, their parents) are unable or unwilling to attend church regularly. Many children do not hear about God or the Bible in their homes. These realities underscore the importance of discipleship in the classroom. As students learn about history, mathematics, and the world around them, they are also strengthened by the promises found in God's Word. This good work begins with the educator, who has filled his or her own cup through worship, prayer, and being in the Scriptures.

Many of my favorite memories from serving as a parish pastor come from time spent in the classroom. The schools graciously allowed me and other pastors to teach subjects such as religion and catechesis, providing an excellent opportunity for relationship building. As we imparted God's timeless truth—something every pastor loves to do—we reinforced for the students that the pastor was another trusted adult from whom they could receive real answers to real questions. This also reinforced for both students and parents that the church and school were partners in ministry.



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When healthy partnerships between school and church are also reflected in the home, students are powerfully equipped to be resilient witnesses of Christ's love in a culture that is increasingly turning away from God's Word and Sacraments.



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How can we encourage this important work? I wholeheartedly believe that we have excellent educators in the LCMS. My encouragement to these educators is to take an active role in your congregation and to regularly be in the Word of God. Remember your Baptism daily and receive the Lord's Supper often. As you consider your students—which is a modern equivalent for the word “disciple” —think of ways to pour into them what you first received. Reflect on how this can be done in a way that reinforces (a word I intentionally repeat often) the love of Christ.

Another powerful tool at our disposal is memorization—a word that may cause dread in your household or classroom. Even as a pastor teaching confirmation, I had to be mindful of different learning abilities and be flexible when it was necessary. I can't imagine how challenging it must be for full-time educators. Some students can memorize material with little effort, while others feel as though they are being asked to climb a steep mountain.

The true purpose of memorization is to allow the Word of Christ to dwell richly within us (Colossians 3:16) and to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105) —a light that guides us through the valley of the shadow of death to our eternal home in heaven.

We understand that the purpose of memorization isn't to punish or make classes more difficult, although it may sometimes feel that way. Its true purpose is to allow the Word of Christ to dwell richly within us (Colossians 3:16) and to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105) —a light that guides us through the valley of the shadow of death to our eternal home in heaven. I have personally witnessed this in the lives of my own boys. My youngest son has gone from feeling anxious about memorizing the Bible and the *Small Catechism* to looking forward to the challenge. We encourage this practice in our home and give much credit to his teachers and pastors!



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Recognizing that every school, congregation, and community is unique, there are many helpful practices that can be encouraged. For my part, I have always promoted memorization, especially of Scripture, hymns, and the *Small Catechism*. I have consistently advocated for a robust partnership among school, church, and home. I have encouraged teachers—and all Christian parents—to live in the Word and to let the Word flow through them as they educate the next generation.

Many great resources are available, and it would be beyond the scope of this article to list them all. However, I would like to highlight some excellent offerings from the Office of

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National Mission, most of which are available at no cost to LCMS churches and schools. One resource that may be of particular interest is an upcoming workshop from Discipleship Ministry titled “Beyond the Classroom: Outreach through Lutheran Schools.” As the title suggests, this workshop will encourage teamwork between schools and congregations that will bless the surrounding community or communities.

The workshop is expected to be completed by 2027, and we pray it will bear much fruit as churches and schools work together to impact the next generation.

Jesus commissions His church to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching. He promises to be with us, through it all. As Paul proclaimed to the church in Corinth: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6, ESV). May God continue to bless our faithful efforts in His name!



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Resources from the LCMS Office of National Mission:

ONM Family Ministry Resources:

Many Devotional and Bible Study Resources

Created Male and Female Resources

Being a Christian Parent Guide

Mealtime Conversation Starters

Catechism Memory Cards

Days of Creation Memory Cards

10 Commandments Memory Cards

... and much more!

For more information, please visit [Family Ministry Resources - LCMS Resources](#).

ONM Discipleship Ministry Resources:

Every One His Witness[®]

Lutheran Evangelism

Evangelism workshop with a core module and 13 context modules covering a range of topics from witnessing to dechurched adult children and grieving individuals as well as Mormons, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Motivated by Love: Every One His Witness for Youth

Congregational Assessment of Development/Decline Status (CADDs)

Congregational Self-Study

Serving in God's Mission

Strategic Planning

Shepherding Our Strays

Reconnecting Disconnected Members

Connect to Disciple

Community Outreach

Coming Soon!

Beyond the Classroom

Community Outreach for Churches with Schools

Members of One Body

Helping all Members find their Place in the Mission of the Congregation

For more information, please visit <https://www.lcms.org/discipleship>



Rev. Dr. Heath Trampe serves as the Director of Discipleship Ministry for the LCMS Office of National Mission. In this role, Heath oversees Witness,

Outreach, Revitalization, Stewardship, and more. Prior to this, Heath served congregations as a pastor in Indiana, Nebraska, and North Dakota. He has been married to Andrea (Aunnee) for 20 years and they have two sons. He would love to connect with you!

All Quoted Scripture: [ESV](#)®

Citations:

Doering, T. (2021). *Walking together: Simple steps for discipleship*. Concordia Publishing House.

Wood, M. (2017). *Every one His witness: Lutheran evangelism core module: Workbook*. Concordia Publishing House.

Review, Reflect, Resolve

- **What actions are you taking, or could take, to daily be in the Word of God?**
Similarly, how can the Word of God be a daily part of students' lives?
- **How can we encourage a healthy relationship among churches, schools, and homes?**
- **What are some of the greatest challenges facing Lutheran educators who want to disciple their students?**



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