Precious in God’s Sight

ELCA Schools and Learning Centers
2015-2016 Devotional Guide

Evangelical Lutheran Education Association

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To the Community of ELCA Schools and Learning Centers,

Another school year is upon us. My grandmother lived to be 93 years old and when I was a teenager, I asked her what the most amazing things were that she had seen in her lifetime. Being born in 1895, there was a whole list of inventions I thought would probably be on the list. She said there were two things. One was roads—when she and others first drove cars in northern Minnesota, it could only be done effectively and safely during the few months of summer and fall when it was dry with no mud, and of course no snow. All that concrete giving you something stable and dry to drive on and the development of multilane and multilevel freeways was mind-boggling to her.

The second thing was time itself. She said that everyone always tells you that time goes faster as you get older, but when you’re young, you never believe them. Even though she had roughly 30 years in retirement and from what I saw didn’t do much except bake cookies, go shopping, play cards, and be my favorite person in the whole world, she said time flew by the older she got.

Now that I’m CLOSE to the age Grandma was when she retired, I think I agree. Time does seem to go faster and faster. Because here we are again entering another school year.

My hope is that you will use “Precious in God’s Sight” for staff devotion and meeting times, and any other time you deem appropriate. Arranging for writers and editing this annual guide is one of the delights of my job. It is humbling to read the many contributions made by educators and pastors from around the country and often, from around the world. Thank you to all who have contributed over the years, and when the call for contributors goes out next year, don’t be shy—everyone has a story to share!

Each subscribing member of ELEA, as well as each contributor, receives a print copy of this annual devotional guide, but don’t forget that free downloadable copies are also always available on our website with a link from our home page—www.elcaschools.org.

So, use in your ministry and remember that you, too, are precious in God’s sight, as are the children and families you serve.

May God’s amazing love and grace surround you in all you do,

Gayle Denny, Executive Director
Evangelical Lutheran Education Association
As we approach a new school year, we come together unified as a staff and as the body of Christ. We come together for the children of God has entrusted to us. God has given and we have accepted the calling and the gifts that we need to do His work. “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received”. (Eph 4:1) Thankfully we have different gifts to create one body. It takes each of us with our individual and collective gifts to teach these dear children. Whether we teach infants, high school or anything in between, our gifts are used for good to build the Kingdom God. Since we all have different gifts, it requires us to depend on one another for help and support to be complete. “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph 4:16)

Questions for the Week:
What do we do each day to lift one another up? How do we as a staff demonstrate to our children and parents that we are one body?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Heavenly Father, thank you for the gifts that you have given each of us. Help us to use them to further your kingdom. Show us how to be bold in our faith and how to be a light of your love for our children and one another. May we seek you in everything we do. With all thanks and praise. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Sherri Bishop, who has been in the field of early childhood education for over 35 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.
“Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Sharing is an important concept especially for three, four and five year old children but it is also true that it is a life long lesson that needs to be continually reviewed. When we as friends, family or strangers share a meal together—be it a snack or the Lord's Supper—all of us come together as God's children. No matter what our differences might be, all of humanity is Precious in God's Sight.

In our schools, communities and homes we are called by Jesus, who is the world's Bread of Life, to share in a mission of love for all of God's creation. We are called to be...“kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven us.” (Ephesians 4: 32)

As Christian educators, let us continue in our actions and our words to share with our beloved children and the world around them, the love of the true manna from heaven, Jesus Christ.

Questions for the Week:
How can we help our students to be kind, compassionate and forgiving of one another in the midst of our differences? How can we as “imitators of Christ” model for our students God's call to “live in love as Christ loved us”? (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear God, Guide each of us to share the love of the true bread of life, Jesus Christ, so that each and everyone of your children knows that they are precious in your sight. Amen.

This devotion is contributed by Gaye Rodriguey, who recently retired after 21 years with His Kids Preschool in Oak Harbor, Washington.
Thought for the Week: Ephesians 5: 15-20

Sometimes it is easy for me to get caught up in all the tasks that need to get done and I forget that the reason I do what I do is because God has called me. I get to work with children and with teachers and have an impact on their lives for God, and I truly love it! How precious is the thought, that the Lord called me to serve Him? From time to time I think, “I am here to show the Lord’s love to students, teachers and families? Me?” I become overwhelmed with the realization that my heavenly Father would give me such an amazing task.

One of the things I love during our school day is when, at the end of our mornings, the classes have their devotional time and closing prayer. I love hearing the voices of our sweet little ones requesting praise songs, asking to pray, or asking for prayer for family and friends. Hearing the voices of children singing songs of praise with great joy and praying reminds me every time just how significant our job in shaping young lives with the good news of Jesus is.

Question for the Week:
Are you taking time to make a melody in your heart to the Lord?

Prayer for the Week:
Thank you Lord for the wisdom you make available to us and the filling of the Spirit, so we can sing, praise and give thanks for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Denise K. Egge of Visalia, California and ChristKids Preschool and Child Care Director for 2 years.
August 23, 2015
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Joshua 24: 14a

“Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.”

In our busy lives how often do we take the time required to revere or honor anyone - especially God? I often have difficulty completing a 5 minute prayer as I begin my day. I begin and immediately the thoughts in my head just take off in multiple directions. I believe this also applies to moments when I desire to honor our God. Does this happen to you?

How can we more fully give God our devotion? How will our children learn to honor God? How can we be sure that they will desire to be faithful to God throughout their lives?

There are no guarantees, I suppose. However, there is one thing that we can do, day in and day out. We can demonstrate our love of God in all that we do. That is by far the best way to teach a child what we grown-ups believe; what is proper; what is best. When we serve our fellow human-beings with love and care, we are also serving God with sincerity and faithfulness. Children will see us modeling these behaviors and they in turn will most likely imitate what they see.

May we all be encouraged to show reverence, sincerity, and faithfulness to our Lord God, wherever we are and whoever we spend time with. I believe this is the best gift we can give our children and the best assurance we can give ourselves that children will serve God with faithfulness.

Questions for the Week:
How do I demonstrate my love of God? How do I serve God with sincerity and faithfulness? How can my students learn to follow God’s command?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, please help me order my days that I might set aside time each day to revere you, to pray to you and to serve you and human-kind with sincerity and faithfulness. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Julie Peck, retiring after 16 years as Preschool Director at Our Redeemer’s Lutheran Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten, Helena, Montana
Verse 9 of this passage was the Lord’s directive to the children of Israel and also to us today. The first classroom was the home where the children learned of God’s love. Their teachers were family members who lived in the home. The boys were required to go to the synagogue to be taught by the Rabbi. The Lord instructed them to “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:6 This is God’s promise to us today also.

New Testament education was similar, with the home being the first place children learned about faith and the synagogue being the boys training. Mothers knew that it was important to hear what Jesus taught and brought their children to him. He blessed them, loved them and assured the mothers there was a place for them in heaven too, proving that they were “Precious in God’s sight”. Matthew 19:14

Today’s faith education begins in the home for some children but not all. Rarely are there generations there to teach the children. Grandparents may live many miles away. For children who do not have any training at home, the church becomes a teaching place for God’s children (big and little) to learn about the faith and Jesus’ love—often the only place they will hear about God and the Bible.

What an awesome responsibility and challenge we have in our schools, colleges and seminaries to teach the faith to all of God’s precious children. Let us begin this year with a goal to accept the challenge that God places before us to live and teach the faith to the next generation for they are “Precious in God’s sight.”

**Question for the Week:**
Do you have a plan to teach the children this school year about God and His love? Who will these children share that love with—parents, even grandparents and maybe their own children in the future?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Thank you God for the opportunity to teach children through your Word. Help us to live out our faith so all know Your love for them.

*This devotion contributed by Marge Robison, retired AIM, teacher, principal, ELEA board member and recipient of the Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award 2010.*
September 6, 2015
Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Isaiah 35: 4-7a

These words from the prophet Isaiah, provided by the Lectionary for the week, may seem not applicable to us who are called to serve children and families. However as we are in the first weeks of a new school year, certain phrases and ideas are powerful reminders of God’s promises to those who accept the challenges of the classroom.

“Say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come”” No matter, if you are in your first or fortieth year of teaching, each year brings uncertainties about how to meet the diverse needs of children, what the parents will be like, and are there sufficient resources to support effective teaching. God’s promise is to come and stay with you every step of the way.

“Eyes be opened, ears... be unstopped, “’lame leaping like a deer, the mute tongue shout for joy”’ It is our goal to open the eyes and unstop the ears of our children to the wonders of God’s world, revealed in nature and the hearts and minds of those in our educational setting. What greater joy is there than to watch a child bursting with enthusiasm in the midst of discovery. A holy noise indeed!

“Water gushing forth, streams, pools, and bubbling springs” This is more than the water tables of the preschool, the drinking fountains of the elementary school, or the science sinks of the high school. The waters of our Baptism refresh us every day with the life-giving Grace of God, and the Peace that passes understanding.

Questions for the Week:
What is your greatest concern for this school year and how can God’s presence support you as serve each and every day?

Personal Prayer for the Week: Lord, help me to remember that You will come and stay with me to open the eyes, ears and hearts of children, parents and fellow staff members. Help me to rejoice daily in the wonders of your world and its people.

This devotion was contributed by Hugh Kress, Waupaca, Wisconsin who served Lutheran schools as a teacher, principal and ELEA leader for 45 years and in retirement as an ELEA accreditation team chair and teacher in his congregation’s confirmation/youth programs.
September 13, 2015
Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Isaiah 50:4

“The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.”

Dear Teachers, I look at your faces at the end of the day. Sometimes I see weariness; sometimes eagerness to get home; sometimes the beginnings of worries that home will add to your day; sometimes elation over how well the kids learned today or how well your out-of-work life is going. Often a combination of all of these.

As teachers you see weariness in the faces of some children, worry in others, joy in others – so too in the faces of your co-workers. What is the word that a good teacher uses to sustain the weary? A gesture, a facial expression, an unexpected act of kindness? Listening with patience and love? Or perhaps an actual word of wisdom, caring or concern.

It takes great wisdom and courage to “sustain the weary with a word.” So Isaiah reminds us that God wakens us each day with ears to listen and to learn and thus to discern.

Young Elise – as I imagine Jesus did in his childhood—comes to school each morning with a listening ear. She soaks up the learning, the new words, the new ideas like a sponge. Would that we all came into school each morning with those ears! The old German proverb is right, “you never learn everything.” So God gives us the courage and strength to “listen as those who are taught.”

Questions for the Week:
How might you sustain the weary? How might your ears be awakened?

Prayer for the Week:
Pray for teachers who are weary. Give thanks for those good things in our lives that give us joy. Pray for listening ears.

Pastor Beth Orling is serving Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Port Angeles, WA, as interim pastor. She gives thanks for the teachers and children in the Holy Trinity pre-school.
“Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ... But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits... Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? ... Draw near to God...”

Conflicts and disputes – we all experience them. We all cause them; we all wish our days could be fully peaceable and gentle. But we know that is unrealistic so we seek comfort in these words given to us by God.

We strive to be wise and understanding. We attempt to be gentle and full of mercy. Then we come to the awful staff meeting or the angry parent. It’s easy to lose sight of pure thoughts. We dig in our heels instead of being willing to yield.

All we can do some days is establish the mantra – Draw near to God, Draw near to God, Draw near to God. That thought reminds us that we are truly precious in God’s sight. God is the one who helps us make it through the conflicts and disputes, though perhaps not always in the way we might have thought.

There will always be upsetting days and encounters with people. But God stays with us, holding us and guiding us to take deep breaths and find peace in all interactions.

**Question for the Week:**
What technique do you employ to calm yourself when encountering difficult situations?

**Prayer for the Week:**
Precious God, we thank you for giving us the Son of Peace. We know that Jesus encountered difficult people so we look to you and to Jesus for strength to get through troubling times.

*Phyllis Castens Wiederhoeft is Executive Director of ALDE, a partner with ELCA Schools and Learning Centers for the IGNITE Conference, February 21 – 24, 2016.*
Thought for the Week:

numbers 11: 4-6, 10-16, 24-29 and James 5: 13-20

“Are any among you suffering? They should pray” (James 5:13)

“Our strength is dried up,” cry the Israelites to Moses in our first reading this week. It’s easy for teachers to relate to that reality. Amidst the pull and push of demands on our energy—lesson plans, classroom management, parent meetings, administrative burdens, not to mention the juggling of home responsibilities—it’s little wonder we feel that our strength has dried up.

Moses, in turn, has his own complaint, which he candidly directs to God: “I am not able to carry all these people alone, for they are too heavy for me.” Let’s be honest with ourselves, sometimes the children in our care, their parents, our colleagues at work, even members of our own family prove too heavy for us to carry alone.

But all is not lost. “Are any among you suffering? They should pray,” writes James. The advice could not be more sound. When matters begin to overwhelm us—when the demands of work and family seem to consume us—we need to retreat, find a moment of quiet, and turn to the Lord.

As Moses illustrated, the prayer should start with honesty. Acknowledge the problem and present it to God. “I’m not up to the task. The burden is too heavy. HELP!” For Moses, the Lord provided immediate relief, anointing seventy elders to help him tend to the Israelites. In the same way, the Lord—in whose sight you are precious—can find help for us, sometimes in unexpected places. But first, we must ask.

Question for the Week:
Are you among those who are suffering? What must you do?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Pray for the grace to acknowledge your burdens honestly and to turn them over to the Lord.

This devotion was contributed by Joe McTighe, executive director of CAPE, the Council for American Private Education.
Hebrews tells us that the gift of Jesus is the way God is choosing to speak to us in these last days. What exactly does this mean? First, it means we are so precious in God’s eyes God desires to communicate with us and Christ is the way God communicates with us. Second, it means that the words of Christ, the life of Christ, Christ’s values and story are all to be studied in order to hear the voice of God.

As a pastor who worked for many years with children I have also learned that they glean God’s voice through the adults around them. They hear God’s voice through us. I have heard children need at least six adults in their life to grow up healthy. If we learn a child’s name and speak to that child, he or she learns that God cares about that child.

We are the body of Christ, when we touch a child in a healthy way the child learns how God can touch him or her. When we give a child our time that child experiences how God desires to share in their life.

The closest a child comes to God today may very well be in our words and actions. When I was a child I walked into my father’s room and witnessed him on his knees by his bed praying. I was astonished to see my father on his knees but in that moment I learned that God could and does communicate with us and I learned that my own father believed that to be true. It altered in a positive way what I believed about God and my own father.

**Question for the Week:**
What action have you done to or for a child this day that has shown them God’s love.

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Thank you Lord for all the children who have been placed into my life, help me to be a holy example to all children. In Christ’s name. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Rev. Marcia M Thompson, retired pastor living in The Villages, Florida*
Thought for the Week: Hebrews 4: 15

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

I was an awful student, under motivated, with an insufficient family history of success in school. I struggled to make grades not because I was not smart enough but because I was sure that my academic growth didn’t matter to anyone.

Anyone but Mrs. Glotzober, who knew that as a 7th grader I had not been properly introduced to Jesus. My growth did matter to Mr. Nitz, drama leader and social studies teacher, who saw things in me that I did not see in myself. Also to Professor Ralph Gehrke who walked into my dorm room because I had decided to skip my freshman dinner.

Each of these Christian teachers somehow knew that I needed their touch as much as I needed their instruction. What do you know about the students in your room? I am sure you know a lot. You can tell when a student has not had enough sleep; you see the signs when there is strife at home. You feel the frustration from that child who learns differently.

Our Lord knows about the struggles in our lives as well. “He was tempted in every way”, tempted to give up, tempted to give less than His best, and tempted to feel as if He were abandoned. He also knows the power of the plan of salvation that establishes meaning in our lives. He knows that it is the action of a gracious God that empowers each of us, student and teacher with the ability to impact the lives of those we touch each day.

Take a minute before class today and take inventory of the faces that are in front of you each day. Search their eyes and their souls as Jesus searches us. Help them to see that they have the strength and support of the High Priest who sacrificed Himself. This is the message of salvation that powers our ministry.
Questions for the Week:
How do I relate to the experiences of my students? What is common to our journey? How can I show the love that lead me to Christ to the young people I will touch today?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Jesus, I know you understand where I am at. You know the joy of friendships and the pains of hunger. You wandered in the desert just as I wander through my lesson plans and parent conferences. Let your example guide me on my path. Stand by me when I rest and run beside me when my days are full of challenge and excitement.

This devotion was contributed by Don Gillingham, Executive Director, Rockford Lutheran Schools, Rockford, Illinois
October 18, 2015
Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Mark 10: 35-45

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The story in the verses above begins with James and John telling Jesus, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” They then request to sit on Jesus’ right and left hand side in heaven. Does this sound like some of the parents you work with? “Ms. Director, I want you to place my child in the four year old class. He’s two years old but already knows his letters!” Are they asking for what is best for their child, or are they wanting their child to be first? Parents are worried. Will my child be successful in school? In some school districts, an increased emphasis on tests and outcomes has put even more pressure on our communities. The motto of the day seems to be, “We have to win!”

Every day, educators are faced with decisions concerning what is best for the children they serve. How does one stay true to developmentally appropriate practice when there seems to be conflicting goals from parents and school and state administrations?

Jesus reminds James, John, and us that our priority is to serve God, not to win the best seat in the house. We don’t have to be the perfect teacher, director, principal, parent, or pastor. Serving God frees us to look at each precious child individually with the gifts that they possess. Being a servant leader allows us to be patient and kind to the families in our communities. It literally takes the pressure of “performing to win” and replaces it with the comfort of “all are precious in His sight.”

Question of the Week:
Do you feel called by God to be a servant leader? If so, how does that help you in your work? Does being a servant leader make you a strong leader or weak leader?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord God, give me the heart and mind of a faithful servant. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jenny James, Director of First Lutheran Preschool in Ellicott City, Maryland.
"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear..."

Without using the word "faith" psalm 46 is one of the most magnificent expressions of faith ever penned. It is the kind of psalm that is very appropriate on this festival of the Reformation. The writer is reminding us that strength for the present is not only found in God's creative power and control of history but also in the assurance that he has the final word. What a powerful promise of how precious in his sight we are. Yet, despite the assurance of God being our refuge and strength I see evidence of Christians living in fear.

Think about the children you teach. Are you assuring them that fear (false evidence appearing real) is usually unfounded, that God's perfect love casts out all fear, and that each one of them is precious in his sight? Listen to the refrain of this psalm: The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Wow! What a promise. When fear is understood as the thief that keeps us from fully living our lives, then how shall we teach our children to live? By trusting God as our refuge and strength and living without fear.

Questions for the Week:
What are your fears? How do fears keep you from living fully? When you name your fears what happens?

Action for the Week:
Write down all your fears on a piece of paper and while praying the prayer of the week, either shred the paper or burn it.

Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, help me to let go of the darkness of fear and to live in the light of your gracious love where you are our refuge and strength and call us precious in your sight. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jeffery S. Gallen, senior pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Goodyear, Arizona
November 1, 2015

All Saints Sunday

Thought for the Week: Revelation 21: 1-6b

So often fixated upon by those who use fear to deepen Christian piety, and so often neglected and shunned by those whose faith could benefit from a deepening of piety (guess which of those two extremes Lutherans like us typically fall into), St. John’s Revelation offers us today a glimpse of Hope fulfilled. John’s vision does not hinge in the usual place - the mid-point - with its wild, fanatical narratives of beasts, horsemen, plagues, destruction, and being left-behind. It’s hinge is here, at the vision’s very conclusion, the new heaven and new earth revealed as a promise from the only One who could ever deliver on such a deal. “See, I am making all things new.”

There’s the gospel-pivot in Revelation, or, to put it better, in all of Scripture, for these are just about the very last words of The Holy Bible! “I am making!” This is a declaration, a promise, a manifesto - the new heaven and earth is being made, even as St. John is writing down his vision for his people, even as we hear it proclaimed in worship for us. It’s a deal in the making, though not completed yet. The violence, war, greed, and racism that fills the news each night is proof enough of that.

But the deal is signed, sealed, and is being delivered even as we speak, even as we pray, even as we cry “Mercy!,” even as we remember the baptism that is the witness of our inclusion in this new heaven and this new earth, even as we receive wine and bread in our hands each Lord’s Day, even as we plead “Abba.”

Question for the Week:
In what ways does John’s vision of a perfect new creation make a difference in your classroom and your life?

Prayer for the Week:
Gracious father may the faith that inspired St. John to offer the hope of a perfect new creation be our faith and our children’s faith. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Donna Braband, lifelong educator and friend of ELCA schools and centers.
This week we meet Jesus in the Temple, on the eve of his Passion, commenting on the gift of the Widow’s Mite. He calls over his disciples and says, "Truly, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they gave out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

A friend shared with me recently the experience of a homeless man who, as the offerings circulated at our church, dug through his pockets to place a dollar bill into the plate. What a precious gift, the best of that day.

Perhaps the children at your chapel services share offerings as well. I wonder what goes through their minds at that “moment of decision.” Will it be candy, or a toy they’ve been craving, or will that handful of coins go to serve the needs of Jesus’ other friends? Surely the import of this moment is more than how much clinks in the plate; it is the moment of choosing thanks to God and commitment to the service of God’s mission in God’s world among God’s people.

“Giving it our all” – what a challenge to all of us who devote time, talent and treasure to the Gospel mission. How can we help these youngsters value the moment of generosity, no matter how small the gift may appear? How can we “consecrate” this moment for ourselves as well, placing all that we are and have in God’s hands?

Questions for the Week:
What has God given us? The Small Catechism’s Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer could be a great resource. As abundant as all our gifts are, how can we dedicate them to Jesus’ loving work? What a time to more broadly define “daily bread,” and generosity toward others.

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you, dear God, for all we are and have, signs of your gracious love. Help us to dedicate all these abundant gifts to the work of making Christ known in daily life, for our children and ourselves. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Bill Hurst, Senior Pastor and Mission Director of First Lutheran Church and School in Torrance, California
November 15, 2015
Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Hebrews 10: 24-25

24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Then there was 3, our preschool started in 2002 with 10 students by 2006 we had reached 78 students and we had 20 on staff. The ministry was in full force in the Glory of God. As the students started to graduate and bigger preschools were developing around us, we were struggling with enrollment.

Entering our 2014-15 school year we had 15 students, we had hope! As the school year went on the realization of the inevitable approached us. Currently with 3 on staff, myself, Ms. Darcy, whom was at one time the Education director and Ms. Tammy our 3 yr old teacher going on 10 years of service. The decision was made in January 2015; the preschool will be closing May of 2015.

As I reflect on this scripture, I’m reminded of the strength the 3 of us brought to each other, We worked together to continue to make the students feel like we weren’t “ending” in the meantime we were packing boxes and relinquishing classrooms. Along with this we gave each other support in many ways.

Our last day of school was here as if it were any other day. We hugged and parted ways from the school. Through the support, we developed not only a positive history together but a continued friendship.

Question of the Week:
How will you respond to God and others in a time of change?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, Thank you for showing us the light in the time that seems dark and allowing us to guide the children to you.

This devotion was contributed by Katrina L. Sayers of Johns Creek, Georgia, who served Lutheran schools for 13 years.
November 22, 2015
Christ the King Sunday
Thought for the Week: John 18: 33-37

Listen! How many times a day do you either say that or wish for that? You are in good company with Jesus! Here Jesus is being accused, tested, and challenged by authorities. They want him to state who is in his kingdom, where he comes from, and why he says and does the things that he does. And his answers remain steadfast and true that God’s promises are for all and that everyone who listens—not just hears with the auditory functioning of their brain—but listens, will know this and live into this. Jesus kingdom is not like ours and it is almost as if he just doesn’t have the words to describe it, but does say to listen to his voice and to know a truth that brings people together in God’s love.

As teachers, you often ask children to listen your voice, to give them instructions and love and guidance. And as teachers, you have the privilege of not just asking for children to listen, but also of listening to them, hearing them speak their truth and their hearts. What does this mean to you to have a voice that leads and ears that listen? It is a beautiful gift to use one’s voice in love and guidance and to use one’s ears in connecting and listening to the wisdom, truth and love of God that comes through children.

Questions for the Week:
When and where and how do you hear God’s voice in life? How do you give yourself moments in the day to listen to the voice of Jesus in your heart and mind?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Try spending 8 minutes (set a timer!) just in silence, letting your thoughts float by and opening up your ears to hear and pray in this way. Repeat the phrase “Jesus hear my prayer” to help you relax and focus and trust that the Holy Spirit will be present in your silence, your sighs, your thoughts.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Leta Behrens of Wellington, Colorado who serves as senior pastor in faith formation and has the joy of being in chapel with preschoolers each week!
November 26, 2015
Thanksgiving Day
Thought for the Day: Psalm 126

I think teaching is a lot like this Psalm. Sometimes teaching is like a dream, and easy. Sometimes, teaching causes a lot of frustration. If this one student would just pay attention for five minutes! If this other one would hand in her homework. If they could all just stay awake for one period.

But then there are the other moments. The joyful moments. That moment of joy when a student who has been struggling with a concept and it finally clicks and their whole face just lights up. When everyone in the class does well on a test. Or the days when everyone is paying attention and understanding the lesson. But before our students can reach those moments, there may be many frustrated tears shed. This Psalm could be a good prayer for a teacher. “Restore our patience Lord. Restore our ability to be cheerful. May my ability to reach and connect these students be as plentiful as a rushing river. Let those who are frustrated with themselves or my lessons, end the year with understanding and gladness.”

I think teachers need to remember that God has put us in this job to guide students through the sowing in tears to the harvest of joy. But it’s not always the students who get frustrated. Sometimes the challenges of teaching are God teaching the teacher something that needs to be learned, like patience or creativity or perhaps the need to think outside the box to reach challenging students. If we take a step back and take a breath, the lessons God might be trying to teach us will hopefully become apparent.

Prayer for the Week:
Concentrate on asking for guidance to always be encouraging and positive for students, as well as remembering to focus on the moments of joy and fortune. Perhaps include asking for the wisdom to discern if God is trying to teach a lesson you need to pay attention to.

This devotion was written by Hannah Jensen-Reinke, who teaches at a Lutheran school in Japan through the ELCA’s Global Missions program.
November 29, 2015
First Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week: Luke 21:36

“But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man.”

It seems like a big portion of life is spent waiting. When we’re children we can’t wait to grow up. When we’re young adults we can’t wait to move out on our own. When we’re single we might wait to be married, have children, get the promotion, etc., etc. When we get older we can’t wait to retire. And so it goes. During this season of Advent we as Christians are also waiting—waiting for the greatest gift that has been given, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As teachers in our Lutheran schools we teach our children to be patient, knowing that good things are worth waiting for. Luke predicts turbulent times before the coming of Jesus and admonishes us to be watchful and truthful and prepared. In these turbulent times in which we’re living what a gift we have to share with our students. With all that we might have to endure in this life we have the promise of what is to come. What a blessing that is to be able to share that message with your children.

Questions for the Week:
How do you teach your students about patience? When bad things happen in their communities how could you use Luke’s message as a message of hope?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dearest Jesus, Help us to be patient and humble knowing that your love sustains us. Help us to be ever watchful and hopeful in the promise of your return. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Marlene Lund, Executive Director of the Center for Urban Education Ministries. Marlene has served in the world of Lutheran urban education for forty-one years. She is an ELCA Associate in Ministry based in New York City.
December 6, 2015
Second Sunday of Advent

Thought for the Week: Philippians 1: 3-11

Paul’s pray to the Philippians is applicable to each of you who are reading this devotion, for each of you share God’s Word and grace each and every day just as did the Philippians. I, too, am thankful for each of you who are called to share God’s unconditional love and grace with the children and families at your school or center. That unconditional love affirms to each person that he or she is precious in God’s sight.

And, just as Paul was thankful for those who still shared the faith during the difficult time while he was imprisoned, I, too, am thankful for each of you who continue to share the faith despite the difficulties of the day or the difficulties of the child or person with whom you are dealing. It is important to stay focused on God’s call to us through the thick and the thin, while dealing with the toughest child or the easiest child, the angriest parent or the most pleasant parent, we need to remain focused on God’s unconditional love and grace, and that each that we encounter is precious in God’s sight. We need to remain rooted in God’s Word and will to share God’s love and grace.

It is easy to go through the day without stopping to be thankful. Remember to give thanks to God in all situations, as Paul did. Teach our children to thank God for all things and to see each person as precious in God’s sight.

Questions for the Week:
Do you give thanks in all instances, good and bad? Do you share God’s love and grace unconditionally? Do you let everyone you meet know that they are precious in God’s sight?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear God, Thank you for loving me unconditionally and providing me the means to share that love with others so that they may feel your love, experience your grace, and know that they are precious in your sight. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Madelyn Speagle, Ed. D., Minister of Christian Education and Principal at Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran Church and School in Jacksonville, FL
Because of the disaster of Israelites seeking fulfillment in false gods and abusing the poor, God sends prophets like Zephaniah to call for and leaders like King Josiah to work for justice and peace – that all might see they are precious in God’s sight, fear disaster no more, and turn to God.

Because of the shame of Israelites falling back into self-made disaster, God sends Jesus, who lives and dies for justice and peace. God raises Jesus from the dead, turning shame into praise – that all might see they are precious in God’s sight, fear disaster no more, and turn to God.

Because of our natural and human disasters, God continues standing in our midst through the hope of Jesus’ living Holy Spirit – that we might see we are precious in God’s sight, fear disaster no more, and turn to God.

God gives us the freedom to make choices. Sometimes we use that freedom to flirt with disaster. Yet today, God continues standing in our midst, sending teachers and caregivers to nurture young people - that they might see they are precious in God’s sight, fear disaster no more, and turn to God.

Questions for the Week:
How is God working through you to show others that they are precious in God’s sight? How are you precious in God’s sight? How do you rely upon God in your education ministry?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Advent is about hope and expectation living in the face of disaster and fear. Perhaps pray for hope and expectation focused on Jesus Christ, who stands in our midst and will return – that we fear disaster no more.

This devotion was contributed by Karl Biermann, who after 10 years as a parish pastor in Texas, now serves as assistant to the bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod.
When did you first experience someone who believed in you? When did someone tell you that you had a gift that was worth developing? If you’ve had such experiences, you know the power they contain.

Mary, the mother of our Lord, experienced this power when she visited Elizabeth and heard her words of affirmation, “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

She didn’t need Elizabeth’s blessing and affirmation to believe. As Elizabeth herself said, Mary had already believed the promise of the Lord that she would give birth to the Savior. And as Luke records, Mary had said, “Let it be with me according to your word,” after the angel visited Mary with the message that she would be the mother of Jesus. Mary had already believed before she visited her cousin Elizabeth.

But Elizabeth’s enthusiastic celebration of Mary’s belief encouraged and emboldened Mary. For immediately after hearing Elizabeth’s word of blessing, Mary broke out with the song that we know as the Magnificat, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” Elizabeth’s blessing, affirmation and celebration of Mary gave her confidence to embrace the calling she had received.

Your words of blessing and affirmation matter. When you speak them, when you express confidence in someone, you extend the power of God’s encouragement and blessing. Be a blessing to others by blessing, affirming and showing confidence in them.

Questions for the Week:
Has a word of encouragement from someone ever changed your life? When did you last affirm the gifts you saw in a colleague or student?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Pray that God may use you as a vehicle for your students to see and claim their gifts.

This devotion was contributed by Mark Wilhelm, Director for Schools, ELCA
December 25, 2015
Christmas Day
Thought for the Week: Matthew 7: 24-27

24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

Do you ever have insights as you are working through a text with your students? As the class was going through this text and recognizing that there are two parts to the act of building your house on rock. The first part is the hearing of the words of Jesus, the second is the putting into practice. Hear and do. When we hear what Jesus is calling us to do and then actually do it, we see that God is faithful and trustworthy. We build that relationship with God and we are able to see how important we are to Jesus and how God wants to use us to further the Kingdom. When the inevitable difficulties and struggles of life hit, the hearers and doers have built their faith and trust in a God with whom they have had experiences that help them to keep their faith strong.

On the other hand, those who only hear God’s word and don’t put it into practice won’t have that base of experiences of God’s trustworthiness. When the storms and floods of life hit, the foundation of experiencing how precious they are to God just isn’t there and they are left to rely on their own wills and hopes. If you are anything like me, that is a recipe for a mighty crash indeed.

Dear Jesus, help me not only to be a hearer of your words but a doer. Where there is doubt about what you would have me do, give me confidence, clarity and courage. Thank you for making me your precious child whose faith is built on the rock of You. Amen.

Darren Sombke is the Director of Spiritual Life at Rockford Lutheran School. He has worked with students of all ages for nearly 30 years. He is a recognized Bullies to Buddies practitioner and a Smart Discipline workshop leader.
Imagine Mary and Joseph’s feeling of panic, discovering that their only son --- God’s Son, in fact --- was not in the group with whom they were traveling. Imagine the fear rising in their hearts as they searched for their twelve year old boy, not for one hour or one day, but for three full days in the busy, crowded city of Jerusalem. Imagine the mixture of anger and relief when they discovered their son Jesus in the temple, learning from the teachers, and asking them questions. Jesus had not told his parents that he was staying behind, something that would have caused outrage and distress in the hearts of modern day parents, too, but he was where he needed to be: in God’s house.

As educators and pastors, we have the opportunity to nurture in the children and youth with whom we work the desire to be in God’s presence, whether at home, during chapel time, or in the classroom. We have the opportunity to create an environment where our students are eager to learn more about God’s love for them, a place where they can ask questions as well as share their own ideas about God and their faith. Of course, we also have the responsibility to teach them the importance of telling an adult where they are at all times! But knowing that they are always at home with God is a valuable lesson that our children can carry with them wherever they go.

Questions for the Week:
How do we help the children in our care to feel at home with God? What questions or ideas about God have your students offered that were particularly insightful?

Prayer for the Week:
Loving God, whether we are at home or at work, in the chapel or in the classroom, we are at home with you. Stir up in us and the children with whom we work the desire to learn more about you so that we might grow in our faith. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

As the pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lynnwood, Washington, Reverend Gail Rautmann (aka “Chapel Girl”) offers weekly chapel services to the students of Gloria Dei Preschool and Kindergarten.
January 3, 2016
Second Sunday of Christmas
Thought for the Week: John 1: 10-14

These verses remind us that Jesus was not accepted by all who saw or
heard him, as he lived among the people of his time and place. Yet for
them, and for us, the power to become God’s children is a gift given by
the very God who created us. Just as Jesus, “the son of man”, was nobody
special in his world until he was revealed as God’s son, we too, are
spiritual nobodies until God takes us in as family. We are given a new
name, God’s name, and a new way of living. We are called to make God
known in the Good News of God’s redeeming presence, and in sharing the
story of our adoption through Jesus.

As teachers and caregivers, we have a unique opportunity to nurture
others in faith. Many of our students, their siblings, and/or their parents
might not know the stories of God’s love, or might be struggling to believe
God’s care for them is real. Remembering that our work serves God, we
recognize Jesus in the faces and needs of others. As we reflect God’s love
in our ministries, we become God’s hands, and through us God can make
Grace come alive for our children, families, and staff.

Just as we have been welcomed into God’s family by adoption, we can
welcome others into that special relationship with God. In our inclusive
ministry no one is unknown, turned away, or excluded. The sense of
belonging we offer shows others that in God’s Kingdom, there is room for
all of us to be known and loved. As the song says, “We love because God
first loved us”. What a gift to be the messengers of that Good News!

Questions for the Week:
What makes you feel welcome in a new place? How is your church/school
a welcoming place? How can/do you create a sense of belonging there?

Prayer for the Week:
Gracious God, We praise you for our redemption through your son, Jesus.
Help us to remember daily that we are yours by Grace alone, and all
creation is precious to you. Open our eyes and hearts to the needs before
us, that we would be your messengers of unconditional love and
belonging through our care. In the name of Jesus, who emptied himself
that we might be filled with your Spirit, Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Karen Sodt Kress, Waupaca, Wisconsin,
joyfully serving as wife, mother, grandmother, teacher, and Stephen
Minister/Leader.
January 6, 2016
Epiphany of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Matthew 2: 1-12

An epiphany moment is one of a sudden and often striking realization – something you didn’t see before. We celebrate the Epiphany in the church calendar when the Magi first saw our Christ and how they were overwhelmed with joy. Their reaction was to “open their treasure chests” (Verse 12) and give their greatest gifts to Him. What a moment that must have been.

I also had an epiphany moment. I have always wanted to teach. I had always thought that was my choice based on interests, talents, and gifts I had been given by God and my parents. One day, when asked why I was in child care, why I put so much into it, it hit me. Because I was doing what God wanted me to do. I was following a path He laid out for me since I was a child, to love and reach out to each of these children with His love, to be His hands and feet in their lives. Like the Magi, I want to offer my greatest gifts to Him through reaching the children in my care, with His love.

God has given each of us special gifts – we can use them to make a difference in the life of a child, or maybe, many children. What you do is up to you. I pray that you will embrace them with overwhelming joy and give your gifts to each child in your care. Show them how precious they are to God and to you. Let them see the Glory of God’s light in your life and how you interact with them in all aspects of their day. You may never know the difference you are making in their lives, but God does.

Questions for the Week:
Can you think about ways that you have touched the lives of children in your classroom, or ways that you still can? Do the children in your care see Jesus in you? Have you had that ah-ha moment of joy when you know you are doing what God wants you to do?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear LORD, please bring into remembrance the lives of the ones who I have touched with Your love. Flood me with your overwhelming joy for placing me where you have me and continue to give me opportunities to minister to those who are Precious in Your Sight.

This devotion was contributed by Barb Wigstadt, Director of TLC Early Learning Center, a ministry of Transfiguration Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Minnesota, since 1989
January 10, 2016
Baptism of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Isaiah 43: 1-7

“You are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you.” (Is. 43:4)

These 12 words are so wonderful to hear that nothing I can say can really add to them. So please read them one more time and allow a few seconds for this message to once again sink into your very souls.

These are, of course, the words of God in Christ to each one of us teachers. For those of us who are baptized it is part of that wondrous promise. For all of us, these words are absolute, no ifs, ands, or buts. We are precious, loved by God.

These words are words our children need to hear often. We say them. We act consistent with them. If 50 years from now your students are asked, “What, if anything, do you remember from your days in the Lutheran school or Center, wouldn’t it be great if the immediate response was, “I learned that I am precious in God’s sight and God loves me.”

“Precious in God’s Sight” is also the theme for this year’s ELEA Devotion Guide. Use the guide weekly and absorb the marvelous message into the very marrow of your bones and the deepest recesses of your soul.

Questions for the Week:
Are there words and actions at your school/center that cause your students to doubt or fail to hear the words, “You are precious and loved.” How can we ensure that even the most difficult child in our school truly believes that she/he is precious and loved?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God that you are precious to Jesus and loved by God. Ask for the Spirit’s blessings on all that you do or say so that each of your children feels the marvelous truth.

This devotion was contributed by Melvin M. Kieschnick, Carlsbad, CA who served Lutheran schools around the world for more than 50 years.
**January 17, 2016**

**Second Sunday After Epiphany**

**Thought for the Week: John 2: 1-11**

I was frustrated, the students were frustrated. I had tried several different teaching methods to explain an important geometric formula but without success. I could tell that the students did not understand the concept. What was I to do? This was an important concept. How could I help them to see – to understand?

The next day I tried again. This time I brought wooden blocks from home and asked the students to, “watch closely.” I took three wooden blocks, formed them into a right-angled triangle, and measured each side. Then I took three other blocks of different lengths and did the same exercise, measuring the lengths of the sides of the second triangle. Finally I went to the blackboard and wrote the formula once again, this time with the measurements of the two triangles.

“No I get it!” a student exclaimed. As if a light had been turned on, experience led to comprehension. Seeing led to believing.

“I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.”

These familiar words from the beloved hymn “Amazing Grace” capture the message of Epiphany. Epiphany is a time to look for God’s presence in our lives. It is a time to lift up the experiences of God that lead to and deepen faith. It is a time for light to shine in the darkness of unbelief and incomprehension. It is a time of transformation.

In John’s gospel, the story of the miraculous changing of water into wine is an “Epiphany story.” Like most experiences of God’s presence in our lives, there is an element of mystery. We don’t know how Jesus turned water into wine. We don’t know how a cross can be a sign of life, how dying can lead to rising, how Jesus can be truly God and truly human, how Christ can be truly present in a morsel of bread and a sip of wine, or how we, a group of sinners, can be the body of Christ.

We can’t fully comprehend, but we see; and in seeing, we believe.

**Question for the Week:**
What gives you strength as you believe in Christ?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
O God of light, shine in the darkness of our world. Open our eyes to see your presence in our lives. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Robert Federwitz, a lifelong Lutheran educator and former ELCA Director for Schools. Bob is retired, living in Dover, Delaware.*
If you are reading this, you are in the teaching field, whether in the classroom, the pulpit, or behind an administration desk. As a Christian educator, you already know that the little ones God sends our way are "precious in God's sight". The love we share and the relationships we have developed are authentic, trustworthy, and deep-rooted, uniting us to God above. We work diligently on our communication skills making sure we use all the latest techniques; that what comes from our mouths is uplifting and aids in building the self-esteem of these little ones. We are conscious of our thoughts, and daily lift children up in prayer asking for patience and understanding in order to do right in the eyes of God, but .....how are we when dealing with their parents?

Forty years ago, while working on my credential, I never took "Crazy Parents 101" or a science lab on the dissection of the brain of a "Helicopter Parent". Yet, as a Christian educator I am directed by God to remember that these sometimes self-absorbed, egotistical, little children in adult bodies are also "precious in God's sight". God guided them in the selection of our schools for their children's spiritual and academic education. Even though some of them may be extremely problematic, we are to speak words that exhibit the same patience and understanding we receive from the bedrock of God's love. Canadian Christian rock band, Hawk Nelson, expresses Psalm 19 this way: "Let my words be life. Let my words be truth. I don't want to say a word unless it points the world back to you." May this be the standard by which we live.

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Heavenly Father, You have placed your precious children into my care. I thank you for them and the relationships we have developed. I ask you to grant me patience and compassion when dealing with their parents. May my thoughts and words be pleasing to you, for all are precious in your sight. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jean Bashi, administrator and teacher at Cross and Crown Lutheran School, Rohnert Park, California. She has been teaching in Lutheran schools for over 30 years.
At our school we have a working creek that is lined with various rocks. From small colored stones to large boulders, these rocks create a firm foundation on which the children can walk and climb safely and over which water can freely flow. But as the children bend down to examine the creek rocks more closely they might see something a little more complex. They see rocks in many shapes, colors, and sizes made up of many sedimentary layers, molded and shaped by the elements into a solid, firm surface, but every now and then, amidst these solid rocks, they come across a rock that is not firm or solid.

These rocks are broken and crumbly or sharp and pointed. These rocks do not belong and we quickly rid the creek of these rocks to keep the children safe. If we think of Jesus as a rock, then we can see Jesus in the solid, firm rocks of our creek, brilliant in color and perspective, absorbing our sedimentary layers (our sins) and a rock on which we can freely stand knowing He will protect us and help us. But what do we do about those pesky crumbly, sharp and pointy rocks that make an appearance every now and then along our creek? Could these rocks be us in all our brokenness and imperfectness?

**Question for the Week:**
What role does Jesus “as a rock” play in your life as an educator? Share a time when you felt the firm, solidness of Jesus presence in your classroom and a time when you felt broken, longing for the foundational rock of God our Father. In what ways are you helping your class learn about Jesus “as a rock” in their lives?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
“There is no rock like my God! There is no rock like my God! Smiling from above, He’s looking down with love. There is no rock like my God! There is no rock, like my King! There is no rock like my King! He’s bringing love and joy, to every girl and boy, there is no rock like my King!” (Excerpt from the song, “No Rock Like My God” written and used with permission by Anne McDaniel).

*This devotion was contributed by Anne McDaniel, Center Director of San Marcos Lutheran Church Children’s Center in San Marcos CA, an avid rock collector who prides herself on sharing Jesus, the greatest rock of all, with everyone she meets!*
February 7, 2016
Transfiguration of Our Lord

Luke 9:36 “Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.”

The transfiguration was a time when Christ’s true self was revealed to a couple of the disciples. What they saw was Christ in Glory. The image of Christ being shown to the disciples is one that I envision as I look forward to seeing Jesus in heaven one day: perfect, flawless, and in wonderful splendor. It leads me to another Bible passage which talks about us being a new creation in Christ.

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” 2 Corinthians 5:17.

As educators we have the opportunity to teach children on a daily basis. We have the opportunity to let them know that because of Jesus they are a new creation. The old self is gone and the new has come. We can share the fact that in Christ they are a forgiven child of God. We must use the opportunities to share that no matter how badly we mess up, God still loves us. When we stand before God, Jesus stands in-between us and God sees Jesus in our place. We need to also make sure that the students know that this does not give us a free pass to make wrong decisions, but instead celebrate that God loves them so much that Jesus took our place on the cross. What a great gift to know, share, and celebrate!

Questions for the Week:
In what ways can we share with our students that they are forgiven because of what Jesus did on the cross? In what ways can we encourage our students to show others that they are a new creation in Christ?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Ask the Lord to help you show others that you are a forgiven child of God; the old is gone and the new has come. Ask God to watch over and guide you throughout your day.

This devotion was contributed by Michael Rottmann, Principal at Rockford Lutheran Academy, Rockford, Illinois
February 10, 2016
Ash Wednesday
Thought for the Day: Psalm 51: 1-17

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

Marking ourselves, smudging ourselves with ash may be a very old ritual, but it may be more relevant than ever before. We live in a time and culture that is obsessed with creating stain-free, bacteria-free, squeaky clean lives and environments. Everywhere we turn we find antibacterial soaps, cleaning products, stain removers and air cleansing gizmos to cleanse ourselves and our homes. We use antibiotics everywhere, including in our foods. We must be clean, inside and out! But at what cost? What consequence?

Schools are a gathering ground for germs, illnesses and grime and dirt.

The dirty, imperfect, in-our-face mark of the cross on Ash Wednesday is a simple yet blunt reminder of who we are – and who we’ve become through the gift of Jesus Christ in the world. It’s a vivid reminder of what Luther came to call our state of being as “sinner and saint,” simultaneously.

This devotion was contributed by Rod G. Boriack, Des Plaines, Illinois, freelance writer and editor/writer for the ELCA’s “Seeds for the Parish” and “Prayer Ventures” resources.
Let’s back up Luke’s story a bit. In the third chapter of Luke we are told of the baptism of Jesus, when the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus and a voice said, “You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you.” Jesus was now prepared to begin his ministry – or was he? The Spirit-filled Jesus is then “led by the Spirit” into the desert where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days – tempted to do evil. From the Spirit’s viewpoint it was a test to prepare Jesus for his ministry, to faithfully obey God’s commands, a test of his commitment to God’s will. And Jesus “passes the test,” giving all the right answers, by relying on the Scriptures.

As educators, we may feel as if we are being tested on a daily basis. The child we just can’t seem to reach, the parent who constantly disagrees with our professional decisions, the developmental differences among our students. It is at times like these when we need to rely on the Scriptures, maybe not for the right answers, but as a guide to help us make it through, and even past, the “test.”

Christian school educators know the importance of reading Bible verses and devotions and praying with our students each morning. We are teaching them to rely on the Scriptures. Using a personal daily devotional and praying before we get to our school or center can give us hope that the next “test” may not be that hard.

**Question for the Week:**
Do you rely on the Scriptures for answers? Have you realized the importance of personal devotions and prayer?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
God of all knowledge and light, you give us your Word and we thank you. Encourage us to use your wisdom and rely on your Word daily, but especially on those challenging days. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Christine Hauge, Associate-in-Ministry and Principal of Leif Ericson Day School, Brooklyn, NY*
February 21, 2016
Second Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Philippians 3: 19–4: 1

“Thereir end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.”

I mess up, often. I think about myself, too much. I “turn inward” too often. How about you? Paul writes with fervor that earthly, self-centered focus ends in destruction and shame. And…thanks be to God that is not the end of the story for us. We, as Christians, have a citizenship in heaven. In spite of our sin and brokenness, Jesus’ death and resurrection restores us to “the body of his glory.”

What a privilege to be able to influence, teach and mentor God’s little ones who are so precious in his sight. Not all days are like a day in paradise, but all do days present us with opportunities to show our colleagues, students and parents that they are, like Paul says to his readers, beloved.

Questions for the Week:
What has been tempting you to “turn inward” recently? How has your connection or relationships to your students and friends here on this staff shown you that you are precious in God’s sight?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord God, We know that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in you, or come to you, but the Holy Spirit calls us by your Gospel. Thank you for sanctifying us, in spite of who we are. How precious in his sight. Thanks be to God. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Brian Becker, Senior VP, Wheat Ridge Ministries. Brian began his career as a Lutheran school teacher. Both of his children attended Lutheran schools from JK-12th grade. “Lutheran schools are about much more than education. 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 healthy, productive society.”
The theme, *Precious in God’s Sight*, fits in well with the text from Isaiah. Precious means great value, unique, exclusive. Each staff member brings special talents and gifts to the faculty. Our students bring potential talents to be developed. Sometimes it is difficult to feel precious or see the value of others but God invites us to come, to listen.

Isaiah invites the poor to take food even without money. Today this seems unrealistic but our needs are fulfilled. God takes care of us in every way. Even when we don’t have the means we receive what we need. That frees us up to be children of God.

In return for coming to God and listening, God makes a covenant with us. It is everlasting and gives us strength, a feeling of value and belonging. Because our needs are met, we are empowered to teach and care for one another.

Even those who have not come to God are welcome. They may have fallen away from the Lord or never knew our Savior. There is forgiveness and a fresh start. No matter what the circumstance, God is loving, forgiving, and accepting.

We are precious, though we are reluctant to come, to listen, to repent, we are still precious in His sight.

**Question for the Week:**
How can you discover and develop the potential of everyone at your school?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Thank God for seeing us as being precious and ask for help in appreciating the preciousness in others.

*This devotion was contributed by Carole Feddersen, retired educator in Lutheran schools and universities.*
March 6, 2016
Fourth Sunday in lent
Thought for the Week: Psalm 32

“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered....Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

God loves us. God loves us so much that he is willing to allow us to live our lives, making our own choices. When we make good choices, we tend to be grateful and happy because all is well. When we make poor choices, we have a tendency to turn away from God and anyone we may have wronged, essentially hiding from the relationship.

God loves us. He loves us so much that he forgives us. When we remain in communication with God, we are more likely to confess our mistakes and recognize that God washes our sins away, enabling us to try again, to repair broken relationships.

When we are washed clean, as we recognize and accept God’s forgiveness, we experience great joy, incredible, joy based on God’s unconditional love.

Consider this actual situation in a 2 year old class:
Teacher: You put the toy in the corner. Let’s go look at the toy.
Child: (Head down, walking slowly, retrieves the toy and reluctantly hands it to the teacher)
Teacher: The toy is in two pieces. Tell me about the toy.
Child: (In a tearful whisper) “I broke it”.
Teacher: Thank you for telling me. Let’s see if we can fix it (helps child hold pieces and snap them together).
Teacher: Look! We fixed it! You told me it was broken and we worked together to fix it. Now we can play with the toy again. Hurray!
Teacher and Child: Smile and hug.

As educators, we have the opportunity, every day, to model/encourage open communication, confession and the joy of forgiveness. We model this best when we have an open personal relationship with God, with consistent communication so that we, too, can celebrate the joy of forgiveness.
Questions for the Week:
How can I spend more time throughout my day communicating with God? How can I model healthy relationships filled with love, communication, confession, and the joy of forgiveness?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord, guide me toward you when I need to talk. Lead me to confess and accept your forgiveness. Then, help me model healthy relationships with my students, parents and colleagues through love, communication, confession and the joy of forgiveness. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Lynn Hess, who serves as the Director and teaches at The School of Grace, a parent participatory preschool, which serves typically developing children, children with special needs and children from refugee families. The school is a mission of Grace Lutheran Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.
March 13, 2016
Fifth Sunday in lent
Thought for the Week: Isaiah 43: 16-21

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.”

It always sounds easy, doesn’t it? Casting cares upon Jesus.
Forgetting wrongdoing. Giving up worry to the Lord.
But of course, in practice, it can be incredibly difficult. What can be the hardest is not forgiving others or forgetting how we’ve been wronged, but forgiving ourselves and forgetting how we’ve made mistakes and done wrong. Yes, so often we are our harshest critics.
But you know who isn’t your harshest critic? The Lord. God knows what you’ve done, but looks past all that to what you can be instead of scrutinizing what you have been. God just wants to love you. If even the Most High, concerned with matters beyond our reckoning, can forgive the lowly like us, then surely we can forgive ourselves and each other and forget the wrong of old.
More than that, as this passage says, God will provide for you and take care of you. If we can remember that, it truly can take away much of our worry and cares. Then we can live a life that’s free, a life that looks ahead and upward, thanks to the freedom that comes from the Savior.

Questions for the Week:
How can you free yourself from remembering the wrongs of old? How can you instead remember to give your cares to the Lord and be content in knowing that forgiveness is real?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, please help me to remember you and your grace instead of remembering the wrong I have done and the wrong that has been done to me. May I be more like You, forgiving and looking to what can be instead of gazing back at what was. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jon Nelson, Beloit, Wisconsin, who is Associate Director for ALDE: inspiring, educating and mentoring the Christian fundraising community to spark generosity for mission. He is also Principal of Nelson Business Communications, LLC, where much of his work is for Lutheran and Christian organizations.
March 20, 2016
Sunday of the Passion
Thought for the Week: Philippians 2: 5-11

Every teacher can relate to this idea of “emptying oneself” (verses 6 & 7). A good teacher gives all they have to make sure that the learning environment is right for the students in her charge. A good teacher will use every resource at their fingertips to be sure that the lesson sinks in for every student.

Every pastor, on this first day of Holy Week, understands the concept of “emptying oneself”. These next seven days will be a form of a liturgical and worshipful marathon. What teachers go through in a Christian school in the weeks before Christmas are similar to what a clergy person experiences in Holy Week – giving it your all; holding nothing back!

You may be a teacher who, having expended all your energy in these weeks leading up to Easter, is now looking ahead to a spring break from the classroom. Your school administration grants you this time of “Sabbath rest” to recharge your batteries for the remaining days of the school term. After having emptied yourself for the sake of your students, use this time to refill yourself. Spend some of the time in prayer and reflection of the privilege God has granted you for shaping hearts and minds in the name of Christ. Be filled- and refilled – with the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of God. Return to your classroom ready to share that love – to give that love – to empty yourself of that love - once again.

Questions for the Week:
When a balloon is emptied, it’s not as much fun to play with as when it was full. Why is being empty a good thing, according to St. Paul? When you find yourself emptied, where do you go to refill? When your students look in a mirror and see their human likeness, do they also see Jesus? Do they see why they are precious in God’s sight?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you God for giving me skills to teach and for giving me times to rest and recharge. Let me never exploit my role as a teacher, but, instead, revel in it, knowing that I teach in your power and in your name, as a servant of Christ and steward of your love.

The Rev. Dr. David Jost is the senior pastor at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Hainesport, NJ and a worship leader at weekly chapel at reJOYce Christian School at the church. He is a grandfather of two.
March 25, 2016
Good Friday
Thought for the Week: Psalm 22

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”

It’s been a long 40 days to get to Holy Week. Many schools are closed Good Friday as Christians gather for worship with an altar stripped bare, reading or chorale on the passion of Jesus, deep silences and intense prayers. This day marks the deepest darkness of Lent, the abandonment which intensifies the Psalmist’s prayer: O God, where are you in my suffering, in this time of my deepest need?

We know something about such times – the deepest pain of loss or betrayal, the overwhelming burden of family and finances, the deep fears that accompany medical crises...

Yet even amid those deeply bereft places our cries do not fall unheeded. For the One who raised Jesus from the dead is the same One who hears the very depths of our cries, even those too deep for words, and responds in love.

Enter into that deep mystery this week, opening yourself to the One who longs to engage your life anew, to empower your witness and strengthen your hope. Remember this same prayer which began in despair continues in hope:

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;[e]
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
24 For [my God] did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,[f]
but heard when I[g] cried to him.

The same One who suffered on the cross at Golgotha is the very One whose Life sings every day of joy and hope. “Christ is risen!” soon we will shout, and the Alleluias once again will surely ring out.
Question of the Week:
There have been times in my life when I have wanted to cry out, WHERE ARE YOU GOD WHEN I NEED YOU?! Can you relate? If so, what helped bring you through that sense of abandonment? What about your students: can they relate? Can they see in your witness a glimpse of the One whose story doesn’t end with Good Friday?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Open the deepest hurt of your heart to God this week; lift up your “groaning” aloud in private, inviting the solemn beauty of this Good Friday to embrace your pain, and empower you to rise praising the One who has never and will never abandon you. Amen.

The Rev. Patricia L. Holman is the senior pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Albuquerque NM; Calico Butterfly Preschool of St. Paul is a weekday ministry supporting infants, toddlers, preschool and pre-K children and their families.
When Mary discovers that the stone has been rolled away from Jesus’ tomb, her first reaction is to tell someone. She is compelled to share the news that Jesus is missing. After she tells the disciples, the disciples run to see the empty tomb for themselves and return home doing nothing about this amazing news. Then Jesus reveals himself to Mary when, in her grief, she mistakes Jesus for the gardener. She does as Jesus asks and goes to share the news with the disciples.

Are we like the disciples who saw the empty tomb and the grave clothes lying in plain sight, testimony to the Risen Lord, and then went home with the news not shared? Or, are we like Mary Magdalene who consistently calls attention to the strange and wondrous events happening that first Easter morning?

Questions for the Week:
Who is it that shared the Good News of the resurrection with you so that you came to believe that Jesus’ rising from the dead matters to you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Risen Savior, bless the teachers you have called to teach and share the Good News. Bless them as they tell THE story of life conquering death so that their students come to faith themselves. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Kristina Ahlman, Pastor, Solomon Lutheran Church and School in Woodville, OH. It is such a blessing to be a part of a Lutheran school where we can tell others that Christ is Risen!
A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

I think Thomas is my favorite disciple. He had honest doubts and questions, but didn’t allow them to lead him to cynicism. The other disciples told him that they had seen Jesus – an impossible thing to believe... and yet Thomas came back the next week to see for himself.

Children should be allowed, even encouraged, to question the things of faith, and should be then invited to see the Risen Lord, just as Thomas was. How do we do that? Where do we find Jesus? Recall that the church is called “the Body of Christ” – when the church is doing Jesus’ work in the world and in peoples’ lives, we encounter Jesus. Help children see what Jesus is doing TODAY in the church – feeding, healing, caring, forgiving, changing lives.

A real and questioning faith, especially in the heart and mind of a child, can be encouraged to see Jesus, to meet him... through us and through the work of the church. Jesus didn’t rebuke Thomas for his questioning – Jesus welcomed Thomas, inviting him to see and touch and feel. He makes the same invitation to us and our children!

**Questions for the Week:**
How can we show our children the Risen Lord in what we do for our children? How can they experience the love and presence of Jesus in the church?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Ask God to help you make Jesus real to your children, going beyond simple stories and songs, to a real faith, lived out for your children and their parents to see. Jesus, shine through my life so that others might know you and your love for us.

*This devotion was contributed by Pastor Larry Becker, who has served as the Sr. Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church and School of Hawthorne, CA, for over 21 years.*
The disciples seem to have returned to their former lives in this short time since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Have they forgotten him? How often do we attend church on Sunday and feel the touch of the Holy Spirit - and then we begin a busy week of school and family and the rush of life takes over. Still, Jesus asks us (with Peter), again and again – do you love me? Like the disciples, Jesus continues to try to find us - he feeds us - and he sends us out for service in his name.

How are we feeding Jesus’ lambs, tending his sheep, and showing his love to those who are precious in his sight? Being intentional about doing our work in his name teaches our children to serve others. 153 large fish, caught in a net that did not tear, is just another example of the abundance that Jesus provides for us. Jesus invites us to encounter him each day, and he promises us the same things he promised the disciples: abundant life and unity with Jesus and God the Father. Let us follow him, share the joy of the Easter life, and build Christ-centered connections with those around us.

Questions for the Week:
Jesus appeared to the disciples after they returned to their former job – fishing. How do you think of Jesus appearing in your everyday life? How do you think Jesus may appear in the lives of your students and their families?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for the abundance of Jesus’ love present in your life and the lives of your students, so that you may purposefully do your work in his name and teach those who are precious in his sight to serve others.

This devotion was contributed by Linda Burrier, who has served as the director of Memorial Lutheran Chapel School for 22 years, and is a former National Board Secretary of the ELEA.
April 17, 2016
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Acts 9: 36-43

“She (Dorcas) was devoted to good works and acts of charity.”... “All the widows stood beside him (Peter), weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made, while she was with them.”

Do you have some artwork hanging on your refrigerator or file drawer or an object set in a special place on your desk? What is the story/stories attached to these pieces? Was the person or child who gave it to you “precious in your sight’?

In this story of the Acts of the Apostles friends were showing off Dorcas’ handi-work. They were showing Peter how precious she was by the work that she had done. Peter pushed the widows and the objects to the side and prayed for Dorcas. She was brought back to life to witness to faith in God. Dorcas’ work was important but more important was the witness she could bear to faith in God.

Sometimes children are pushed to the side. Take time to listen to their faith stories. You may hear how the little children are “precious in God’s sight.”

Questions for the Week:
What would your friends share about what you have done? What would God highlight that makes you or a child you know “precious in God’s sight?” What witness to your faith can you share this week with others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
May we see all that is precious to God this week. Thank God for Tabitha/Dorcas, Lydia, and Peter for their witness to faith in God.

This devotion was contributed by Marlene Druckenmiller, Associate in Ministry, serving St. Paul’s Lutheran Church and Child Development Center as Christian Education Coordinator, Douglassville, Pennsylvania.
Even to the Gentiles

One of my most vivid memories of first grade is of those notorious reading groups. I was blessed with an excellent teacher who understood our fragile psyche and carefully designated us as “Blue Birds,” “Red Birds” and “Yellow Birds.” It took about a day and a half for us sophisticated 6 year olds to figure out that the “Blue Birds” were the high flyers, the “Red Birds” were the wanna-be’s, and the “Yellow Birds” were just hoping to get off the ground. And we all knew where we stood in that pecking order.

That same reality exists in each of our classrooms today. How do we assure those “Yellow Birds” of their value as God’s children in a world that assesses people according to academics, attractiveness and athleticism? How do I assure a graduating senior with an ACT score of 17 his third try that he still is blessed and valued by the Creator?

It can begin with a reminder that God has shared the gift of repentance even with the Gentiles. God sees each child as equally valued and loved. As Lutheran educators we have a wonderful opportunity to instill in each student that sense of value that is so counter-cultural. I have to admit that part of my desire to carry that out results from the fact that I was never a “Blue Bird” either. How about you?

Questions for the Week:
How is that message of value being conveyed in your classroom today? How does it sound in the words you speak to those “Yellow Birds”? Will your students leave your classroom with a sense of ability, or of value? Which is more important?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for undeserved grace that abounds to us all, and implore the Spirit to empower us to instill in our students an understanding of their value as Children of the King.

This devotion is contributed by Don Kortze, who serves as Academic Dean at Lutheran Junior/Senior High School in Rockford, Illinois, and is still not a Cardinal’s fan.
May 1, 2016
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Acts 16: 9-15

As I prepared to write this devotion I read thru all the passages and Acts 16 jumped out at me for many reasons, first this is one on my favorite stories. Lydia was a God seeking person, she was a Gentile, but yet see sat at the water to prayer with Jews. As I looked again at the date I knew then which one I was to choose. May 1 was my grandmother’s birthday and her favorite color was purple and there is no other person I know that lived their life more for Christ than her.

My Grandmother was a great teacher and she loved all children no matter what. I remember a time when I was little she taught bible lessons to the children at the children’s with disability school and I said to her “I don’t know if I could work with children like that” and her reply was “They are all God’s children and he will give you the strength.” She was always like that, always seeing the good in the situation. Now that I am grown and have grown children of my own and grandchildren I know what she was saying. I was also that non-traditional student and went back to school when my oldest graduated from high school, my major was education. With this journey I was a one on one aid for a child with multiple disabilities and at that time things had come full circle. Each child is precious in his sight, they are unique and individuals.

Just like Lydia, children are seekers. Children are sponges and ready to soak up whatever is given them and if we are lucky they will spread that love and caring for others with others.

Question for the Week: Have you been an example of a good steward? How did you work with diversity, making all children feel special no matter what their abilities are?

Personal Prayer for the Week: Dear Lord, thank you for all the little children you send to us to care for and nurture. Help us to provide for them the ability to continue you seek your never ending love and share you love to others.

This devotion was contributed by Michelle Schaffer, Norwalk, Ohio who is the Christian Day Nursery School Director.
“When the cat’s away, the mice will play!” Sometimes you may feel like you are playing a cat and mouse game with the children in your classroom, or your own children at home as they have fun trying to get away with things when you aren’t looking. A favorite stunt when I was an 8th grade student involved the daily delivery of milk cartons before lunch. If the teacher was out of the room, a person close to the milk crate would ‘air mail’ cartons to classmates (a.k.a. throw it across the room). This was great fun until the day one day the thrower’s aim was wrong and a carton flew out of the open third story window and landed dangerously close to a passerby. Game over!

The situation Paul and Silas were in was anything but fun. They were beaten by the city authorities for healing a woman who was possessed by a demon and they were thrown into prison. They had a chance to fool the guards when the ground shook, prison doors came open and their chains were loosed. But they stayed put. Their decision to do so resulted in new believers in Christ as a result of the prison guard’s amazement at their honesty and integrity.

Questions for the Week:
What opportunities do you have as an educator, parent, and citizen to model Christian love and values even when you could ‘get away with’ disobeying the rules? In what ways can these situations create opportunities for you to share your faith with others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord God, help me respond to your love by living a life filled with honesty and integrity each day. Please open my eyes to opportunities that my choices provide to witness and share my faith with others.

Rick Herman, who serves as the President of Wheat Ridge Ministries, contributed this devotion. Rick previously served for many years as a Lutheran School teacher and principal.
"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

Throughout my life, I have always admired people who could speak another language other than English. I fell short trying to master a foreign language in high school and college. No matter how hard I tried or how much I studied, I could never seem to do as well as my classmates. I even struggled with Hebrew and Greek while I was in the seminary.

The disciples fell short too. Prior to the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples, they were only able to speak in their native language. Once they were filled with the Holy Spirit, a miraculous thing happened—they were given the gift of speaking in languages not their own.

As educators, we are given the responsibility to help our students recognize the gifts that they have been given. We are challenged to help our students achieve their full potential not only as students, but also as Christians. In a world driven by individual achievement, it is difficult to get children to recognize that what they have and who they are is given to them by God. Just as the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost, so too are the children filled with the Holy Spirit through baptism. We need to remind our students that God is always with them.

Questions for the Week:
What are your greatest gifts? How do you use those gifts to bring the love of God to others? How can you inspire others to use the gifts that God has given them?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your daily life. Recognize all of the gifts God has given you and find ways to help others see God’s blessings in their lives.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Tom McGawley, who is currently serving the congregation of Memorial Lutheran Church in St. Augustine, Florida
May 22, 2016
The Holy Trinity
Thought for the Week: Romans 5: 1-5

Our theme, “Precious in God’s Sight,” suggests we are of value, our Father acting to protect and care for us. God knows our sequence of experiences in today’s text and is present and active as it progresses, knowing we will suffer but that we will be equipped, empowered, to move on to endurance, then to character, and finally to hope. We are able to accomplish this because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Working with children or with each other, dealing with issues, personalities and misunderstandings, we have more to draw upon for guidance than just the school’s rules or our own expectations, instincts and training. We know God has poured love into that person’s heart. In the heat or frustration of the moment we may assume we alone are the receptacle of God’s love but we must look beyond. Not only is this child precious in God’s sight and ours as well, but this child or colleague is also a receptacle, a recipient, of that same God given love and should be treated accordingly.

Hope through God’s guidance will not disappoint either of us who are justified by faith and at peace with God through Christ. We rejoice in our hope and sharing the glory of God. In times of difficult relationships with our children or each other, let us celebrate the unifying sharing of the presence of God’s love within us. May God’s outpouring of love today dwell richly in each of us.

Questions for the Week:
Before you respond to a difficult situation, do you stop to acknowledge the presence of God’s love within yourself? Do you then do the same, recognizing the presence of God’s love within the child or adult with whom you are called to interact? Might you take the time prior to your interaction to remind the other party that she/he also has that love of God and that you recognize her/him as having the same? Am I expressing my own needs or the love that God has poured into my heart? Can I make them one and the same?
Personal Prayer for the Week:
Good and Gracious God, each day I struggle with moving from suffering to hope, dependent upon your guidance and support. Pour into me this day and every day a rich measure of your love through the Holy Spirit that I may be guided to that hope that will not disappoint.

*This devotion was contributed by Alan Feddersen, Oro Valley, AZ., who served Lutheran schools as teacher and administrator for over 45 years.*
You have come to the end of another school year. This is the time when we say our goodbyes and send the children on to the next educational experience in their young lives. Some of the children will continue on in your school, but others will move on to other area schools. Many of these children do not have a church family outside of your classroom. Will they remember all the songs in praise of Jesus you have sung each day? Will they let their little light shine for others as you have taught them to do?

All of these children are precious in His sight and all of them have a deeper relationship with Jesus because of you. They may not sing the songs to Jesus as you did everyday, but those tunes and words of praise will forever be with them. Send them on their way knowing you have done your best as a good and faithful servant.

Questions for the Week:
What is the one thing you have worked on everyday and want the children to remember after they leave your class? Do you continue to pray for the children and their families when the year is over?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you, Lord, for being with us and guiding myself and my colleagues through each day this year. As your presence has been with us everyday in class, let it now follow each child as they leave my care. Be with them and the choices they will make each day. May they forever sing your praise and feel your great love. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Candy Rickard, who served as a teacher and administrator at an ELEA member preschool prior to serving as ELEA’s Membership Coordinator from 2004—2015 and now is enjoying retirement.
June 5, 2016
Third Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Luke 7: 11-17

It’s happened to every teacher. A child tells you something that makes them sad and then the tears start. We want to make it better, to ease their hurt, so we wrap an arm around their shoulder and remind them of God’s grace for us in Jesus. But don’t you wish you could do more?

In Luke 7, Jesus certainly does. At first Jesus’ response to the widow seems rather upsetting. Who in their right mind would tell a grieving woman to stop crying and stop a funeral procession? If it was anyone but Jesus, we would probably be pretty upset. But because it is Jesus, we know He’s got something great in store.

Jesus’ heart went out to the woman, just as it goes out to us. He may not bring a dead grandma back to life here, but He gives us comfort, hope, and peace through what He accomplished on the cross. Luke writes that all the people present were filled with awe and praised God; the news about Jesus spread throughout the area.

Our God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort others in their trouble, with the same comfort we ourselves have received from God. (1 Cor. 1:4). When you are going through hard times, savor the ultimate comfort from God. You are precious in His sight. God loves you with an everlasting love and He died to redeem you. He’s prepared a place for you in heaven. That’s comfort worth sharing.

Questions for the Week:
How has God been preparing you to show comfort to others? Who do you think might need to hear a word of comfort this week?

Prayers for the Week:
Thank God for being your comfort and for His redeeming work. Ask God to show you how you can comfort others with the same comfort He has shown to you.

This devotion was contributed by Katie Krause, who teaches at Rockford Lutheran Academy in Rockford, Illinois.
“Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be- you get a fresh start, your slates wiped clean. Count yourself lucky- God holds nothing on you…”
King David vs. 1-2 of Psalm 32 (The Message)

Take a moment and read all 11 short verses of Psalm 32. It is known as one of the Penitential Psalms of the early church, appropriate for teaching the new Christian about sin and forgiveness. Read Psalm 32 from The Message – the fresh, modern words will make you smile!

Much like the early church, an educator’s role in a Christian school includes teaching children what is right and what is wrong, encouraging confession and giving absolution. Who is the child in your classroom who tries to keep all the rules, yet inadvertently messes up – and completely falls apart? Who is the child who has a hard time following any guidelines and challenges your patience every single day, maybe every hour? Who are the ones who want to tirelessly negotiate every single rule? How do you handle the one who blames others for their wrongdoing? Who is the child who holds the “sin” inside, but at some point the words come tumbling out accompanied by tears and remorse?

Yes, our schools and early learning centers have rules about how life works best, what we should and shouldn’t do. Along with teaching and caring for our children and youth we have the privilege and responsibility to share God’s gift of unconditional love and forgiveness. It is a life-long lesson in God’s saving grace… to know our slates are wiped clean.

Question for the Week:
What kind of youth were you - a rule keeper or a rule breaker? One who kept all things inside or did you blurt out your wrongdoing? Recall a time you received words of love and forgiveness – how did you feel?

Prayer:
Dear God, we celebrate your mercy and grace. We know we are forgiven and we give thanks for what you have done for us through Jesus. Help us to begin each day and every moment brand new, knowing we are precious in Your sight. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Linda Staats, who has a passion for connecting church and home and all generations for nurturing and passing on faith. www.homegrownfaith.net
“Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came...”

For many school is out! And June often means graduation. How many of us wish we could graduate “from the law” no longer needing a “disciplinarian” to guide us in faith? Isn’t there a certificate for that? Doesn’t a degree in teaching or a masters of divinity mean we have all the answers? I hope not!

Why is it that we so often feel the pressure, as role models of faith, to have all the answers? Perhaps it’s the judgement that often comes to be morally perfect. But maybe faithfulness is modeled more in our life long journey of maturity through imperfections. What greater tool for teaching than humility? Working with children you might know best that journeying with the student is more important than feeding them the answers.

So give yourself a break. We all need the law to guide us. And we all need disciplinarians (teachers) to disciple us in faith, but trust me we will never have all the answers. So enjoy your student’s faith questions. And maybe over the summer find time to explore some of your own.

Question for the Week:
What is a faith related question a student asked that you were reluctant to answer? What is a faith question you have? Get together with the pastor connected to your school and ask if you can wrestle with some questions together.

Personal Prayers for the Week:
Holy Wisdom, thank you for the guidance of the law and the gift of faith. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper, who serves as Program Director for Ministry with Children for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and is a wife and mother of two young children.
As Christians, our life is to be one of service to others. This can be difficult because our very nature is to be selfish, to want to do things our way, and to be complacent in the way things have always been. We are precious to God and He wants a better life for us, a life of freedom. We are to live a free life and never again allow the bondage of our own selfish desires or fears to take control. God told us how to live free: to love others as ourselves. This is the true act of freedom. Putting others first, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us, permits us to hear what others are saying and see what they need. It helps us get out of our comfort zone and try something new. When we take ourselves out of the picture and put others first the fruit of our Christian walk can be seen. We show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Imagine how our classrooms will change when we bring these fruits with us! As teachers it’s important not to be stagnant or become complacent with the way things are. We must continue to grow spiritually and in our service to the children we teach. We need to be open to utilizing new ways to bring them the education they need. Enjoy your freedom, keep moving forward in service and learning, and watch as your students flourish under your example!

**Question for the Week:**
Are there areas in your life or in your teaching where you have become stagnant or complacent? If so, what are some ways you may be able to kick-start some changes?

**Prayer for the Week:**
Thank God for your freedom! Ask Him to help you embrace your freedom, to break free from any selfishness or complacency, and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. **Example:** *Dear Lord, thank You for loving us so much that You set us free from the bondage of our selfishness and fears. Please help me to live a life of freedom, moved and motivated by the Holy Spirit, resisting the compulsion of selfishness and complacency.*

*This devotion was contributed by Kim Mickey, Pre-school Teacher for 3 years at Memorial Lutheran Chapel School, St. Augustine, Florida.*
I’m writing this in May, and the school year is coming to a close. I know this by listening to the children and teachers down our hallway. There seem to be more tears, likely brought on by the extended day light hours allowing for more outside family time and play, however, creating some very tired children. Teachers have programs, parent conferences and a general barrage of end of the year tasks to accomplish. It’s easy to feel overwhelmed at this time of year, even with the return of the sun and hash of winter now gone. At times such as these we can take heart and remember God’s Goodness.

Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.

God has been good to us this year. He led many new families of diverse nature to our school, we heroically made it through our accreditation, all were kept safe throughout church construction, our students enjoyed leaning from their loving and very qualified teachers and our budget is looking good!

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise. Say to God, How awesome are your deeds!

Next week we will be inviting our families to join us for a spring chapel service. We will sing and give thanks for all we have and all God has done for our school in his name. We will say...Come and see what God has done.

Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living and has not let our feet slip.

Question of the Week:
What has God done for you and your school this year? Were you able to sing his praises through the joys and challenges of the year?

Prayer for the Week:
We bless and praise you God for your goodness and thank you for keeping watch over our school. May we remember to thank you even in times of trial and rejoice in you always.

This devotion was contributed by JoAnne Gustafson, Director of Normandale Preschool in Edina, Minnesota, and former ELEA National Board Vice President.
He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

In the hustle and bustle of daily life in and around our homes, our community, our schools, are we losing touch of our neighbor? God asks us to love with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength and all our mind. Are you aware of what each person you come in contact with is dealing with inside their soul, inside their mind? How often do you say the words “how are you”? How often when you say those words are you taking the time to see beyond the face and into the heart and soul of that person? It is hard. It takes intentional time to focus on others and their needs. We must put down what is on our agenda to focus on them.

With many of the children, parents and staff that we come in contact with each day we are missing opportunities to show genuine care and compassion. We must begin taking time to stop, to listen and to assist when needed, without judgment and bias.

Compassion does not have to be a lost art. If we follow the example of Jesus we can make a positive difference, not only in our life, but in the lives of those we come in contact each day, and in turn, the world.

Questions for the Week:
Am I a good neighbor to everyone I meet? Am I acting out of compassion and Christian motivation or out of responsibility and guilt? Do I put myself first or do I put the needs of others first?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Forgive me, Lord, for my selfishness. Forgive me for excusing myself in times of discomfort and inconvenience. Help me to put away my biases and personal agenda to ask out of sincere care and compassion for my neighbor.

Cory Newman is the Associate Director for ELCA Schools and Learning Centers. She spent 15 years in Early Childhood Education, most recently as the founder and Director of an ELCA Preschool in Verona, WI. She and her family currently reside in Carbondale, IL.
You’ve probably heard Mary and Martha placed in opposition to one another, as if one is “right” and the other is “wrong.” That’s really not what Jesus was saying. “The better part” referred to by Jesus is the ability to listen and reflect on the word of God so that our actions will be grounded in God and in the calling that we’ve been given. When we focus only on our activities, our roots grow dry and shallow. Growing in our relationship with Jesus takes time and attention.

If Martha of Bethany was challenged by worries and distractions in her world, think about how true that is for us in the 21st Century! Like Martha, we can get caught up in the tasks that are at hand to the point that we forget the people around us and our spiritual roots grow dry. In our busyness we can forget that we do what we do because Jesus first loved us. We know that Jesus wants us to serve others; that’s clear in so many other Bible passages. This passage reminds us that our actions are without the meaning we want them to have if they are not rooted in our relationship with Jesus.

**Question for the Week:**
Consider your own daily routine. Are you busy with distractions and things of this world? Are you taking time to stay grounded in Scripture, prayer, worship and Christian fellowship? What is the example that you are giving to your students and others around you?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Give God thanks for opportunities to serve and opportunities to pause and rest. Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you balanced by keeping your life rooted in the Gospel so that you will continue to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

*This devotion was contributed by Pastor Martha Clementson, Co-Senior Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church and Little Friends of Grace Preschool in Westminster, Maryland. She is also Vice-President of the Board of Trustees at Carroll Lutheran School, Westminster.*
Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial” (from Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer).

“Lord, teach us to pray...” the disciples asked. The disciples were simply asking for an example, a formula for prayer. They had noticed that when Jesus prayed, it was different from anything they had heard. It was personal.

What Jesus gave them was not only what they asked for, but much more: He gave them a guide for their relationship with God. In this prayer we learn that God is our Father, to whom, (as Luther in his Small Catechism reminds us,) we can come boldly with complete confidence as our loving father. We are invited to pray for “daily bread” - for the things which we need to live happy and joy-filled lives. We are reminded that forgiveness, both given to us and given by us, are at the core of this relationship with God.

Questions for the Week:
How can you model and teach these things for your children and their families? Through your teaching and example, help the parents to see in God the Father a model of how they are to care for their children. Help the children see and experience God as loving, forgiving, and caring through your relationship with God as your trusted Father.

What to do this week:
- Pray the Lord’s Prayer daily.
- Watch what God does in your life.
- Live in forgiveness – forgiven and forgiving.
- Trust in God’s care for you.
- And be a part of God’s Kingdom as it comes to you, the children you teach, and their families.

This devotion was contributed by Shirley Becker, Director of the First Lutheran Early Education Centers in Torrance, California, as well as the current ELEA National Board President.
Vanity means futility or meaningless. Solomon, King of Israel wanted his people to see their success and prosperity as meaningless – that it could all disappear in a blink of an eye. Solomon’s accomplishments left him sour or feeling void because he pursued them as a means to personal satisfaction. Inattaining all he had – the thought of leaving it behind to those who could mishandle or lose it all together plagued him. His resolve came by way of understanding that even though he had obtained success, wealth and power – his true happiness came only through pleasing God.

Society tells us in order to obtain happiness we are to do all we can to attain it and make personal satisfaction our chief goal. Not only do the tangible things we obtain get left behind at death but may be left to those who have done nothing to earn it and could possibly be misused or lose it all together. Hard work with proper motives (caring for your families, serving God) is not wrong. We must work to survive, and more important, we are responsible for the physical and spiritual well-being of those under our care.

Questions for the Week:
How do you keep from feeling your job is a hardship more than a blessing? How do you make sure that in teaching your students and families you are leaving something more valuable than an earthly possession?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Praise God for an opportunity to not only provide the tangible things for yourself and your family but for the grace of God who gives you a reasonable portion of health and strength to impart a spiritual nugget into the lives of your students.

This devotion was contributed by Shauncrea Fulwood, St. Augustine, Florida, who serves as Parish Administrator for Memorial Lutheran Church.
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