

EDUCATION – Why Lutherans care so much about it

Excerpt from article by Jessicah Duckworth in the magazine: *The Lutheran*. October 2013. p. 18-19.

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1. God expects God's people to learn. The writer of Deuteronomy makes clear that the commands of God are to be passed on from older generations to newer ones. When a child asks about the meaning behind the law of God, parents are to tell the story of God delivering the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

2. A Christian who learns, learns not for herself alone but for her neighbor. The Great Commission in Matthew emphasizes that we become disciples in order to participate in the process of making disciples. Education for Lutherans is learning the stories of who we are created to be, learning to be disciples of Jesus Christ and learning to respond in faith, making disciples and serving our neighbors wherever we are, as we are able.

3. Martin Luther desired for Christians to encounter the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection and live a Christian way of life. For Luther the Small Catechism (containing the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, a summary of the sacraments, daily prayers and household duties) was a brief digest and summary of the entire Scriptures and contained all the Christian needed to know about a life of faith. He encouraged mothers and fathers to teach the catechism to their household daily.

4. At the same time, Luther insisted that parents send their children to school to learn how to read and write because this would enable them to also read Scripture and the catechism. Luther held on to the long view of learning. Children would one day grow up to become the heads of their own households or perhaps even become a pastor. Mothers and fathers who could read and write would be equipped and competent to teach the Scripture and the catechism to their family. To be prepared for this holy vocation, Luther said, children needed to attend school.

5. Education is learning to be human and learning to be faithful. When Lutherans support schools, both public and church-related, they follow the greatest commandment to live freely by loving God and loving neighbor.

6. For the vocations of teachers and learners everywhere, we give thanks to God. The ELCA's social statement on education states:

“Education belongs to our baptismal vocation. Our particular calling in education is twofold: to educate people of Christian faith for their vocation and to strive with others to ensure that all have access to high quality education that develops personal gifts and abilities and serves the common good.”

7. Where inequality exists, we are called to ask helpful questions and work closely with educational leaders in our communities, cities and states to improve educational quality, especially in regions where poverty and discrimination loom large.

8. As an Old Testament scholar, Luther worked tirelessly to ensure that the wisdom and practices of the past were honored and passed on. At the same time, he argued against some of the current Christian practice of his day. His reform of the church was, as the late Tom Christenson, who was a professor at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, describes it, “an act of faithful criticism.” Luther expended lots of energy teaching a different view of the gospel and correcting bad practice.

9. Thus Lutheran education involves criticism. Criticism isn't an end in itself, however. We engage in faithful criticism in service toward God's creating, redeeming, sanctifying truth. **Healthy criticism** involves self-criticism, rooted in the recognition that human beings fall short of God's intentions.

10. As Christenson described it in his book *Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education* (Augsburg Fortress, 2004): “More than anything else we, as human beings, need to be critical of our own abstractions, particularly of all those abstractions that claim ultimacy.”

11. **Healthy criticism** also involves humility. We can't know the mysteries of the created world without learning from our neighbor. When we forget to learn from our neighbor, the means of grace, stewarded by the church, are the means for forgiveness and reconciliation.

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