

# Persevere:

## Rooted Together In Christ

2021-2022 Devotional Guide  
ELCA Schools and Learning Centers



Sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America





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ELCA Schools and Learning Centers

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ELCA's guidelines for inclusive language, this devotional seeks to  
illustrate the expansive nature of God.

ELEA Devotion Guide Coordinator,  
*Cory Newman*, ELEA Executive Director

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Evangelical Lutheran Education Association (ELEA)  
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1301 E. Main St #3215, Carbondale, IL 62901  
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Welcome to the 2021–2022 edition  
ELCA Schools and Learning Centers  
Devotional Guide

*“We can remain steadfast, trusting God through present difficulties and pains, because we know the outcome...Only with a secure hope rooted in the faithfulness of God will we be able to weather the storms of life...It is our total confidence that Christ will complete the work He began in us that enables us to persevere over a lifetime. Without hope, people give up. The Christian life must not only be empowered by faith; it must also be sustained by hope.”* (Adapted from *Growing in Grace*, Bob George, pp. 131-132, 141, 144)

If you have heard it once, you have heard it a thousand times: what a year! Each of you has faced many similar challenges and yet each challenge reflected your own set of unique circumstances, protocols and requirements. You each faced your own Goliath in those hard times. Rather than walk the path of least resistance you chose to stand strong and persevere, relying on the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

For more than a year, you have been the constant that your families, children, and congregations have counted on. You’ve worn many hats - some of you have been janitors, maintenance personnel, sanitization experts, counselors, and therapists. Through it all you’ve remained calm, collected and strong.

You may feel exhausted, like you have nothing left to give. Yet each day you still return, with a smile and positive tone to encourage your staff and support and love the children in your care. We know the hand of God is upon you and that your faith has sustained you. A deep-rooted faith will support you through the trials of any situation you are faced with. It will help you flourish – just look at how far you’ve come!

May this year’s devotional guide bring you renewed strength to lead the amazing school ministry that you have been called to serve. May you also know that the ELEA stands firm in its commitment to continue to Connect, Develop and Inspire all leaders of ELCA Schools and Learning Centers.

In His Service,

Cory Newman, ELEA Executive Director

ELEA THEME FOR 2021–2022  
“**PERSEVERE: ROOTED TOGETHER IN CHRIST**”

Colossians 2:1-7 NRSV

*Theme and Text prayerfully chosen by the ELEA Board*

**Persevere** The designers of the Mars rover, Perseverance, faced overwhelming challenges in the years spent orchestrating and then completing the first part of its mission — the launch and inspiring successful landing of Perseverance on Mars, February of 2021.

During the pandemic, our ELEA administrators, teachers, pastors, staff, parents, and caregivers also faced what often seemed like insurmountable obstacles. Each of you, regardless of your role and responsibilities, is a shining and inspiring example of faith-filled leadership and perseverance in fulfilling your mission as a Lutheran School and Early Learning Center. (James 1:2-4 NIV)

**Rooted Together in Christ** During the pandemic we have repeatedly heard the phrase “rooted in science,” in reference to following Covid-19 guidelines. We are asked to listen to and trust the scientists and medical researchers as the foundation for decisions about our daily movements, habits, and interactions. The intent is to care for ourselves and all those around us — to keep everyone in our community healthy and safe.

As ELEA and as a ministry of the ELCA we are “rooted together in Christ.” During these past 18-months, we have come together to educate, encourage, support, care, and pray for one another in these challenging and unprecedented times.

**Persevere: Rooted Together in Christ** As we open our schools, centers, hearts, and minds and prepare to launch another academic year, let these words from Colossians Chapter 2 inspire and guide us:

*“<sup>5b</sup> I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.<sup>6</sup> As you, therefore, have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

*Linda Staats, Founder of HomeGrown Faith, former ELEA Board member, and recipient of the Donald E Vetter award.*

## A RENEWED CALL TO SERVE

ACTS 16:9-10

*9 During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10b</sup>being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.*

When I was a young boy, the only call from God I remember hearing talked about was the Call to ordained ministry. My dad answered that Call. I answered that Call. But, throughout my 50 years of ministry, my understanding of Call has broadened and deepened. God calls each and every one of us. We just need ears to hear and eyes to see ... and willingness to respond.

We believe in the 'priesthood of all believers'. You, in the ELEA, are uniquely positioned to help those you serve hear God's Call. It happens through the lessons you teach ... in your conversations ... in how you live out your faith ... and how you invite all to consider God's Call, now, and the future for which you are preparing them.

We have entered into a post-covid, post-Christian world. It is one where the faith and the Church are challenged on every front. Few of the young people who were part of the youth ministries I led are now active (or even nominal) members of the Body of Christ. Few in the generations that follow me in my own family are active in any form of faith or service. I share this with great sorrow as I realize my failure to help those in my charge understand God's Call.

Now, I think, the key to renewal is in the concept of Call supported by our confession of 'the priesthood of all believers'. To hear God's Call is to think about our life in a different way. We are not our own. As God called me to ministry — and you to this ministry — so God is calling your students to a life of ministry and service.

**Reflect:** How will you share your sense of vocation this coming year? How will you invite those you serve to consider their Call?

**Pray:** Dear God, Thank you for your clear Call. Help us to call forth the best in those we serve. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

*Joe Aalbie has served six 'calls' formally and 3 'calls' informally. He and his spouse have lived in Vancouver, WA for about 30 years and in their current home for 27 years.*

**AUGUST 1, 2021**  
**TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
EXODUS 16:2-4, 9-15

“Are we there yet?” You most certainly said these words as a child, and you have heard them as an adult. Traveling from point A to point B can be exciting — or boring. Rarely do we have the mental fortitude to enjoy the moments in-between “A” and “B”, especially with the onset of technology and social media. The wilderness time was “in-between” for the Israelites; in between captivity in Egypt and the promised land.

Summer is coming to a close and the time between school years is almost over. There are many thoughts and feelings that come with a new school year: nerves, excitement, and perhaps impatience. Ready or not, the month is now August and the demands of your time and energy will change as the month progresses. It is OK — you won’t be in the in-between forever. The school year will start, new routines will be established, new connections made, and new opportunities to show love to your people. God will be there, never far away.

Moses and Aaron were in the wilderness with their people. Their leadership highlights two important tenants of faith; God will provide in our time of need, and God calls leaders to be with people in their current state of affairs. Joyful? Yes! Sad? Yes! Complaining? Yes! As a leader, God works through you to share the love of God in Jesus Christ to all whom you encounter — today, tomorrow, and always.

**Reflect:** How will you intentionally spend your time in the “in-between?” How will you respond to those who complain to you? Or those who complain about you?

**Pray:** Holy God, Thank you for journeying with us through the in-between parts of life. Bless us this month, as a new school year begins. Remind us, always, that you have equipped us and empowered us for the task of loving our neighbors. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

*Pastor Paul Waterman serves Elim Lutheran Church,  
Marshalltown, IA. Pastor Paul enjoys drinking coffee with his  
wife, playing with his three children, and coaching youth sports.*

**AUGUST 8, 2021**  
**ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2

On this day, the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, we consider this text from Ephesians and dwell on how Paul's words to the church at Ephesus, the Ephesians, apply to us as Christians in today's world. This portion of scripture is considered by some Biblical scholars to be for all the faithful in Christ Jesus anywhere in the world, as a model of how Christians should live our daily lives.

As everyday people, we might call these words a guide for living in today's society and workplaces. Paul was very strong in urging Christians to let these traits be embedded in their daily walk, no matter where they were, or who they were dealing with. The heart of his message seems to be in 4:32 (one of my favorite verses of the NT) where Paul exhorts us to "be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (KJV).

Paul recognizes in his letter that it is very easy for each one of us to feel 'hurt' when someone upsets us. As Christians, we are to be different, (just) because Christ has made a difference in our lives by giving his life as the supreme sacrifice for all our sins. We can repent and ask God to forgive us our slips and moments of failing at being 'perfect Christians' in our daily living. We are 'not perfect,' and Christ's sacrifice covers our sins through God's forgiveness. Being kind allows us to concentrate on the positive aspects of Christian living and improve our Christian walk through this life.

**Reflect:** How will my daily life and the way I live (my actions) show that I strive to be Christian in all that I do, in all my mannerisms, in dealing with others every day?

**Prayer Prompt:** Pray that the way I live, walk, talk, and all my actions will reflect God's unconditional love for me and that God's love through Jesus's sacrifice, will continue to change my life.

*Dave Bonar, first-time contributor, is Board Chairman of Concordia Lutheran School in Greater New Orleans since 2000. He retired as a Commander in the U.S. Navy after 27 years of service. He is a seasoned computer systems specialist and an expert driver/trainer of pulling Mardi Gras floats.*

**AUGUST 15, 2021**  
**TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
1 KINGS 3:3-14

The question was simple: "What should I give you?" The one who asked was the God of the universe; the one who is capable of giving anything. The recipient of the question was Solomon, chosen by God to be the King of Israel. The answer was also simple, "Give your servant an understanding mind."

For what would you have asked? It's fun to think about. What would it be ... Money? Fame? Would you think of yourself or put someone else first?

What if the request had to be tied to your profession? Would you ask for students who always listened? How about a huge endowment gift so your ministry always had plenty of financial resources? Or would you ask for unlimited patience?

Solomon understood his position. He states, "I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in." He knew that he needed help to be able to govern God's people well. Solomon's request pleased the Lord, so much, that in addition to wisdom, he bestowed upon him riches and honor. God says, "No one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you!"

Would your request please God this much? God does hear our prayers and listens to our pleas. God gives each of us the talents and gifts needed to care for all God's children. We may not be wealthy and famous kings, but God chose us to serve in ministry. God has equipped us with all that is needed!

**Reflect:** What has God given you so that you may excel in your position of ministry?

**Pray:** Almighty God who blessed Solomon with wisdom, riches and honor, please sustain in us all that is needed to care for those who you have called us to serve. Amen.

*Curtis Wudtke, Principal of Rockford Lutheran Academy,  
Rockford, IL.*



**AUGUST 22, 2021**  
**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

JOHN 6:56-60; PSALM 34:17-18

*This teaching is difficult; who can accept it? (John 6:60).*

The Apostles were enjoying the Passover celebration with their best of friends, Jesus, the hoped-for Messiah who would restore the glory of God and the people of Israel, when Jesus shocked them into sobriety. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." The disciples could not fathom how this "food" would allow them to "live forever." (John 6:56, 58).

"Who can accept it?" These strange words challenged all conventions, upturned their beliefs in the purpose of life, discarded their understanding of what it meant to be human. Imagine your greatest hero offering their flesh to you!

Like many Lutheran schools, we are an extension of the mission of the church ... to teach the Good News of Christ's Resurrection, to elaborate on the gifts of Christ's holy body and blood poured out for the world. Sometimes we forget Christ is here, crying in a Kindergartner's tears, laughing as Christ celebrates victory over a math problem, aching as Christ initiates a hard conversation with a colleague. Jesus tells us he is "the bread of life." And what is that bread filled with? It is filled with heartache mixed with uncertainty, leavened by pain clinging to our souls, satiated only by love.

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:17-18).

**Reflect:** Why does Jesus tell the disciples, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them?" (John 6:56).

**Pray:** Jesus, you taught your followers that You are the bread of life. Grant us the understanding of how, by eating your flesh and drinking your blood, we too may inherit eternal life. Amen.

*Nathan Ash is an educational leader who strives to bring the good news into his stewardship as a father of eight children, a husband of 25 years, and Principal at Ascension Lutheran School, Thousand Oaks, CA.*

**AUGUST 29, 2021**

**FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

DEUTERONOMY 4: 1-2, 6-9

*9 But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—*

The words in Deuteronomy draw us into the saga of God liberating the Israelites from the Egyptians and the long and difficult journey leading up to the borders of the land God promised to them. Their decades-long journey involved repeated cycles of exodus fatigue, frustration, rebellion, renewal, impatience, and living without the things they were accustomed to having. But they persevered.

We became familiar with the realities of “pandemic fatigue” when, we grew tired and frustrated of being cooped up, living with restrictions, changing education strategies, giving up what we knew as normal, and being told what to do. Even though most of us adapted to the constant changes for the sake of everyone's health and wellbeing, we had our weary, irritable, and even rebellious times. But we somehow persevered.

Life, even without a 40-year journey in the wilderness or a pandemic, takes perseverance — spiritually, physically, and emotionally; individually and together. We endure what comes our way because we are grounded in the good news of Jesus Christ, the ways and wisdom of God, and the guidance and strength we receive through the Spirit. Our communities of faith and siblings in Christ remind us of these good things and nurture resiliency that is rooted in Christ and helps us persevere.

**Reflect:** Who helped you to endure and grow during the challenges of the past year? What is your greatest challenge, now?

**Prayer Prompt:** Give thanks to God for specific people who have sustained and strengthened you over the past year. Pray that you will not forget them and that their love, concern, and support will inspire you to demonstrate the same attentiveness and care for your co-workers, students, and parents.

*Rod Boriack, Des Plaines, IL, is joyfully retired and serves as an independent writer for the ELCA and other ELCA-related organizations.*

**SEPTEMBER 5, 2021**  
**FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

MARK 7:24-27

*So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone .... "He (Jesus) made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." Mark 7:30, 37b.*

My first year of teaching in a Lutheran school was in 1947 with 32 children, grades 1-3, in San Antonio, TX. In the following five decades I was involved with Lutheran educational institutions from early childhood centers to graduate school. When I spoke with colleagues about their experiences, there was ALWAYS one topic that would eventually come up: "Special Ed" or "Kids With Special Needs." We love them. They challenge us. They give us joy.

Jesus approached kids and adults with special needs. In today's Gospel lesson a little girl had "an evil spirit." Her mother had no idea what to do. While Jesus is tending her he also confronts an adult who since childhood had hearing and speech problems.

Jesus is a model for us that informs our response to people with special needs. He is challenged by them. He cares. He approaches each, one by one. He sees the unique potential in each.

This text calls every person engaged in Christian education to follow our Lord's example: to care, to work at understanding, to seek professional and divine expertise. We do not let God's children wear out our patience. We talk to Jesus and pray for divine guidance. We do our best — and then entrust those with special needs (and everyone else) into the caring, healing hands and heart of Jesus.

**Reflect:** Share with your colleagues any feelings of gratitude, guilt, or hope that you experience whenever the topic of kids with special needs comes up.

**Pray:** Dear Jesus, Thank you for your special love for persons who have special needs. Guide me that this relationship may be a source of blessing to both them and me. Amen.

*Mel Kieschnick served Lutheran education nationally and internationally for over 50 years. Now in retirement, he lives with his wife Jane in Carlsbad, CA.*

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2021**  
**SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
JAMES 3:1-12 (MSG)

The third chapter of James begins, “Don’t be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the highest standards ...”

Lol — after almost 20 months of confronting the challenges and impact of Covid-19, plus our country’s racial and social injustices, do you wish someone had given you this advice earlier in your life and career?

The text in James goes on to add that no teacher is a perfect person or has total control of one’s life or situation. In Isaiah 50:4-9a, another prescribed text for this week, teachers are further encouraged with these words, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.”

You — our administrators, teachers, pastors, and staff have tongues of a teacher. Despite worry and fear and what often seemed like insurmountable obstacles, you have persevered and faithfully sustained and cared for one another, the children and households whom you serve, including your own. Because of your leadership and rootedness, our mission as Lutheran Schools and Early Learning Centers continues during these unprecedented times.

**Reflect:** During these past 20 months, when were the times you questioned your vocation or became discouraged? Who or what sustained you and encouraged you?

**Pray:** Dear Lord, with the support of one another and ELEA, may we continue to live our lives rooted in you, Christ Jesus, established in faith, and abounding in thanksgiving. Amen.

*Linda Staats is the Founder of HomeGrown Faith. She is a former ELEA Board member and the recipient of the 2018 Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award.*

**SEPTEMBER 19, 2021**  
**SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MARK 9:30-37

Jesus was taking time to teach his disciples about the heart of His mission – living and dying in liberating service to others. However, as is often the case when teaching is difficult, the pupils did not readily understand it. And they were afraid to admit their lack of understanding or to ask clarifying questions.

Later, when the disciples were by themselves, rather than explore Jesus' teaching together, they chose to ignore what they did not understand. They found themselves unwittingly stumbling into the teaching anyhow when Jesus caught them arguing about who is the greatest.

Jesus takes the opportunity to sit them down again, this time showing them the heart of His mission. Bringing a child into their midst and taking the child in His arms, Jesus demonstrates for the disciples what greatness really means – being the first amongst those who serve.

Each day teaching and loving a child is a day of welcoming Christ, serving God's beloved, and practicing discipleship. In so doing, not only are we following Jesus, but we are also nurturing communities and generations who will have the courage to live for others.

**Reflect:** What do you imagine the child was thinking and feeling when Jesus embraced her/him and started teaching the disciples?

**Pray:** God, you claim us as your children and love us unreservedly. Teach us to love and serve You and one another with childlike eagerness and humility. Amen.

*Rev. Linda Norman is an ELCA pastor and currently  
serves through the Mission Investment Fund,  
a financial ministry of the ELCA.*

**SEPTEMBER 26, 2021**  
**EIGHTEEN SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MARK 9:38-50

In today's text, the disciples object to a person doing exorcisms in Jesus' name. Their concern? The person is not a disciple of Jesus. How dare that person claim to do good in Jesus' name! In response, Jesus chides the disciples saying, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

Setting aside the concept of exorcism (I only get 250 words for this devotion!), pause and consider the power in Jesus' admonition to his disciples. People tend to operate on the reverse principle: If you are not for me, you are against me. If you are not part of our group, you are our enemy. If you do not conform to our expectations, you will be punished.

Hear again Jesus' word of openness and acceptance. Whenever you act—even if you are not certain you have chosen correctly—know that God smiles on your action as long as you are not intending evil and not intentionally trying to stand against Jesus.

Never let worry and anxiety trap you again. Of course, you should strive to do what is right. You are called to make the hard decisions necessary to stand against all that is wrong, which is the meaning of the metaphors about cutting off body parts in the text. Do not, however, fail to act for fear that God will condemn you because of a misstep. Jesus' acceptance extends even to those outside Christianity who are not against him. How much more will Jesus overlook your missteps!

**Reflect:** Have you ever hesitated to do something you were confident was right because you feared others would react negatively?

**Prayer Prompt:** Pray God will strengthen your trust that Jesus accepts you, welcomes you and calls you to decide, even if you are proven wrong!

*Mark Wilhelm, Executive Director of the Network  
of ELCA Colleges and Universities.*

**OCTOBER 3, 2021**  
**NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
HEBREWS 1:1-2A

*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.*

“Yes, Jesus loves me; the Bible tells me so.”

Our center and school often invite students to learn and sing this familiar and comforting hymn. In these simple yet powerful words, children are reminded of two crucial elements in our biblical faith: (1) the Bible is the record of God’s mercy and might, and (2) Jesus stands at the center of our faith.

In my decades as a pastor, I’ve often been confronted with biblical images that people find troubling, or even frightening and savage. Especially when people’s lives are hard or challenging, where can we go to find that compassion and grace God promises in the Word? “Many and various ways.” Whether young or old, we remember and share what stands at the center of scripture – and why we can continue to rest in its promises, whatever may come.

For the writer to the Hebrews, the center of it all is so simple and so direct. It is Jesus, God’s unique and saving Child. The living Word, through whom all things came to be, is also the Lamb who is God’s emblem of redeeming love for all. Whatever else scripture speaks, its healing and saving center is Jesus, our friend and Savior.

“The Bible tells me so.”

**Reflect:** Where do you find the truest and most comforting word in the Bible? What does it mean to “look to Jesus” as the center of God’s message? How can you share that saving center with those in your care?

**Pray:** Almighty God, your word is filled with stories, poems, histories and ethics for living. Help us always to look to the center of your saving word— Jesus our Savior and Lord. Amen.

*Bill Hurst, Pastor and Mission Director of  
First Lutheran Church and School in Torrance, CA.*

**OCTOBER 10, 2021**  
**TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

MARK 10:27

*Jesus looked at them and said, ‘... for God all things are possible.’*

Rooted In Possibility. To be rooted together in Christ is to be rooted together in possibility!

Possibility gives hope and hope is what is produced by the good news of God revealed in Christ Jesus. Through Christ, the hard act of forgiveness is possible; the counter posture of mercy is possible; the bold embodiment of love is possible. For us mortals alone, what seems impossible becomes possible through Christ with the hope of God to persevere.

In the gospel story that grounds this week, it is the rich man who was left shocked and grieving at the seeming impossibility of Jesus’ loving directive to go and sell what he owned, give it to the poor and come follow him.

We are emerging from a time of shock and grief that at times felt impossible to persevere. And yet, the call to give everything away – old notions of how things must be done; preconceived notions of what kids can handle and not; our need to know and control (what else!?) – and follow Jesus, finds us filled with the very grace of God that makes all things possible.

Beloved, let this hope of possibility sustain you this week as we continue together, rooted in Christ to persevere in faith, giving hope to our students, each other, and a healing world. It’s a blessing to share the journey with you!

**Reflect:** What is something you’ve experienced on the journey that was made possible by God’s grace?

**Pray:** God of infinite possibilities, give me/us the strength and grace to persevere in faith so that, together, my/our children, co-workers, and community remain rooted in the hope of Jesus. Amen.

*R. Adam Berndt is persevering as pastor of the community of faith at Cross of Hope in Albuquerque, NM.*



**OCTOBER 17, 2021**  
**TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MARK 10:35-45  
*The Request of James and John*

Skilled teachers take a good deal of time plotting out who sits where in a class. Proximity and distance from the teacher help students learn effectively and often forestalls unwanted behaviors in a class. Every group of children has its own chemistry that can quickly become unbalanced, depending on where the attention-demanders and sensory-seekers might sit in the room.

We can never know if Jesus had any experience as a teacher before beginning public ministry. Jesus must have been well-versed in his study of the scriptures, but no proof exists that the Anointed One had ever been responsible for a tight band of disciples, boys who “looped” with their teacher for 3 years; boys who really never got the message until after Jesus left them and sent the Holy Spirit to help them understand God’s teaching.

We have all dealt with the children who want to be the “teacher’s pet” or students who feel that they are being treated unfairly because some children appear to be getting more attention or more privileges than they are. The Gospel of Mark gives witness to the grace with which Jesus, the perfect teacher, pointed out to the disciples that their place next to the Rabbi carries a great responsibility and, ultimately, a very dear price.

**Reflect:** How do I model the grace of Jesus in my leadership at my school or early learning center, so that my students might become the next generation of servant leaders in our community? How do I teach with confidence the love of Christ?

**Pray:** Good and gracious God, fill me with your wisdom as children seek love and approval and, sometimes, status among their peers. Help me to nurture all the students in my care so that they come to know your divine love, and learn how to live in community and care for each other. Help our students understand the responsibilities of your love, to put aside selfishness and pride, and to become active and courageous leaders through your grace and faith in you. Amen.

*Chris Comella is principal of Pilgrim Lutheran School, Chicago, IL, and serves as vice-president of the ELEA Board of Directors.*

**OCTOBER 24, 2021**  
**TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MARK 10:46-52

On any given day, I can be blinded by the problems and challenges I face. I am so focused on trying to fix the things that I perceive to be important, that I can miss the opportunity to be present for others. When things get overwhelming and I feel disheartened and discouraged, I tend to cry out, like the blind Bartimaeus, “Jesus. . . have mercy on me!”

The disciples say to Bartimaeus, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” When I am troubled, Jesus hears me and responds. Like Bartimaeus, it is often the words of those around me who encourage me to “take heart; get up,” and to remember that Jesus is calling me through these challenges and will be there for me.

Some days it may be difficult to persevere. When I remember that Jesus is right beside me and has a plan for my good, even in the toughest of circumstances, I find that the challenges that I thought were too much for me to manage, become lighter. I feel so much better. I am able to respond to the words of Jesus, “Go; your faith has made you well,” with a calm peace that I know only comes from God.

**Reflect:** What things cause you to be blind to the needs of others? Who reminds you to, “Take heart!”? When have you experienced a situation that ‘your faith has made you well!’?

**Prayer Prompt:** Be thankful for whatever circumstances you find that you are in each day. Lift them up to Jesus in faith, knowing that Jesus has the power to make all well, and will help you on your way to knowing peace.

*Joanne Osterland is blessed to serve as the Executive Director  
at Christ Lutheran Preschool in Dallas, TX.*

**OCTOBER 31, 2021**  
**TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
RUTH 1:1-18

The story of Naomi and Ruth is a very familiar scenario for me. The Bible story is that Naomi had two sons; her husband and both sons died, but the two daughters-in-law remained. One of them, Ruth, stuck to Naomi like glue and moved back to the land of Judah from Moab with her.

Reading the rest of Ruth, we see that Ruth remarries and ultimately becomes the grandmother of David, making Naomi David's great-grandmother, who is included in the lineage of Jesus. The mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship becomes one of mother and daughter. I can relate.

When my second husband and I married, my son was five and my husband's daughter was ten. She and I hit it off from Day 1 and she continued to live with our family during her teenage years. She has a birth mom who is still very much alive and a lovely woman; but my step-daughter and I are indeed much like mother and daughter.

She often calls her mom and me her "two moms." We both have somewhat different, but very important, roles in her life; and she, her husband, and my two grandkids could not be closer to me than if she were my biological child. Her father, my husband, died six years ago and we have become even closer since. My grandkids are old enough to understand the "step" part of the relationship, but I am truly their grandmother — no distinction has ever been made.

God closes the gap and teaches us that love is love and family is family — regardless of biology.

**Reflect:** How can you help your students understand the love of family regardless of genetics? Encourage them to share stories about their step-families.

**Prayer Prompt:** Pray for those, particularly the children in your care, who do not have supportive relationships with their step or biological families.

*Gayle Denny is a retired educator and lifelong learner who served as a former Executive Director of ELEA.*

**NOVEMBER 7, 2021**  
**TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
PSALM 146

When you are bowed down under the weight of your day, where do you receive strength to preserve?

I find encouragement in God's Word, the Bible. Psalm 146 guides God's people to praise the Lord no matter our circumstances. Why? Because ... our hope is in the Lord our God, not in our situation.

This is the Triune God who sets us free from our sin, opens our eyes to the beauty of the earth and sea, brings justice to the oppressed, and watches over all the children of the world.

God has always and forever given strength and peace to the weary people of the world and will for all generations to come.

Sing praises to God all your life long!

**Reflect:** What praises will you sing today to our forever God?

**Pray:** Dear Lord and Savior, I praise and thank you for blessing me with your creation, your faith, your strength, your peace. Amen

*Gaye Rodriguey is a PreK Readiness teacher at His Kids  
Preschool at Oak Harbor Lutheran Church  
on Whidbey Island, WA.*

**NOVEMBER 14, 2021**  
**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

1 SAMUEL 2:1A

*Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God."*

Rooted in her faith in God, Hannah perseveres in prayer.

She's so desperate the local priest thinks she's drunk the way she prays with her whole body, soul and spirit. Hannah stays relentless in her prayers.

Her husband doesn't understand why his gifts won't suffice to make her happy. Hannah stays relentless in prayer.

Family members provoke her, irritate her and cause trouble for her. And yet Hannah stays relentless in prayer.

Perhaps she doubts, perhaps she wonders, perhaps at times she feels like giving up, but her faith journeys with her through these ups and downs. She knows no other way.

So Hannah, rooted in her tenacious faith in God, perseveres in prayer until the day she is able to thank God by naming her newborn son Samuel, meaning, "I have asked him of the Lord."

**Reflect:** Does rooted in faith mean to you that you have absolute guarantees, flexible beliefs, or something else all together?

**Pray:** Holy Mystery, thank you for Hannah's model of faithfulness and for the many ways faithfulness is modeled through us. Amen.

*The Rev. Janelle Rozek Hooper works as Program Director  
for Ministry with Children for the ELCA  
and serves on the ELEA Board.*

**NOVEMBER 21, 2021**  
**TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
REVELATIONS 1:8

John describes our Lord God as the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. From the beginning to the ending and all that is between, God is present.

Some define God as the Alpha in being the chief in divine nature, being powerful overall. While God as Omega defined as becoming the lowest despised and rejected by man.

When we teach this solid truth to our children, we are teaching them that God knows and understands their joys and pain. God knows divine power as well as rejection. God understands being praised then being beaten and hung on a cross.

As adults, when we grasp the reality and fullness of God, our anxiety will fade away into overwhelming confidence. Fully trusting that whatever has happened, we will be able to see that God truly has had it in control from the beginning to the end and all in between.

**Reflect:** What is something happening in your life that you are confident God understands? Can you look back and see where God took care of an incident in your life? Is it easy to let God have control of your life?

**Pray:** Dear Gracious Father, I am so grateful that you are indeed the first and last and all else that exists in our lives. Thank you for understanding all that we go through and for being our friend. Amen.

*Melanie Bicket, ELEA Membership Director*

**NOVEMBER 28, 2021**  
**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
1 THESSALONIANS 3:9-13

Today is the New Year's Day of the church year. It is another new beginning. The theme for Advent is HOPE. The color is blue, the color of hope and faithfulness.

These are the words we need to read and hear following more than a year of COVID-19. It has been a struggle – difficult at times for you to teach and lead your school, to maintain a sense of normalcy. Yet through it all, you have persevered.

I chose the second reading for this Sunday from Paul's letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. Paul is enthusiastically filled with joy. The reading begins in v.9 with, "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?" The joy and thankfulness that is expressed comes across as sheer delight and even with a hint of relief. We are reminded of the joy of knowing that we are loved when life is tough.

I think that Paul and Silas' exuberant thankfulness relates to the fact that the Thessalonians have maintained their commitment to a relationship with Paul and Silas. They have not disowned Paul and Silas. The Thessalonians are suffering; Paul and Silas are suffering. Nothing would be easier than to call the whole thing off and to desert each other. But this is not what has happened. They continue to love, and support, and encourage one another.

Relationships matter, particularly when life is tough – which it most often is. Relationships matter! To know that you are loved, prayed for and supported in the midst of suffering is a wonderful and joyous experience.

**Reflect:** How have you persevered this past year?

**Prayer Prompt:** Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13) is my prayer for you ... to increase in love, to be blameless, and to remain steadfast in hope.

*Deacon Robert Federwitz, former ELCA Director for Schools,  
is retired and living in Dover, DE.*

**DECEMBER 5, 2021**  
**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

BARUCH 5:7

*For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.*

As we approach the savior's birth, are we thinking about those around us and how difficult this season may be for others? Some people are showered with gifts, but those gifts may be empty of spirit. Some people have very few gifts, but those gifts may be filled with the glory of God. And some have no one to give gifts to or receive from, and their spirit is waning. Help to lift everyone up—in essence, level the playing field so all can easily see and feel the glory of God. It is in showing others God's goodness that we give a part of ourselves and grow together in the Lord.

Children's light shines bright, but can be squashed if one is not paying attention. We all have times when children test us ... Stop ... Breathe ... What is that child truly saying? Is he or she scared about something, but only knows how to show it by trying to get attention? Truly watch and listen to the children and what they are saying. Help by giving them tools and light to move forward.

God has given us skills to use in our life. Use these skills to help those around us. Something that seems so simple and easy to us may change the world for someone else. Listen to your heart. Find ways to help everyone see the goodness in God. For God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

**Reflect:** Who do you see around you that is asking for help? How can you help this person and give them a brighter light to follow?

**Pray:** God, grant us serenity to look truly at others and see what they are asking for. Show us the way to provide the help they need and give comfort when needed. Let us walk alongside you, with a light to show others the way to your grace. Amen.

*Mary Adams, Director of Ahwatukee Preschool, Phoenix, AZ.*



**DECEMBER 12, 2021**  
**THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT**  
PHILIPPIANS 4:5-7

It's getting close! Kids know Christmas is almost here. Many parents and teachers are exhausted, worried they can't give their families a "good" Christmas. Just a few more days till Christmas break. Can you make it? Can you stay patient? Can you be gentle with your students? With yourself? Will you get everything done?

Perhaps we start with prayer. The prayer might be short, like "Help!", or it might be one of those "get-down-on-your-knees" prayers where you pour out your heart to God and beg for the Spirit of gentleness, patience, kindness, and hope. Prayer may lead you to give thanks for the people, the students, the stories, the Christ-child.

When I talked with after-care and pre-school children in Advent, we'd tiptoe into the quiet twilight sanctuary to light one, then two, then three candles in the wreath. We'd talk about mother Mary, stepfather Joseph, shepherds, and angels. For some kids, this would be the only time they would hear the Christmas story told without presents and trees and snowmen. Their shining eyes would gaze at the peaceful candles while "outside" everything was hectic.

This worrisome and exhausting time is meant to be a time of joyful anticipation and patient introspection. May you find special beauty in the children, young people, and colleagues with whom you travel the Advent path to Jesus' birthday.

**Reflect:** How might you become aware that "the Lord is near" in your classroom, in your home, in your heart?

**Pray:** Dear Lord, Help me to be thankful and to await the blessings of patience, joy and hope that you promise us. Give the children in our care a joyful, Christ-filled Christmas! Amen.

*Rev. Beth Orling is a retired pastor who spent joyful years serving parishes with pre-school and after-care programs.*

**DECEMBER 19, 2021**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT**  
LUKE 1:46-55

Advent is a time to prepare and get ready for the birth of Christ. What a joyful time! As we walk through this season of Advent, remain focused on the reason we celebrate Christmas. It is easy to get caught up in setting up the tree, hanging lights, making lists, and buying gifts for others.

God sent Jesus to humbly live among us and take our place on the cross. What a great gift and one that we don't have to buy, but are given because of God's love for us. Take time to reflect and give thanks to God for sending Jesus to save us.

After receiving the great news she will be the mother of God's son, Mary praised God and gave thanks for the wonderful gift of Jesus. She showed us all what it means to serve and did so in a humble way.

While living on this earth, Jesus was an example of what it means to be humble. Jesus showed us how to serve others by walking alongside them, putting them first, showing us all what it means to have a servant's heart.

**Reflect:** As you move throughout the season of Advent, how do you show others, especially your students and families, what it means to humbly serve? How are you preparing to celebrate Christmas and the birth of Christ? How can you encourage your students and families to give back during this time of year instead of being focused on receiving?

**Prayer Prompt:** Ask the Lord to help you serve and in doing so give back because God has given you so much. Pray that the Lord gives you patience and strength as you take on the task of modeling for others what it means to humbly serve. Pray that through your example, others may see what it means to serve and do so in a way that points back to Jesus.

*Michael Rottmann is Principal at Grace Lutheran School,  
Winter Haven, FL and currently President  
of the national ELEA Board of Directors.*

**JANUARY 9, 2022**  
**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**  
ISAIAH 43:1-7

As a parent and preschool teacher for many years, I read tons of picture books. I love them! The illustrations and story combine to transport readers to new places and spark interesting conversations. There are a few books that cross generations and stand the test of time. However, one such story is about a boy who is having a tough day. The boy cannot avoid it, trouble appears to follow him everywhere.

Each time I read this story with a class, it pulls both adults and students into the story. The classroom grows quiet. We can all relate to those days (or weeks) when the "to-do" list is long, the complaints are louder than the compliments, and nothing goes quite as planned. It is easy to empathize with the character, maybe a small part of us even hopes for a solution.

Times like this make it harder to cope, we may want to give up. Isaiah 43:1-7 reminds us that God is with us in the midst of difficulties. God offers protection: "Do not fear; for I am with you." In knowing God is present, courage and strength rise up to meet these moments. We are not alone. This message offers hope.

God provides us strength to persevere; to reveal patience and grace to staff, students, and families in their moments of need. No matter what is happening around us, we are not alone. God claims us and loves us. This is good news to share.

**Reflect:** Talk about a time when God has provided strength or protection to you.

**Pray:** Loving God, you watch over us and walk with us through all things. Thank you for your protection, strength, and peace. Guide us to love and encourage others knowing you go with us always. Amen.

*Amy Cauble serves as a preschool director and teacher for Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church and Preschool in Sioux Falls, SD. She has served as an educator/director in the ELCA for over fifteen years.*

**JANUARY 16, 2022**  
**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**  
1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

The story goes that Mother Teresa had a novice who was charged with keeping her schedule. Often this novice would report to Mother Teresa saying, “Mother Teresa, we have a problem with the schedule.” This seemed to happen over and over until one day Mother Teresa asked the novice, “Can we change the word? Instead of calling it a ‘problem,’ can we call it a ‘gift?’”

The next time there was a problem with the schedule, the novice remembered the counsel of Mother Teresa and reported, “Mother Teresa, we have a ‘gift.’ The plane is delayed four hours.” Mother Teresa replied, “Ah, a ‘gift!’” And she pulled a book from her satchel and eagerly began to read.

Today’s text from 1 Corinthians talks about spiritual gifts given specifically to each of us. Too often we are so focused on what strengths or gifts we do not have that we forget to acknowledge and celebrate the strengths and gifts we have been given.

God gifted each of us differently and I believe it was with the express purpose to allow goodness to permeate humanity from all sorts of directions so that no one “gets missed!”

Something strange occurs when we focus our attention on using our gifts for the sake of others – we become stronger. Our ability to persevere through difficult times is strengthened when we give generously of our gifts. It is as if the hand of the Creator redistributes our giving to fall back on us as well.

**Reflect:** What are your best gifts and how do you give them away?

**Pray:** Gracious God, thank you for the spiritual gifts you have graced each of us with to use for your glory. Make us mindful to use them as a way to reflect your love. Amen.

*Dr. Kris Meyer is a retired principal of  
St. Paul’s Lutheran School in Waverly, IA.*

**JANUARY 23, 2022**  
**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31A

You are important. You are gifted. You have something to offer.  
You are a precious child of God. Yes, YOU!

1 Corinthians uses the body to proclaim this message. Each part has a vital role to play. The eye is the only part that can see, the ear the only part that hears, toes for balance and only one heart that keeps pumping. The whole body depends on and cares for, each part.

If you have ever had a sore tooth or even a little paper cut, you know that even one small body part in pain can affect your entire being. We pay attention to the smallest and seemingly insignificant parts because we cannot experience a sense of wholeness if even one part is suffering. So each part of the body responds, each with its own gifts to offer, in order to make the body well.

Just like that, we are an interconnected body of Christ. God's children are connected with ligaments of love that cannot be broken. We cannot experience the fullness of God's Shalom (peace/wholeness), as long as any child of God suffers.

To dwell in God's peace, we must believe the Holy Spirit empowers us with God-given gifts. When we respond to God's call to share these gifts, we participate in bringing healing and wholeness. We take time to discern our particular gifts to share, and perhaps help name them in others, then develop the courage to share them with a world in need.

**Reflect:** What particular gifts do you have to share with the world around you? Can you encourage or name certain gifts in the people in your life?

**Pray:** God of all, you have called us to participate in your mission of redemption and reconciliation in a broken world. May we hear your call and use our gifts and talents so that all may experience your shalom, your peace, love, and justice, here and now. Amen.

*Rev. Felix Javier Malpica is Pastor of Faith Lutheran Church  
and Faith's Little Friends Daycare in Janesville, WI.*

**JANUARY 30, 2022**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**  
JEREMIAH 1:4-10

When I teach confirmation or adult Sunday school, I sometimes wonder what I will say or what questions will come up. Perhaps you have some of these same worries concerning what your students will ask or how they will stump you.

In this text, we hear how God is calling the prophet Jeremiah. Even as Jeremiah hesitates at the call of God, he is worried that he will not know what to say when he is prophesying. But our persuasive and persistent God reminds Jeremiah that God will give him the words to speak.

As a seminary student, this story from Jeremiah about his call and commission catches my attention. Often, “call” gets reserved for those who have entered the ordained ministry in the church as a deacon or pastor. But “call” isn’t only for those who are ordained. Instead, Luther believed that God calls all people into this remarkable story of God’s love that God is pouring into the world.

God calls you to share that love with your students trusting that God goes with you in your work. You get to help build up students and challenge others. You get to be advocates for your students, especially those who are struggling or on the margins. You get to plant seeds in their brains and hearts that will bear good fruit throughout their life.

**Reflect:** How can I plant seeds that build up my students while challenging them to advocate for others?

**Pray:** Calling and sending God, you called your prophet Jeremiah to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Use me to build up, challenge, advocate, and plant seeds in the hearts and minds of students at my school. May I, by your Holy Spirit, continue to follow your call in all that I do. Amen.

*Jacob Krueger is originally from Lincoln, NE.  
He is currently a seminary student at  
Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, IA.*

**FEBRUARY 6, 2022**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
LUKE 5: 1-11

You and I might be alike in that I don't describe myself as a fisher-woman, but I have fished with my dad – an annual 4th of July adventure as a kid. We fished for sunnies off a bridge in Minnesota; I refused to put the worms on the hook(eww!). After releasing all the sunnies back into the lake, we'd head to Hardees for burgers.

I'm thinking of this memory as I read the Gospel from Luke 5. As you read it, I invite you to connect your fishing memory to it. In the story from Luke, Jesus is at a lake. He was with people fishing for Good News. They were so eager for Jesus' words that Jesus got into a boat to speak and see them. Then, Jesus asked the boat owner Simon to go to deeper water where, much to Simon's shock, his nets gather more fish than he can handle. Jesus' response to Simon sounds something like: "You think this amount of fish is impressive? Wait till you see how we catch people with Good News!"

I imagine an anchor was involved in this boating Bible story. Surely, an anchor was needed to secure the boat from which Jesus taught. Surely, an anchor was needed when Simon let down his nets in deeper water. First, they were anchored, and then the outreach began. First, they were anchored, and then the blessings flowed.

Our "Rooted" theme for the ELEA takes a nautical turn in this Gospel. Like roots, an anchor is a solid foundation. Once anchored, Jesus taught. Once anchored, Simon received a miracle. Once anchored, we become fishers for Jesus.

**Reflect:** Gone Fishin'? Think about a favorite memory of yours while fishing. Or, think of a fish-related experience of yours. What was the weather like, who was with you, what did you catch?

**Pray:** Lord God, You are our anchor. Open our ears to Jesus so that we can let our nets down, trusting Your promises and ready to help each other bring in the nets of blessings. Amen.

*Deacon Emily Myallis, Children's Minister, St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church & Christian Early Learning Center (CELC) in Lititz, PA.*

**FEBRUARY 13, 2022**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
JEREMIAH 17: 7-8; PSALM 1:1-3

Both of these Old Testament readings set the tone for the Epistle and Gospel readings for today. The promise of Life is given to those who give their minds and hearts to the Lord.

At times we feel close to God, it's easier to claim this promise than when God seems distant from our daily lives. I'm reminded of the contrast between the Wisconsin winter when the landscape can seem void of life and color, and spring, when the promise of new life is fulfilled in the greening of the earth.

In the time between, though we long for it — spring seems far away, just as God might seem to us, at times. It's the hope of what's to come that can keep us rooted in God's promises, even when we don't notice or can't imagine that God is with us.

When we trust The Word that restores life within and around us, our faith perseveres despite our experience with losses that can overwhelm us. While we are often slow learners, God patiently waits for us with the gifts of grace.

**Reflect:** When have you felt closest to God? What gets in the way of feeling God's presence for you? How can we help our students know God's love when we struggle to feel it ourselves? What can our children teach us about faith?

**Pray:** God of Grace, We thank you for the promise of abundant life. Forgive us when our faith falters and we fail to accept your gifts. Renew our hope with your Word, strengthen our faith, and give us the courage to trust you whatever comes. May our children learn of your abiding love from us, and we, from them. Let it be so, Amen.

*Karen Kress, is a life-long learner and teacher, married to soulmate, Hugh Kress for 50 years. She lives in Waupaca, WI, where winters seem long, and spring comes slowly.*



**FEBRUARY 20, 2022**  
**SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**  
PSALM 37:1-11, 39-40

Have you decluttered your life lately – mentally and/or physically? Decluttering involves finding “your center, your truth” and eliminating the excess; making peace with what no longer serves you and letting it go. Decluttering is a journey and an experience.

Psalm 37 reminds me a bit of decluttering. Both have structured guidance on how it’s done to gain better perspectives; it’s a process. In a world that has us moving at a faster pace day-to-day, Psalm 37 reminds us that we must quiet all our racing thoughts, worries, concerns and turn them over to God. We have to be able to just let it go, and rest in the Lord.

In this Psalm, David outlines a list of what we shouldn’t be doing, with his overall message being that we need to be focusing on our own relationship with God. It offers some basic principles for living a worthwhile life; and when you spend a moment meditating on his words, it can be a life-changing verse that brings you back to the right mindset with a change in perspective.

God’s wonderful promise is what we have to hold on to. Remember to breathe through it all, practice patience, and let it go – declutter your mind and use God as your center. God delivers peace of mind, always.

If God is your center – no matter what happens in your life, as long as you delight in God, you are filled with joy; you feel blessed.

**Reflect:** Is there any aspect of your life, mentally or physically, that could use a bit of decluttering right about now?

**Pray:** Lord, help us to let go of the excess that daily weighs us down. Help us to focus on You, Your words, Your steps. Help us to find Your quiet and to keep You as our true center, to rest in You and find peace. Amen.

*Kimberly Julian is employed at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Ephrata, WA. As office staff, she manages outreach outlets to include support to the Church’s Preschool Program and Youth Summer Camp.*

**FEBRUARY 27, 2022**  
**TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY**  
LUKE 9:28-36 [37-43A]

In this gospel, Jesus and his inner circle of disciples climb to the mountaintop. Once there, Jesus is changed – he is transfigured. His clothes become dazzling and the prophets, Moses and Elijah appear with him. They speak about his departure, we assume his death. A cloud surrounds them, and God's voice declares, "This is my Son, my Chosen. Listen to him!" The next day, a crowd is waiting for Jesus, and he resumes his work by healing a child.

I wonder if, while Jesus was praying, he lost concentration for a minute, and the magnificent glory of the firstborn of all creation overwhelmed the dust-covered skin that barely contained it? Think of it! As Lutheran educators, it is our duty to see God within every human being and to share that vision of God's love with the children we care for. God did not (that we know of) speak to Jesus on the mountain, he spoke to the disciples – to us.

Transfiguration can be translated as metamorphosis; think of how caterpillars metamorphose into butterflies. Children come to us as caterpillars – they are on a journey. We fill them with God's love so they are equipped to transform into the beautiful butterflies that will carry that love to others. Some days it is simple to see the glory of God in everyone we meet, other days may seem mundane. We are always in God's presence. Open your eyes to see the dazzling love that resides in all of us. Jesus' transfiguration shows the disciples, and us, a small part of what awaits us when we, at last, enjoy God's holy presence.

**Reflect:** What God says to the disciples, he longs for us to hear: This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him! How are you listening to Jesus when you care for children?

**Pray:** Gracious Lord, we thank you for the beautiful vision of Jesus on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah. Help us to see your love in others each day; when it is dazzling and obvious, and when it is hidden by the mundane. Help us listen to Jesus. Amen.

*Linda Chambers is Director of Memorial Lutheran Chapel School, and Family Ministry, in St. Augustine, FL. She is Ambassador for ELEA Region 9, former national ELEA Bd member and a recipient of ELCA Early Childhood Director of the Year award.*

**MARCH 2, 2022**  
**ASH WEDNESDAY**  
PSALM 51:1-17

For many years the idea of a "tabula rasa," or 'blank slate,' dominated educational theory. Human beings were considered unformed templates ready for imprint. No longer the dominant paradigm for the educational process, the notion persists that parts of us – at whatever age – remain malleable and impressionable. This corresponds with the concept of a "do-over" (a "mulligan," in golf terms), which suggests that learning is flexible in nature and requires trial and error to achieve particular goals.

Psalm 51 shares such a view of the person in relationship to God. The Psalmist knows God as the God of love and mercy, so sin can be erased and change may occur. Blotting out the former things, whatever cripples healthy relationships, brings truth, wisdom, and a new and right spirit. For this a "tabula rasa" is required: The slate must be wiped clean so that the Holy Spirit may intervene. This psalm offers images that may be unsettling regarding race, such as reaching a state "whiter than snow." But, whether it's a blackboard or a whiteboard in a given educational setting, the focus is on erasing the unhelpful old and rejoicing in what is being created anew.

Faith is the inclination by which we offer ourselves to God as such a blank slate. When we trust in the abundant mercy and steadfast love of God, made flesh in Jesus and received through the Spirit, such faith is fulfilled and we are restored into the joy of our salvation.

**Reflect:** How do we wipe out unhelpful attitudes or practices to welcome something new?

**Pray:** God of love and mercy, you know where we have fallen short and need to do things over. Create in us clean hearts, so that we may know your joy and gladness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Richard Eddy has served as an ELCA parish pastor for over 25 years, including supervision of a preschool program. Prior to ordination, he worked as a classroom therapist for students with emotional problems affecting their academic achievements.*

**MARCH 6, 2022**  
**FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**  
ROMANS 10:12-13

Following a chapel service in a small classroom, four-year-old Peter said,

“Ms. Marge,”

“Yes, Peter, what do you want?”

Peter replied, “Can we go up into the BIG CHURCH?”

“That’s a great idea, Peter,” responded Ms. Marge.

Peter remembered going to the sanctuary during VBS last summer. The early childhood program was in the basement under the sanctuary. Seventy-plus little children and staff members climbed the stairs, walked down the center aisle, and sat in the front rows before the altar and beautiful stained glass windows. It was awe-inspiring, with a special feeling of being in God’s house and knowing God’s presence, love and protection.

Many children and adults experienced the Lord of ALL during the chapel time in story and song. As Paul says in Romans 10: 12-13, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and he bestows riches upon all who call upon him. For all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

**Reflect:** Look this week for opportunities to share God’s love with someone. God wants all people to know of God’s great love for the world and to be saved.

**Pray:** Dear Lord, may our sharing be worship to you of your great love for all people. Help us to reflect that love every day. Amen.

*Marge Robison is a retired lifelong Lutheran educator. Former ELEA Board Member, and the 2010 recipient of the Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award.*

**MARCH 13, 2022**  
**SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**  
GENESIS 15:1-12, 17-18

*15 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”*

Teaching Chapel, I get to experience the Bible with a new perspective. It has become a special part of my faith journey to be challenged to reflect on lessons to be sure our children “get it”.

This past year when Abram’s story came upon the Chapel rotation, teaching God’s promise to Abram and Sarai was one that struck my heart in a timely way. I thought about the unknowns and uncertainty in their lives and how much I could relate in the midst of pandemic life, also questioning where my “rewards” were since it felt so much had been taken away.

It makes sense for Abram to have had skepticism towards God. When we don’t experience immediate reward for faith and commitment, it can be easy, like Abram, to feel ‘not seen’ by God. So often through the pandemic I felt great doubt whether God knew how stressed, scared, and confused I was.

In knowing the bigger picture of the story, I was reminded of God’s goodness, love, larger vision, and fulfilled words. God showed Abram the stars in the sky and let him know that is how great a reward he will receive and how endless the fulfilled promise will be — and God delivered. I remembered we are a part of God’s promise to Abram. We are the stars and part of that family. And God will give us the same fulfilling promises far beyond what we could ever imagine.

**Reflect:** When have you felt like Abram and wondered about God’s promises? Where have you seen God fulfill promises? How are God’s rewards different from rewards of the world?

**Pray:** Gracious God, Help us remember your promise to Abram is a promise to us. Help us see ourselves in the big story of your love for us. Amen.

*Kate Elkins is the director of Midtown Lutheran Preschool in Atlanta, GA and currently serves as the secretary for the ELEA Board.*

**MARCH 20, 2022,**  
**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**  
COL. 2:2,7; I COR. 10:13

Lent is a solemn and introspective time. It may be inappropriate, then, to ask the irony-laden question, "Are we having fun yet?" but, instead to inquire, "Is your heart encouraged?"

Our Col. 2 text says that "hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love." We may be individually rooted in Christ but being rooted "together" in Christ suggests meaningful relationships. As educators, we live with barriers — physical ones: halls and walls; professional ones: schedules, preps, and disconnects on discipline or educational philosophy; personal ones: time, family status, and interests.

If only we could better weave the threads of our individual daily narratives into a whole that would help all of us to persevere. Our knitting together, bonding in love, can mitigate risk while focusing our strengths to overcome, to endure.

Today's Isaiah text says that God will abundantly pardon. Our Psalm text says that God's right hand upholds us. Our Corinthians text says that when tempted (or challenged) God will provide a way of escape. May God use us as instruments to do and to be just those things for and with each other — pardon each other, uphold each other, provide "escape" for each other, all so that we may persevere — in Christ. Are you ready? Go forth and sing with joy!

**Reflect:** Politicians refer to "reaching across the aisle." In what ways can you, today, reach across the "hallway" to your colleague who is in need of your help to persevere? Allow a few minutes during devotion time for sharing and personal support.

**Pray:** Lord, encourage our hearts to love colleagues that they may persevere and endure. Provide us with opportunities and insight to love, forgive and uplift each other. Send your Holy Spirit to equip us so that not only is our word our bond but more, our bond is our love. In the sure Hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

*Alan Feddersen, retired teacher, principal, and director  
of schools whose heart has thankfully been encouraged  
by many colleagues over many years.*

**MARCH 27, 2022**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT**  
LUKE 15:1-3, 11B-32

This passage is often referred to as "The Prodigal Son," but I like the term, "The Faithful Parent," a little better. It tells a story of two sons, each taking very different paths and a father who has to abide by the movements of these two sons.

The text tells us the father gives the younger what he asks for, even though we, as hearers of this text, probably know it is a mistake ... we can almost see trouble lying ahead. While the son does indeed squander his inheritance, he does at last return home in disgrace; but is welcomed home by his father with open arms. The older son meanwhile is upset with his father's decision and sulks. The father assures this sulking son that he indeed loves him equally.

The moral of this parable lies in God's unquenchable love for all of God's children and wishes only to have us together as one family. As people that work with children, we should realize that children are different and have different needs. "One size fits all" is probably not the best approach in dealing with the needs of those in our care.

Accepting differences and loving unconditionally, as the father did in our story, can truly benefit the growth of our young people. The father didn't reject the "outrageous" request of the young son. The father allowed the son to try and when the son ultimately failed, he welcomed him back with open arms. There is no greater love than this.

**Reflect:** Have you done anything you later regretted? How did you feel afterward?

**Pray:** Loving God, thank you for allowing us to be courageous in our actions, and when we fall, thank you for picking us up and giving us a big hug. Amen.

*Bob Cederstrom, a pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, Hyde Park NY, works closely with the students and faculty of Little Sprouts pre-school. He served on the board of the Lutheran Schools Association. He holds a degree in Adaptive Physical Education.*

**APRIL 3, 2022**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT**  
PHILIPPIANS 3:4B-14

*<sup>7</sup>Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup>More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Over the past two years, we have all suffered through many losses due to the ongoing repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. In our schools and centers, we have lost time together, we have lost enrollment, we have lost some old and beloved ways of doing things. Our churches and communities have lost many wonderful souls to the virus.

Paul speaks to us of loss in today's reading. Compared to knowing the love of Jesus, Paul says, he regards everything else as a loss.

In the midst of all the losses we have suffered, what can we do? How do we deal with so much loss without falling into despair? Like Paul, we want to know Christ. Like Paul, we press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

We know that Christ suffered the worst loss of all when he went to the cross and then returned from the dead to save us. His sacrificial death tells us that he loves us beyond all possible human understanding. Jesus has been with us through all of the losses we've experienced over the last two years, and Jesus has given us the strength to press on, even in the midst of significant challenges.

By continuing on our journey to know Christ, we can persevere through loss. As we pray, worship, and study with the children in our care, we all come to know Christ better.

**Reflect:** Where did you see or feel Jesus supporting you during a recent challenging experience?

**Pray:** Dear Jesus, We want to know you. Keep our lives rooted in your word and your love. Sustain us through experiences of loss, and draw us closer to you. In your name, we pray. Amen.

*Melissa Roselle, a lifelong Lutheran, serves as the Director of Education at St. John's Lutheran Preschool in Springfield, IL.*



**APRIL 10, 2022**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT**  
LUKE 19:28-40

In today's lesson, Jesus sends disciples up ahead to a place they had not been, asking them to complete a task that probably did not make much sense to them at the time. Can you imagine their conversation as they walked? "What do we do if this doesn't work?" "What if they say, no?" "What are we doing here?"

Jesus asked them to walk into the unknown. He used their faithful obedience to fulfill the Scriptures. If I imagine myself walking alongside them, I can hear their confusion and uncertainty. Yet, they obeyed.

Fast forward to September 2021. It is time to reopen schools and childcare centers across the country. We know that God is working in our midst as we provide academic instruction, faith formation, and tender care to his precious children.

At the same time, God is asking us to walk towards the unknown. "How will this work?" "Masks and temperature checks?" "Can we build community if we are six feet apart?" We walked ahead. God provided. We were obedient. God was faithful. We moved forward, rooted in faith.

The first day of school did not look exactly like Palm Sunday, but it was a very joyous celebration of welcome. In our obedience, God was faithful. Like the crowd in Jerusalem, we had the opportunity to praise God for the miracles we had seen. Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Hallelujah!

**Reflect:** Has there been a time that you felt challenged to move ahead in faith, not understanding the plan, but trusting God to use your obedience for good?

**Pray:** Good and gracious God, you have promised to never leave us. Give me the courage to act obediently in faith, trusting in your perfect plan. Comfort me when I am afraid, and give me wisdom to hear your voice in my daily acts of work and love. Amen

*Mandy Gilbert is a lifelong Lutheran. She is the Special Educator turned school Principal at Carroll Lutheran School (CLS) in Westminster, MD.*

**APRIL 17, 2022**  
**THE RESSURECTION**

ACTS 10:39A

*We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. (NIV)*

I have never been to Jerusalem but I am the witness to what Christ has done in classrooms, fields, and stages in the schools where I have served. I have seen Christ change the course of a child's life. I have seen him bring peace to suffering parents. I have seen him bring classrooms together. I have seen awesome things, and I'm sure you have also.

The disciples often missed the really good stuff that Jesus said and did. I imagine they were busy preparing the Palm Sunday parade. They could have been fixated on preparing the upper room for the most important banquet of all time. They worried about who would roll away the stone but missed the fact that Christ's Resurrection would transform the world and every soul in it for all time.

What keeps you occupied ... lesson plans, cleaning up dropped lunches, bringing peace to the playground? It is a shame when we let the tasks and troubles of the day block out the power of Christ's promise to bring eternal life. How cool is it that we get a fresh start every day? Before we raise our sins have been empty from the place where we sleep.

This is the message of Easter on that day with the rising of the SON, we have been made new! Don't miss the power of that thought.

**Reflect:** When have you seen the power of God in your classroom?

**Prayer Prompt:** Use "circle time" to create a list of times you have seen God's power in the relationships between classmates.

*Don Gillingham, Rockford, IL, has been involved in the ministry of Lutheran education for more than 40 years. His passion is telling stories of how God uses our classroom experiences to show God's promise and power.*

**APRIL 24, 2022**  
**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER**

PSALM 118:24

*This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

I clearly remember belting out a song based on this verse as a member of the children's choir at the church where I grew up. Because I would sing so loudly, my gasps of breath could be heard intermittently between the song's words, which made for some great entertainment.

When I look back at videos of my spirited performance, I can't help but giggle. However, when I think about the little girl singing that song, I remember feeling full of joy. The sound of the pianist accompanying, the choir director that never squashed my distracting voice, and the congregation that stared back with smiles all left me with the feeling that God was near, and I had every reason to rejoice and be glad.

In our jobs as educators, what an opportunity we have to let this verse affect the posture we take each day. When we are lost in the routine, worries, and frustrations, it's easy to forget "this" day means our gracious Lord made every day. Our actions and reactions should be filtered through the lens that whether the day is good or bad, hard or easy, the Lord has made it, and we should indeed delight in that. As we push forward to the end of the school year, may we find ourselves leading our students, especially the ones with giggle-worthy performances, to see God's intention in creating "this" day; and, let us genuinely rejoice and be glad.

**Reflect:** In what ways are your students and co-workers seeing you rejoice and be glad on this day?

**Pray:** God of goodness and creation, thank you for creating this day. Thank you for our students, parents, and co-workers you've graciously brought into our lives, and may we rejoice and be glad because of what you've done and who you are. Amen.

*Andrea Gross is an alumni of, and now a co-director at  
Shepherd of the Valley Preschool, Boise, ID.*

**MAY 1, 2022**  
**THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**ACTS 9:1-20**

Saul's conversion story is spectacular. Imagine your worst enemy, someone who has threatened to kill you because of your belief in Christ, becomes blind after an encounter with a bright light and Jesus's voice. By the time you hear of it, your worst enemy has regained his sight and had a change of heart. Instead of fighting you, he wants to fight with you and proclaim Jesus as his savior.

The disciples were obviously afraid of Saul. And who can blame them? Can people really change course that quickly?

Last year was the year of adjustments. We all struggled to make sense of changes in opinions, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding the pandemic and social unrest. And yet, we persevered, supported by our brothers and sisters in Christ, trying to see where God was leading us and holding each other up in faith.

It must have been hard for the disciples to trust God working in Saul. But this was the kind of change that they were preaching was possible through Jesus. The disciples may have even gotten used to fearing Saul. Now, they would need to adjust to their new life with Saul the ally instead of Saul the threat. There was a new faithful soul to add to their tribe, rooted in Christ Jesus.

There will undoubtedly be more adjustments to be made as we navigate this world, but thankfully we have the gift of the Holy Spirit lifting us up and transforming our lives to fit whatever comes our way.

**Reflect:** Have you ever changed your mind about someone when you found they were rooted together with you in Christ? Can you see God at work in the transformation?

**Pray:** Dear Lord, Help us to be flexible enough to adjust to your ever-changing world. Open our eyes to see the possibility of transformation. Amen.

*Jenny James, Director of First Lutheran Preschool in Ellicott City, MD, has contributed to many ELEA devotion guides and served as one of ELEA's first Ambassadors for Region 8.*

**MAY 8, 2022**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

JOHN 10:22-30

*27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.*

Recently, I had a conversation with a member of our congregation who keeps sheep. He is always a good resource for checking common preacher's assumptions about "sheep" texts like the one before us today. When verse 27 came up, he brightened. "You know," he said, "most people think sheep are dumb, but that's an old myth that spread because sheep can't be driven by ranchers from behind, like cattle. In reality, sheep are quite intelligent. While they don't respond to being driven from behind, they do respond to shepherds leading the way. They can even differentiate between voices, different whistles, and specific noises made by their shepherd whom they freely follow."

Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice...and they follow me." I fear that our mischaracterization of God's beloved creatures does not stop with sheep. Too often, children and youth are treated as if they are only capable of being recipients of our common ministry and mission, rather than the full agents that they are.

After a first-grade Sunday School class centered on the healing of the 10 lepers, the students were eager to share what they learned. When asked, one student, Owen, spoke up, "We learned that Jesus touched the lepers to make them better. So that means that we can be friends with people who are sick, too!" A more faithful, missional response to Jesus' ministry will not be found among even the most faithful religious professionals. Every little sheep has agency in God's mission.

**Reflect:** When have you been mischaracterized as incapable? How might we empower young people to see themselves as agents of God's ministry and not simply recipients of it?

**Pray:** Good Shepherd, let your voice resound in our community, that we might hear and follow. Guide us in our work of empowering your sheep for your work in the world. Amen.

*Tim Maybee is the Pastor for Community Engagement for the people of Our Savior's Lutheran Church and Noah's Ark Preschool in Circle Pines, MN.*

**MAY 15, 2022**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
JOHN 13:31-35

This week we encounter our Lord's declaration that "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another." In its context, Jesus acts more as servant than Lord in the washing of his disciples' feet. He speaks then of the betrayal that awaits him at the hands of one of his own, Judas. These two actions serve as foundations to understand what comes next, the command to love one another — to love as servants and not to betray one another.

We've done both, haven't we? We've lived as bearers of "Servant Love." The Church Father Tertullian wrote in about 200 CE that outsiders said of Christians, "See how they love one another." The early Church's witness of caring for the poor, the sick and the dying were of significance to the world. Hospitals and care centers that we support today continue the fulfillment of that tradition.

But betrayal is also a part of our heritage and our contemporary experience of Church. We turn our backs on those who are "other" to us. We denigrate those who disagree with us. We castigate those whose behavior offends us. We shun those who embarrass us.

As leaders in our church's educational centers, we struggle with these realities. In our relationships with fellow staff, parents, and students we seek to both love and avoid betrayal. As difficult as this is, it is not impossible. We have within us the power of Resurrection Life. Step-by-step, bit-by-bit, the world will begin to look more like God originally intended the world to look, a paradise of Shalom-Peace, Eden of Wellness, and Life Abundant.

**Reflect:** In what ways does your educational institution address the question of betrayal?

**Pray:** Almighty One, Giver of Life, lead us to love without bounds, to serve without reservation, to rejoice with abandon, to embrace all whom you place in our company. Amen.

*Donna Braband is the former Director for Schools  
and Early Childhood Education Programs  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*

**MAY 22, 2022**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**ACTS 16:9-10**

Many years ago, I worked as a music teacher in an inner-city Mission church and school in Philadelphia. As a young person starting out in my career, I was blessed to work with a pastor who had a clear vision of his goal for the children God had sent to him.

We were to provide the students with a Christ-centered education that helped them to rise above the circumstances of their current living conditions. If they graduated from high school, went to college, reached their goals while living out their faith, and never returned to the neighborhood again, we had succeeded.

In today's reading from Acts 16, Paul had a vision. He interpreted the vision as a call from God to proclaim the Good News to the people of Macedonia, which Paul did with great success. Paul was only one person. Through the Spirit of God, Paul acted on the vision God gave him. He not only changed the lives of many people but partly through his ministry, God changed the entire course of history.

As people who work in Christian education, we have that same potential. We've received the vision and have been commissioned by God to bring the Good News to our students and to the world. How wonderful it is for God to trust us with this tremendous responsibility. May we always keep the vision before us as we go about fulfilling our mission of educating the children of God.

**Reflect:** Based on the vision God has given to you, what goals have you set for your mission in the world?

**Pray:** Thank You, God, for calling us to bring the Good News of Jesus to those you entrust to us. Help us to always persevere in our mission with humility and holy vision. Amen.

*Rev. Susan Ohl is pastor of St. Luke's Union Church (ELCA, UCC), Shoemakersville, PA, home of Church Mouse Nursery School. Pastor Sue's vision has always been one of evangelistic teaching, reaching out to the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

**MAY 29, 2022**  
**SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
ACTS 16:16-34 AND PSALM 97

Perseverance: Rooted Together in Christ

Paul and Silas were busy serving God in Philippi. Through the Name of Jesus Christ, Paul ordered a demon out of a fortune-telling slave girl. Consequently, Paul and Silas were beaten without a hearing and put into the innermost prison with their feet in stocks. Instead of groaning and complaining, they prayed and sang hymns to God, and the prisoners listened to them.

Perhaps Psalm 97 was one of the prayers and hymns: “The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad” (v. 1), ending with, “Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!” (v.12).

God listened to Paul and Silas’s persevering praise because they were rooted together in Christ. God’s reward was an earthquake that shook open the doors and unfastened prisoners’ chains. Miraculously, no one escaped. Paul shouted to the jailer that all were present and to do himself no harm. “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” cried the jailer. They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Paul and Silas persevered in speaking the Word of the Lord to the jailer and his household. They believed, and the entire family was baptized that night. Paul and Silas were fed, and their wounds washed—because rooted together in Christ, they persevered to bring glory to God. The jailer “and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God” (v. 34).

**Reflect:** How do you react when you are busy serving God and you are subjected to unfair and unwarranted penalties?

**Pray:** Loving God, may my service to you correspond to my relationship with you without regard to current circumstances. Help me to persevere because I am rooted together with Christ. Amen.

*Shirley Ehler is organist, choir director, and Stephen Minister  
at Gloria de Cristo Lutheran Church ELCA in Yuma, AZ.*



**JUNE 5, 2022**  
**DAY OF PENTECOST**

ROMANS 8: 14-17

*<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*

As all of us work and care for God's children, we too must realize that we are also a child of God.

As we teach children in our programs to love God, to rely on God, to pray to God; we also must do the same. We are all rooted together in this ministry of teaching God's love.

Remember, just as our congregations feed us, we in turn are feeding the children in our programs. We are teaching them about the kindness, love, and strength of God's love along with the peace that we receive knowing that God has shared the glory with all of us.

**Reflect:** What are you doing to strengthen your love for God?

**Pray:** Dear Loving God, we pray today for each and every person. We pray that all feel the warmth of your love and the knowledge of sharing that love in our programs. We pray for all of God's children. Please help us remember that we are called to be "God's Children." In Your Name, we pray, Amen.

*Renee Stinar, Preschool Director at Hope Lutheran Church in Eagle, ID and Idaho Region 1 Board Member.*

**JUNE 12, 2022**  
**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

ROMANS 5:1-5

*5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God ... <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

Justified by faith, a seemingly clear yet unclear statement. We know that Jesus died on a cross in order that we may be saved. Furthermore, that Jesus' death on that cross provides us with the grace of God and hope in all that we do in God's name. This is at the forefront of our work with students throughout each and every school year.

As we work daily with young minds and help to develop their character through all that we do, we have an opportunity to share with the children an understanding of the faith we have in Jesus. The character of our students is a result of our school and center teachers and workers sharing with our students the love that God has placed on their hearts — the glory of God. We encourage our students to share God's glorified truth. As our students grow, learn, and inspire us, we are able to see them develop and demonstrate God's love in our world.

I believe that the greatest gift we have from working with students at our school is witnessing their growth in understanding their relationship with God through their Savior, Jesus Christ. Building character through this understanding is foundational to the faith walk. It is our greatest pleasure to walk alongside each student as they grow in that faith.

**Reflect:** Where are you finding character being built inside your school or center?

**Pray:** Lord God, may we all seek to have peace with you through Jesus and build up our students in ways that produce hope and develop their minds. Let us share your love with our students and help them to share that love with others. Amen.

*Scott Dabson, Director at Alpine Academy of Rockford in  
Rockford IL, a Pre-K thru 6th Grade Elementary School.*

**JUNE 19, 2022**  
**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
GALATIANS 3:28-29

When we reflect on the look and feel of a classroom, we realize that each of us comes from a different home, a different background, and may even speak a different native language.

Students and teachers come together each day with one purpose, to learn together and grow together in knowledge. Some learn quickly and others need a little more time. Some have two parents at home and lots of support and help, while others may have one parent or grandparent who does their best to juggle a busy schedule and helping with school work. No two students or teachers are alike whether it is skin color, hair color, height, or language.

This reading from Galatians reminds us that we are all one in Christ. In the world around us where there are divisions and differences, it is good to remember the words that Paul spoke. There are many things that can separate and divide us. The list can be endless.

Paul's reference to Jews and Greeks, male and female, is an example to remind us that as Christians, rooted together in Christ, there are no barriers between us. We are all heirs according to God's promise to Abraham: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2) Whether adult, youth, or child, we are all children of God and blessed to role model what it means to be one in Christ.

**Reflect:** What opportunities do you have in the classroom to help children and youth get to know and respect one another?

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, help me this week to look into the eyes of each person I meet and remember we are one in your name and show your love through my actions and words. Amen.

*Debbie Streicher is Co-Director at Milestones Ministry, former president of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA, and a certified Level 1 coach for the ELCA.*

**JUNE 26, 2022**  
**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
GALATIANS 5: 1, 13-25

Covid 19 dramatically changed the world. Many caregivers wondered how they could keep the children in their care safe. Was it possible to stay safe and well and still meet the needs of the children we loved?

As a Christian, I believe in the power of God to heal all things. I believe that God's unconditional love conquers all. This passage clearly outlines the gifts of the Spirit and the desires of the flesh. Even though I have a relationship with the Triune God, my human frailties made me doubt that God's love would prevail.

It was only after I turned my full attention to the scriptures and prayer, that I was able to accept I was powerless to change what was happening in the world. I reminded myself that it was by faith working through love that God's miracles unfolded.

In looking back, I believe that through perseverance I was able to overcome my doubts. It was through God's grace that I am safe and well. By following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I was able to overcome my fear and doubt.

There are still uncertainties about how the future will unfold. When I allow God to be my protector, I can do all things through Christ. Let us guide our children in the spirit of love and joy.

**Reflect:** When you are afraid, how do you invite God into your heart?

**Pray:** Dear God of Grace, when I am afraid, help me to trust your love and do your will. Let me model the godly life in all things. Amen.

*Janet Siry, LCSW, was a preschool teacher at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rocky Point, NY. She spent many years involved with Children and Family Ministries and Parish Education, testifying about God's love in the world to all ages.*

**JULY 3, 2022**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 10:1-11, 16-20

Are you a light packer who takes it as a challenge to never check a bag when flying? A heavy packer who thinks through every fashion contingency? Do you watch YouTube videos about packing while preparing for a trip to see how it's done perfectly? We all need certain things when we travel to feel prepared for the journey.

Jesus, however, sends the disciples out to spread God's word with very little equipment: No bag! No shoes! No food! His 'how-to' video would likely not get a lot of views. And the journey must have seemed daunting. He sends them because there is too much work and not enough workers. He sends them like sheep into wolf territory. But Jesus has a point to his brief packing list – he sends them with his name, which is all they really need. They return astonished at the support they received and the power they were able to wield in Jesus' name.

As educators, it often feels like there is too much work, not enough resources (human or otherwise), and the territory can feel unresponsive, unfriendly, or even downright hostile and full of demons. But the potential 'harvest' of growing young minds cannot be left fallow, the word of God demands to be shared, and you have everything you need to accomplish what is really needed.

**Reflect:** What one 'thing' did you need to get through the previous school year? Or, what one 'thing' will you be sure to keep close as you prepare for the next one (e.g., patience, humor, prayer, a friend, a colleague, a spiritual practice, a bottle of wine)?

**Pray:** Gracious God, send us where your word is most needed. Give us courage for each step of the journey and confidence that you have given us all we need, including each other, to face the challenges ahead. Amen.

*Deacon Mary Houck has served in congregational Children, Youth, and Family Ministries and Special Needs Ministry since her ordination 10 years ago. Collaborating with Lutheran preschools in her calls has given her a deep respect for Lutheran educators and the impact they have on our faith communities and neighborhoods.*

**JULY 10, 2022,**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 10:25-37  
*The Parable of the Good Samaritan*

This is one of my favorite Jesus stories. This story rings true in today's times. We have the groups of the have's and have not's, and a few in between.

As I write this we are a little more than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen a lot of good neighbors (Samaritans) working to help those that have been in need. No matter how difficult things became, our first responders, doctors and nurses, worked tirelessly and put themselves in harm's way to help others.

We have witnessed communities band together to make and distribute free meals to all that wanted one. When natural disasters made a difficult time even worse, communities came together to help their neighbors persevere. There are also those that have turned a blind eye to those needing help and have thought only of themselves and their own needs.

We, as educators and caregivers of the children placed in our care, are the role models of what it is to be a good Samaritan. Persevering through all the hard times. Keeping Jesus in our hearts and doing what he would have us do.

Jesus has shown us what it is to be a good neighbor — it is our turn to spread the Good News.

**Reflect:** How will you be a good neighbor today?

**Pray:** Dear Generous God, Thank you for sending us your son Jesus to model for us what it is to be a good neighbor. May we persevere through these difficult times and be that neighbor, that Jesus has taught us to be. In your name, we pray. Amen

*Michelle Schaffer, Director of Christian Day Nursery School  
owned by St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church. Member of St.  
Peter, NW Ohio Synod Women of the ELCA President and an NW  
Ohio Synod Council member.*

**JULY 17, 2022**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 10:38-42

Luke 10:38-42 ... you know the story? Jesus visits the sisters' Mary and Martha in their home. Mary sits with Jesus while Martha is left to the busy work of serving. Martha complains to Jesus that her sister is not helping, who tells her she is, "distracted." Read the story! You will find two sisters with two different personalities.

What happens after the biblical story? Jesus departs. Martha and Mary are alone. Just for fun, imagine them washing dishes. What are they feeling? Saying? Not saying?

Conflict! I often have our Peer Ministry participants take turns being Martha and Mary. Martha is likely still irked. Mary is disappointed Martha could not relax.

You are at the kitchen sink ... Ready, Set, Go! Inevitably someone is going to yell at the other. We stop talking about resolving conflict. What was working? What wasn't? We invite two more participants to try a different approach. Maybe this time sarcasm enters in. We try three or four more such role-plays, each different.

Reality? Sometimes we react to conflict like Mary, and other times we react like Martha. Our feelings may get shared, but too often are kept to ourselves, maybe because we are trying to be nice! These hidden conflicts often become compounded, adding tension, stress and strain to relationships. Here is the challenge — finding ways to speak honestly and openly. Peer Ministry youth often discover "I" messages. Without accusing, blaming or shaming we learn that expressing our own feelings and needs works best.

**Reflect:** How do we handle the 'irks and quirks' in relationships? How do we keep from inflating relational differences? How does our faith guide our relationships among colleagues and students?

**Pray:** Dear Lord, Thanks for loving us in the midst of even the irks and quirks of every relationship. Thanks for keeping us real!

*Lyle Griner is National Director of Peer Ministry Leadership,  
teaching caring, listening, helping and welcoming skills*

**JULY 24TH, 2022**  
**SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 11:1-13

Have you ever been to the beach, gone by a lake, or even just taken a lazy walk through nature? When I think of the Holy Spirit, I think of that perfect wind that dances through my hair so gently and embraces me like a soft, warm blanket on a slightly chilly night. I use the imagery to calm my mind and body during any difficult situations.

As an educator, there are sometimes situations where I pray for the Holy Spirit to bring that peace to my heart. Sometimes the situation can be a child asking for something that he or she can't use due to safety reasons. To the child, I am 'unreasonable' as I refuse to give in for fear of the child's safety. Instead of just saying "No," I explain why the child can't have his or her way. Quite similarly, I ask God for help. I ask and sometimes receive a different answer than expected, but all I hear is "No." I forget that God is watching and listening and knows what is best for my life.

We must persevere in all situations knowing that God already has tomorrow in the palms of God's hands. All we have to do is ask and God will hear us. Seek the Holy Spirit in times of tribulation and feel the warmth in a calming wind's embrace. Take a deep breath, inhaling and exhaling the words, "Be with me, God." Claim God's peace in the moment of uncertainty. Knock and find that even though we are a speck of sand among the shorelines, God has a purpose for each and every one of us and knows us each by name. God even knows every hair on our heads. Wow! How magnificent is the Lord our God!

**Reflect:** What are some anecdotes or strategies that you use to help get through stressful situations in the classroom and in life?

**Pray:** God, help us understand that even though your answers aren't always what we want or hope, you know ultimately what is best for our lives. Help us remember that you, God, will never give up on us, and help us to, in turn, never give up on you or the children in our care. Amen.

*Tami Towers is the Preschool Director and Kindergarten Teacher at Zion Lutheran Early Childhood Center, Tinley Park, IL.*



**JULY 31, 2022**  
**EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**COLOSSIANS 3:10**

In Whose Image?

In St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, he states, "and have clothed yourself with a new self ... according to the image of the Creator."

One of the most popular areas of early childhood classrooms is the dress-up corner. Here children can clothe themselves and take on a new image, perhaps a doctor, a fireman, or an astronaut. Stepping out of themselves in their imaginations they can be part of a whole new story in a different world.

So many times our children come from places of stress and hurt. They often cannot avoid the negative images in real and imaginary life. In a Christ-centered classroom, the image of a loving and caring God is provided by the teacher through words and actions. Often a gentle word of encouragement, a soothing balm for physical and emotional pain, and sharing God's stories can clothe the child for walking with Jesus.

**Reflect:** How many times has a child been embraced by the image of the Creator in the safety and security of their classroom or playground?

**Pray:** Creator God, Thank you for providing us images of peace and beauty in nature, in art, and in the stories of Jesus's care. Help us to have the patience, fortitude, and wisdom to present images that create opportunities to help the children embrace the image of God. Amen.

*Hugh Kress has had the joy and privilege to serve in many roles in Christian education, now beginning his sixth decade of service — as a classroom teacher, administrator, national ELEA board member, and accreditation leader in Lutheran and secular agencies.*

## MY REFLECTION NOTES

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# MY PRAYER NOTES

Rooted In Christ you have persevered through incredibly challenging circumstances. Roots are essential for A plant to have life, likewise a connection with Christ and your ELEA community is a necessity if you are to have a successful school ministry. Without adequate nourishment from its life-source, a plant withers and dies. Let these devotions be your life-source; an anchor to provide stability, connection and inspiration, to be Church and school together. It is with heartfelt appreciation we lift up the writers of these devotions.

Alan Feddersen  
Amy Cauble  
Andrea Gross  
Beth Orling  
Bob Cederstrom  
Chris Comella  
Curtis Wudtke  
Dave Bonar  
Debbie Streicher  
Don Gillingham  
Donna Braband  
Emily Myallis  
Felix Malpica  
Gaye Rodriguey  
Gayle Denny  
Jacob Kruger  
Janelle Hooper  
Janet Siry  
Jenny James  
Joanne Osterland  
Josef Aalbue  
Karen and Hugh Kress  
Kate Elkins  
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Linda Chambers  
Linda Norman  
Linda Staats  
Lyle Griner  
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Mary Houck  
Mel Kieschnick  
Melanie Bicket  
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Michael Rottmann  
Michelle Schaffer  
Nathan Ash  
Paul Waterman  
R. Adam Berndt  
Renée Stinar  
Richard Eddy  
Robert Federwitz  
Rod Boriack  
Scott Dabson  
Shirley Ehler  
Susan Ohl  
Tami Towers  
Tim Maybee  
William Hurst



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