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Belief and Practice Statement

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is true God and true man, sent by the Father for the salvation of humanity. The Apostles' Creed explains that Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary," which supports Jesus' dual natures. He is wholly God, knowing no sin himself so he may save us from our own (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV), and also wholly man, taking on the flesh in order to fulfill the Law on our behalf (Heb. 2:14). He was sent by God the Father to do this so we may have life in His name (John 3:16).

Who am I?

I have many titles – daughter, sister, student, pre-service teacher, and musician to name a few – but first and foremost, I am a called child of God (2 Thess. 2:14). No matter where I am in life or what my job description is, I can always root my identity in Christ, knowing that He has chosen me as one of His own and called me to be a teacher.

My story starts in 1997 when I was born on June 23 and then again into the family of Christ on July 20. For the last 20 years, I have called Lutheran institutions my home, going from St. Paul's Grade School to Saint Paul High School to Concordia University, and while I have learned much both academically and spiritually in each, my story continues outside of school to a key, defining chapter of my life.

When I was 12, my dad died from cancer. No one else my age had experienced this before, yet everyone in my class, everyone in my school, and everyone in my town came together to support my family. I experienced firsthand how influential and uplifting a small Lutheran community can be, and I knew then that I wanted to work, teach, learn, and lead in one for many years to come. In the following years, I felt God leading me to Concordia University and calling me to be a middle school teacher because I could use my own experiences from middle school to help others through their own.

Law and Gospel

Being able to distinguish the Law from the Gospel is one of the most basic steps of understanding such an important doctrine; however, if one cannot accomplish this task, how are

they supposed to be able to teach it to others or apply it in their own life? We turn to Scripture for guidance here, more specifically Paul's letter to the Romans.

Paul explains that the Law holds sinners accountable, shows us our sins, stops our mouths, declares us undeniably guilty, and justifies no one (Romans 3:19-20, ESV). He then explains the Gospel by saying sinners are justified by God's grace as a gift, which was paid in full through the blood of Jesus. This we can only receive through our faith (Romans 3:24-25). Fryar (2004) expands on this in her own words to explain that while the Law sets the standard higher than any sinner can attain – demanding nothing less than perfection in thought, word, and deed – the Gospel demands nothing, instead declaring us righteous and free from sin, death, and the devil. The Law shows us a detailed report of our every sin, but the Gospel graciously forgives us and welcomes us home to eternal life by no merit of our own.

When teaching the Law and Gospel to students or to anyone, it is important to always teach both together. Everyone needs to know that the two doctrines work together as well as how they do this. There are different situations that call for different approaches in applying Law and Gospel, but it is important to teach students that you cannot have one without the other. Fryar (2004) explains that God gave his Law as a gift of love. Its detailed rules tell us how to live a joy- and peace-filled life through Christ before the Gospel can come in and melt our hearts “so that we receive from Him the gift of a new life” (pp. 52). After this, the Law comes back to bring us more benefits and gifts from God. Teaching one without the other will only confuse students and lead them down a path of faulty applications.

Such faulty applications are just as important to take note of as teaching Law and Gospel or even distinguishing the two. And as necessary as it is to teach both together, it is also necessary to apply them together. However, this is not always an easy task for us because we are not God. Only He can apply Law and Gospel simultaneously. When we apply Law and Gospel, we should first look at the state of the sinner. Mueller (2005) writes that we should apply the Law to sinners who are comfortable in their sins before applying the Gospel. Doing so will show them their sins and how they do not and cannot meet God's standards set in place by the Law, and then the Gospel reassures them of their salvation in Christ. Conversely, sinners who are terrified by their sins and their damnation without Christ should receive the Gospel before the

Law. The Gospel comforts them and reminds them of their forgiveness and salvation before the Law is able to make them more remorseful.

Role and Value of Lutheran Schools

The role of a Lutheran school is more than that of just teaching students the required curriculum and preparing them for society outside of the classroom. Lutheran schools are expected to integrate faith into the school day, but more than that, they have survived for this long because they do so with a greater mindset. Lutheran schools operate for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission and teaching children to obey all Christ commands. They utilize the opportunity for mission and outreach (Schmidt, T., 2016) by delivering the Gospel to students or family members who may not already believe (Schmidt, R., 2016). Doing this opens the door to baptism, and many families who wouldn't otherwise consider baptizing their children now have that connection in place. Additionally, Lutheran schools take on a missionary mindset when they foster relationships between students and teachers (Mehl, 2016). As a teacher, it is my privilege to proclaim the Word of God in the classroom. Lutheran schools provide the opportunity to be a witness every time any teacher or administrator enters a classroom.

Fulfilling the Great Commission

My role as a teacher extends far beyond grades and curriculum; it extends into life outside the classroom. My role as a Lutheran teacher is greater yet, as I foster and guide students in regards to their eternal life. All Lutheran teachers work with a purpose to effectively minister to students of all ages, utilizing the students' God-given gifts to make a difference in the lives of each and every student that crosses their path.

God's purpose for my life as a Lutheran educator can be concisely summed up in the Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20, NIV). It is my mission to make these disciples through a classroom instruction richly rooted in Scripture, allowing for the work of the Holy Spirit to blossom in the minds of the students (Schmidt, T., 2016). Openly discussing the doctrine of Baptism with my students is important to me because I want them to understand why it is so important in the Lutheran church. Similarly, if a student is of a different denomination, I want

the entire class to be able to discuss differences in beliefs across the denominations, and I will pray the discussion ignites a spark in any unbaptized students, ultimately bringing them closer to eventually getting baptized.

When God called me to be a Lutheran teacher, he equipped me with special gifts, gifts I can effectively use in ministry. One of these gifts is my caring nature. As I work closely with students and get to know them, I begin to care deeply for them and their well-being. When I care for students, I want the best for them, and the best thing I can think of is eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. I plan to use this gift in my ministry by working hard to give the best theological instruction – one that leads them to God. Furthermore, I plan to use my God-given gift of music to instruct students where words may fail. Incorporating this into the classroom and connecting it to congregational music can help students better grasp their personal mission from God.

As I work in the lives of young children, even now as a pre-service teacher, I hope to make a difference in those lives as they see the light of Christ in my own. I want to build a relationship with each of my students in order to proclaim the greatness of salvation given to us by Christ (Romans 5:19) – a salvation only attainable through the work of the Holy Spirit (Mehl, 2016; 1 Cor. 2:14), as we have been called by God, by name (Isaiah 43:1).

Lutheran Teacher's Relationships

In every aspect of the vocation, Lutheran teachers are called to develop relationships. First and foremost, Lutheran educators build relationships with students and their families. We serve as a representation of Jesus to these students, and the best way to accomplish this is by taking the time to personally know each student and his or her family and praying for them. Presence also plays a large role in building a relationship. Students look up to teachers, and if students consistently see their teachers outside of the classroom in church, at athletic events, and even other school events, they will start to recognize their own importance to you as a teacher. With this, though, greeting students by name at all times makes it pretty obvious to kids that you care about them. This helps build relationships with parents, too, because they will recognize your devotion to their child and be that much more appreciative of and comfortable with having you as their teacher. Maintaining positive communication with parents makes it much easier to have those harder conversations with them, and as always, praying for and with students and parents builds a firm relationship rooted in Christ.

In addition to developing relationships with students and their families, Lutheran educators must also have strong relationships with colleagues, the community, the congregation, and the District and Synod. It is difficult to help students build a strong relationship with the community if their teacher doesn't have one, and showing up to church, games, and school events speaks volumes to the community and the school the same way it speaks to students. Daily devotions with other teachers and spending time together outside of school provides an opportunity to get to know one another not just as a colleague, but also as a person.

Finally, Lutheran educators serve as a representative of the LCMS to everyone in the school, the church, and the community. It is important to keep this relationship with the Synod because the Synod can serve as a support system for all LCMS church workers. The most important part of being a Lutheran teacher goes beyond teaching students the required content; it is teaching them about Jesus. This is much easier to accomplish when one of the teacher's strongest relationships is with the office that holds these beliefs at their core.

Ethics of a Lutheran Educator

A code of ethics is a necessary set of standards for any professional, teachers included; however, the code of ethics for a Lutheran teacher looks a little different than that of a public teacher. First and foremost, Lutheran teachers should demonstrate their commitment as a professional via their moral character, high standards of performance, and equality of opportunity to uphold the state of Nebraska's own code of ethics (NPPC, 2018), but they should also do so with their mind set on the Spirit and not on the flesh, as instructed in Romans 8. Setting the mind on the Spirit is not only life and peace (Rom. 8:6), but the Holy Spirit is working in your heart to create a helping and serving attitude.

Second, Lutheran educators are to be committed to their students. The Nebraska Code of Ethics (2018) explains that educators "shall practice the profession with genuine interest, concern, and consideration for the student," working to stimulate and grow their learning and understanding. We as educators are to always keep in mind the benefit of the student, working to ensure their needs are being met in any way possible. As Lutheran educators, though, it is also necessary for us to be committed to the students' spiritual growth, teaching them as God commanded in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20).

Third, Lutheran educators are to be committed to the public. In other words, we are to be committed to the congregation, the school, and the community. All educators bear “particular responsibility for instilling an understanding of and confidence in the rule of law” (NPPC, 2018). For a Lutheran teacher, this parallels Peter’s first letter, in which he writes, “Each one of you should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4:10). As teachers, we not only serve students, but their families, the congregation as a whole, and the community beyond the school and church.

Finally, Lutheran educators are to be committed to the profession itself. The Nebraska Code of Ethics (2018) summarizes this by saying educators should respect their profession by working to raise the standards, improve the service, and build “sound professional relationships...built upon personal integrity, dignity, and mutual respect.” Simply put, all educators should respect their profession to the point of constantly working to make it the best it can be, including Lutheran educators. However, Lutheran educators work not only for the betterment of earthly things, but for God and to his glory, such as found in Colossians – “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Col. 3:23).

References

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