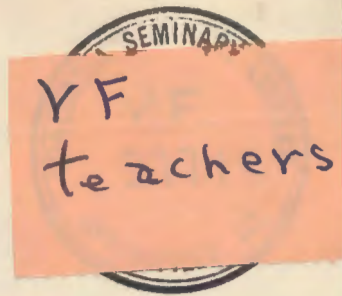


The
Ethics of the
Lutheran Teacher



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By Wm. A. Kramer  
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January, 1955

Special Service Bulletin for Lutheran Teachers, No. 401

Board for Parish Education

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

210 North Broadway, St. Louis 2, Missouri

INTRODUCTION

The Ethics of the Lutheran Teacher comes to you by courtesy of the Board for Parish Education of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. The outline contained in this pamphlet formed the basis of a discussion at the Superintendents Conference, which met at River Forest, Ill., December 7—9, 1954. The superintendents felt that the outline provided a valuable standard for Christian teachers and that it deserved to be made available to the teachers in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod for reading, study, and discussion. The following specific uses were suggested by the Superintendents Conference

1. Discussion at District or Regional Teachers Conferences.
2. Use by principals as a guide for staff meetings at the beginning of each school year.
3. Use by superintendents and District Boards of Education in their bulletins and reports to teachers.
4. Use in Synod's teacher training colleges.

Additional copies of the pamphlet are available free on request.

BOARD FOR PARISH EDUCATION
The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod

The Ethics of the Lutheran Teacher

INTRODUCTORY

1. Ethics are principles which we adopt for our own conduct. The ethics of the Lutheran teacher are grounded:
 - a. in the Moral Law;
 - b. in the written laws of human society, insofar as these are not contrary to Scripture;
 - c. in the unwritten mores, insofar as these are not contrary to Scripture.
2. Codes of ethics are common among professional people.
 - a. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, and others adopt standards of conduct which deal with problems common to their professions.
 - b. Greater responsibility and higher service call for a higher code of conduct.
 - c. A mere code of ethics does not insure proper professional conduct, much less Christian conduct.
3. Only right motives produce right conduct in the eyes of God. Without right motives even a perfect outward observance of a code of Christian ethics is inadequate.
 - a. Christian ethics demand much more than doing right; they call for doing right for the right reasons.
 - b. The Christian teacher's motive in all his work and relationships is God's love in Christ, and his own love for God. Here he gets the strength to do what is right, and here he finds correction when he becomes guilty of a

breach of good ethics, as all do at one time or another.

- c. Since the ethics of the Christian teacher are the rich, beautiful fruit of a staunch Christian faith, he must concern himself continually with the strengthening of his faith, the raising of his moral ideals, and the development of positive Christian attitudes and determination. Spiritual growth and growth in Christian ethics are of one piece.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S PERSONAL CONDUCT

1. All moral requirements apply to every Christian, but with special force to the Christian teacher. His conduct (and that of his family) is to be exemplary, above reproach. 1 Tim. 3:1-13.
 - a. Personal. 1 Tim. 3:1-9.
 - b. Husband and wife relationship. Eph. 5:22-25.
 - c. Wife. "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." 1 Tim. 3:11.
 - d. Child training. "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" 1 Tim. 3:4, 5. When the devil succeeds in misleading the children of Christian teachers into grievous sin and offense, it should be clear that the offense is not due to neglect on the part of the parents.

2. Pride and ingratitude are perhaps the fundamental unchristian attitudes which lead to the jealousies, breaches of confidence, tactlessness, partiality, prejudice, and bad manners of which also teachers can become guilty. "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife." Prov. 28:25; and "when pride cometh, then cometh shame." Prov. 11:2.

3. The teacher needs to be a person who loves, reads, and studies God's Word, and a person who spends much time in prayer. This will help to keep him humble and grateful.

4. The teacher need not for a moment think that he can fool people, that his heart may say one thing and his words and actions another. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." Prov. 23:7. "Of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." Luke 6:45.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

1. The office of the Lutheran teacher cannot be measured by earthly standards; God's high standards must be applied. Christian education is built around the fact of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-15):

"The Shepherd . . . calleth His sheep by name and leadeth them out . . .

The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice . . .

They shall go in and out and find pasture . . .

I am come that they might have life . . .

And I lay down My life for the sheep."

2. In this conception of Christian teaching there is abundant cause for

joy, gratitude, and faithful and unselfish service.

a. It is therefore wrong for a Christian teacher to apologize for his Christian calling or to speak disparagingly of it.

b. It is wrong to fail to prepare adequately for it.

c. It is wrong to use the profession as a steppingstone to something which the teacher considers greater and better. Christian teaching, also of small children, is a God-pleasing, noble, and respectable work; it is part of the Christian ministry.

3. Signs of a healthy professional approach and outlook.

a. Diligent study of God's Word.

b. Preparation for daily tasks.

c. Preparation for proper certification (not for the sake of degrees, but for greater service).

d. Membership in at least one professional group.

e. Faithful attendance and participation in the work of professional conferences.

f. Development of good work habits.

g. Reading of professional journals, especially *Lutheran Education*.

h. Support of the truth. (Digging deep and expressing opinions based on knowledge rather than on faulty or incomplete information, impulse, or selfish aspirations. Meditation on the divine truths of God's Word.)

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S RELATION TO HIS PUPILS

1. Proper relationships between teacher and pupils can be easily de-

terminated on the basis of Matt. 18:5, 6: "Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

- a. The teacher will regard the welfare of the child as his principal obligation.
 - b. He will respect the children as people and serve them according to their needs.
 - c. He will pray, plan, and work for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the children under his care.
 - d. He will be sympathetic and courteous in all dealings with the pupils (no harsh and unfriendly criticism, sarcasm, or insulting names).
 - e. He will be firm yet kind in discipline, training his pupils for stability and responsible conduct.
 - f. He will demonstrate by his own conduct the kind of conduct he seeks to instill in the pupils (self-control, an even temper, fairness in grading, confident trust).
2. The Lutheran teacher tries to make the religious instruction as winsome and appealing as possible.
- a. He cannot convert or strengthen children by his own power, but he can drive them away by teaching religion as though it were something repelling or unattractive. (Backsliders often blame the instruction they received in their youth.)

- b. The spirit of the instruction in religion should be carried over into all other areas of school instruction and school life.
3. The teacher keeps confidential information about pupils confidential.
- a. He does not speak of deficiencies of pupils publicly.
 - b. He does not talk uncharitably about them in private.
 - c. Information about the physical, intellectual, or moral condition of the child belongs to the teacher, the child, the parents, and, sometimes to the administrative officers of the school or the courts; never to the public.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S RELATION TO THE PARENTS

1. There is a close relationship between the right treatment of children and the right relationship with parents. When a teacher tries with the help of God to seek the children's spiritual and temporal welfare, parents will, as a rule, be thankful and appreciative.
2. The teacher who is a father or mother will know, and others ought to know, that even Christian parents can have serious problems in the training of children.
 - a. He is ready to discuss these problems sympathetically with the parents, either at their request, or at his own request if the situation warrants.
 - b. He will regard all parents with respect and remember that they love their children, that they want to do what is best for them, and that most of them have good

sense. (Speaking unfavorably about parents is as wrong as speaking unfavorably about children.)

- c. It will help the teacher to remember the importance of parents if he keeps in mind that even on school days the child is under his influence only about 25 per cent of the time, and that God has given parents the first and foremost responsibility in child training.
- d. The teacher will seek to maintain co-operative relations by home contacts, office conferences, P. T. A. discussions, fair and aboveboard dealing in all matters, and helpfulness in every respect.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S RELATION TO HIS ASSOCIATES

1. The first requirement is that we respect co-workers as fellow Christians.

- a. Because we are sinners, irritations are bound to occur in the area of human relations.
- b. Success in the work depends on mutual confidence and faith between fellow workers. Pastors and teachers sink or swim together. We build God's kingdom by lifting each other up, "in honor preferring one another." Rom. 12:10.
- c. It might help if occasionally we meditate on what this world would be like if all people were like us, that is, no better than we are.

2. Since the pastor occupies a central position of leadership, and the

teacher likewise a position of leadership, the relationship between the pastor and the teacher must be defined.

- a. The teacher, though called directly by the congregation for congregational work, does not occupy the central place in the congregational program which the pastor occupies. He is a servant of the Word in the same sense as the pastor, but not in the same position as the pastor. The sensible teacher does not try to encroach on the position of the pastor. Each has an honorable and responsible position of his own.
- b. This may provide a practical way of looking at the situation: The question is not where the responsibility of the one ends and that of the other begins. If we take that approach, we will soon be fighting about the boundary line. We must recognize that responsibilities overlap and that talents vary. In many ways, the pastor and the teacher are co-responsible, and they must complement each other in their work. The pastor generally has a more thorough theological background than the teacher, with no discredit to the teacher. The teacher generally has a better educational background than the pastor, with no discredit to the pastor. They simply have different training, because there are different tasks to be performed, and each does what he is trained for and what he can do best. Since pastor and

- teacher have different, yet overlapping, duties, they must consult to outline programs and to fix responsibilities. If the problem is approached in a Christian spirit, and in that frame of mind, the difficulties will fade, and the opportunities for serving God and the congregation will multiply.
- c. All dealings between pastor and teacher should be open, honest, and charitable.
3. Good advice to the teacher:
- a. Be loyal to the institution of which you are a part, and make it a "we" proposition. Do not work selfishly for advantages.
 - b. Give credit for assistance received.
 - c. Do not criticize predecessors, or the teacher of the grade or grades just below the one you teach.
 - d. Emphasize the good things your predecessors and co-workers do and have done, and compliment them for it.
 - e. Do not interfere in the affairs of an associate unless moral considerations, evident neglect of duty, or official position compel you to do so. But in cases like these don't shirk an unpleasant duty.
 - f. Accept full responsibility for your own words and actions; don't blame another when things go wrong. Acceptance of responsibility is a sign of intelligence, maturity, and professional competence.
 - g. Keep confidential information confidential. Gossip and unkind criticism of associates have hurt many a school and many a teacher and pastor. Often it may be wise for the teacher not to tell at home what he knows, to spare the family the temptation to give out confidential information.
 - h. If it becomes necessary to admonish an associate, make your criticism frank, constructive, and confidential.
 - i. Transact business through the proper channels, and co-operate with the administration: principal, pastor, board.
 - j. Assist in carrying out school policies. Democracy operates where policies are developed cooperatively and determined by the majority, but democratic privilege does not extend to disparaging or undercutting policies so developed.
 - k. Keep adequate records for the benefit of the school and your successor.
 - l. Be thankful to God for success in your work and for your accomplishments, but do not boast about them.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S RELATION TO THE CONGREGATION

1. As a member of the congregation the teacher has all the duties of church membership, not only those that are part of the teaching profession.

- a. He is to be active in the work of the congregation, Sunday school, vacation Bible school,

Bible class, organizations, as far as talents, time, and energy permit.

- b. He and his family are to be examples in generous, proportionate giving.
 - c. The chief work of the teacher can be expected to be in the area of Christian education, because he is trained for this purpose.
 - d. Leadership training offers many opportunities to challenge the talents of the teacher.
2. The teacher should have at least one responsibility outside of school duties. This responsibility should preferably involve work with young people or adults.
- a. This extra-school activity will give the teacher status, provide associations he needs, provide an outlet for his talents, widen his acquaintance with people.
 - b. Extra-school activities should be arranged in a consultation between principal, pastor, board of education, and the teacher in question.
3. The teacher gives the congregation his best. Even a low salary is no excuse for shirking duty, though it is proper to ask for an adequate salary.
4. In dealing with congregation members, the wise teacher follows an even course.
- a. Not too aloof, not too intimate.
 - b. No favoritism, courting the favor of influential people for personal advantage.

- c. No alignment with factions in a congregation.
- d. No belittling of the congregation he serves.

5. Some teachers work part time to make ends meet. A teacher has the responsibility of supporting his family, but, in most cases, an additional part-time job should not be the answer.

- a. The teacher who works at an additional job makes a half-hearted admission that teaching is not a full-time job.
- b. Teachers ought to get an adequate salary so they don't have to work part time at another job.
- c. They ought to get a reasonable vacation (three or four weeks) and serve the congregation the rest of the time.
- d. Some of these improvements may come as teachers participate more in the general spiritual ministry of the church and as more adequate salary scales are developed.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S RELATION TO THE SYNOD AND THE DISTRICT

1. When ability, time, and energy permit, the teacher should be ready to serve the church at large in its various needs. Requests for such service will ordinarily be made in the proportion to which the teacher's consecration and ability are recognized.

2. The teacher should readily respond to official requests, return his *Annual* cards, report changes of address, supply statistics, and do whatever else can be rightfully expected.

3. He should regard the Superintendent or District Board representative as a Christian counselor, and the visit of the Superintendent or Board representative as an opportunity for growth in understanding his task and for deepening his consecration.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S RELATION TO THE COMMUNITY

1. The school is part of the community and owes the community service.

a. The teacher will boost the community, not belittle it. He will strive to become an integral part of the community, state, and nation. It is painful for a congregation (and the teacher) to have a teacher in its midst who is bodily part of one community and wishfully part of another.

b. The teacher will participate in community affairs to the extent that talents, time, and propriety permit, remembering always that his chief service to the community is the training of Christian, law-abiding, active citizens.

c. The teacher will try to be a credit to his community. The school will be judged by him. Saloons, taverns, unnecessary debts, unpaid bills, intimate friends of doubtful quality, and questionable amusements are out of bounds for the Christian teacher.

2. The teacher will maintain cordial relations with the public school.

a. The public school is a necessary institution in most communities, and the parochial school teacher should support it.

b. He should be on friendly terms with public school people, attend public school institutes when possible.

c. In every way he should maintain cordial relations and cooperate with public school people as educators and citizens of a community should.

d. He should, however, also remember that the parochial school operates in its own right, and not by the benign sufferance of local public school authorities.

THE LUTHERAN TEACHER'S RELATION TO PUBLISHERS AND SCHOOL SUPPLY HOUSES

1. The Lutheran teacher will accept no favors or commissions from firms where his influence or right of decision are involved in purchases.

2. The teacher is wise if he refuses to give testimonials for books or other instructional materials. Sometimes these testimonials are abused. He is likewise wary when a salesman claims to have testimonials from Lutheran superintendents or from Synod's School Office.

3. He will not solicit sample texts or other materials unless a change in textbooks is actually contemplated.

4. He will acquaint himself with the instructional materials published by his own church, and with the recommendations of the *School Reference Catalog*. The point is not that he must use the materials published by Synod, but he has the obligation to understand these materials and their purpose, and to use them unless there is a good reason not to use them.

THE PROPER HANDLING OF CALLS

1. The fact that a Christian congregation is willing to have a teacher as the shepherd of its children is a cause for gratitude and humility.

- a. A teacher will show due consideration and respect to the congregation by whose call he is presently serving, as well as to the congregation which is calling him.
- b. He will immediately acknowledge a call.
- c. He will pray for wisdom to decide the call in line with God's will.
- d. He will deal honestly and tactfully with both congregations.
- e. If he accepts a call, he will apply to his District President for a transfer, and to the new District President for membership and installation.

2. The practice of looking over a congregation to which a call has been received is getting more common.

- a. If it is not wrong to ask for further information in a letter, it is not wrong to get further information by means of a personal visit.
- b. There is more opportunity for abuses in personal visits. It is too easy to permit physical surroundings to overshadow the importance of the work that is to be done.
- c. Personal visits should be open and aboveboard; no secret visits, no visits without the approval of the calling congregation or its responsible board, preferably no visit without an invitation.

3. Calls are seldom placed which require only school service.

- a. Barring unusual circumstances, a teacher who insists on working only in school restricts his own usefulness and dampens his joy of living and of service.
- b. A teacher who takes on more work than his talents, time, and energy permit is watering down his effectiveness and is not serving well in the long run.
- c. Jesus can be our Example. He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Matt. 20:28. Yet He also took time to meditate, to rest, to sleep, and He didn't neglect the members of His own "family" (the disciples).
- d. Women teachers have the same obligations as men teachers, generally speaking. They are also to keep the needs of the Kingdom uppermost, dealing fairly and openly with congregations, congregational boards, and District officials.

IN CONCLUSION

We find it hard to live up to the high standards which God has set for us, because we are sinners. Our only hope is in God. If we are right with God, we will be generally right, and our ethics will be right.

Good ethics can never be achieved by external pressure, nor even by the human resolve to be what we ought to be. The necessary internal transformation comes from God. In the study of God's Word and in prayer we find the strength we need. Let us give God a chance to talk to us daily

and freely and to work in us, and we will become the kind of people that we ought to be.

To be sure, imperfections will haunt and distress us until our last teaching day and our dying day, but this should not discourage us. Since God has chosen imperfect teachers to teach children the perfect way of life, He has also made it possible for them

to perform the task joyfully and successfully. We can therefore say with St. Paul: "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." Phil. 4:13. At the same time we are assured of forgiveness for our failings and our daily mistakes. That is a precious comfort, and the knowledge of it helps us to make a new start each day.

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