

INTRODUCTION

Education leads to evangelism and evangelism leads to education. It must be so! It is so! Theologian and educator Letty Russell wrote in one of her earliest books, *Christian Education in Mission*, that the Christian community is a witnessing community, gathered together by the love of Christ, which is too wonderful not to be shared in words, actions and service. Christian community is the context for Christian education. When invitation to join in God’s mission is not lived out “and the community is not a *witnessing* community, those who are being nurtured in the community receive ‘miseducation’ or a gift of education that has already been turned into a stone.”¹

The mission statement at Wartburg Theological Seminary invites people to: “A place where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning.”² Or, to put it another way, “learning leads to mission leads to mission leads to learning. . . .”³ While each of the terms “evangelism,” “mission,” and “outreach” has unique connotations, and the ministry of “education” goes by many names, the calling, the connection, and the commitment are the same: education leads to evangelism, which leads to education, which leads to evangelism. . . . It must be so! It is so!

Why, then, have evangelism and education so often been pitted against one another in budgets, time, and energy? Sometimes an emphasis on Christian education is interpreted as “living in the past” while evangelism is promised to be the “way of the future.” Sometimes one hears it is said that education is “soft” or “boring,” that which happens in the church basement to people already inside the church, whereas evangelism is “new, strong, and exciting,” that which reaches outside. On the other side of the divide, some people faithfully cling to education in the church but fear evangelism, even flee the calling, thereby also setting evangelism and education against each other. These false dichotomies, these erroneous images, do justice to neither education nor evangelism.

If the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and many other church bodies are to carry out their goals of evangelical outreach, solid teaching is necessary. If church bodies are to faithfully educate, they must provide teaching and learning ministries that are alive and that spring forth into a vital sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ. This book shows how we can build on our Reformation foundations to reach out to all kinds of people with the gospel in a pluralistic world. The education and evangelism connection leads to vocation: a calling of all the baptized.

The Book and Its Authors

This book was born through an exciting conversation in the fall of 2005 in Toronto, Ontario. Professors of Christian education at seminaries of the ELCA and the ELCIC met for two days preceding the annual meeting of the Religious Education Association.

The professors were discussing, *Our Calling in Education: A Lutheran Study*,⁴ the first publication of the ELCA Task Force on Education. That study and the subsequent first draft of a social statement⁵ were disseminated across the church body in preparation for the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Chicago in 2007. The ELCA in assembly in 2003 adopted “A Vision for Evangelism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”⁶ Two of the objectives of the ELCA Evangelism Strategy are “to prepare and renew evangelical leaders” and to “teach discipleship.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada approved “The Evangelical Declaration” at its National Convention in 1997. It includes this statement: “We commit ourselves as church to equip all of us to be people in mission and life as faithful disciples. We will emphasize ongoing learning for both laity and clergy. We will make full use of the resources of the people in our congregations, schools, seminaries and leadership positions in the church.”⁷ The Rev. Paul N. Johnson, ELCIC Assistant to the Bishop for Ecumenical Relations, Lutheran Communion, Mission in the World and Worship, said, “The link is clear, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ—evangelism—belongs with Christian education as word and melody join to form hymns of thankful praise.”⁸

That vibrant conversation among professors of Christian education in Toronto by the end of the first evening had turned into a commitment to write a book connecting education and evangelism. Bill Huff, who was present at the meeting representing Augsburg Fortress, fully endorsed the idea and encouraged publication to coincide with the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2007. The final chapter of this book, *Christian Education as Evangelism*, is written by Professor Susan Wilds McArver, of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, who also is a member of the Task Force on Education. She was able to include the final work by the Task Force as they sent their report to the ELCA Church Council in the spring of 2007.

This is the fifth book—all published by Augsburg Fortress —written by Christian Education Professors in Lutheran seminaries. The first book, *Education for Christian Living* (1987), emphasized the comprehensive calling of Christian Education in the parish. The second, *Lifelong Learning* (1997), focused on the exciting, challenging calling of adult education. The third, *Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices* (1999), laid theological and educational grounding for the church’s confirmation ministry. The fourth, *The Ministry of Children’s Education* (2004), once again focused on a specific age group, looking at the child developmentally and theologically, and providing a wealth of ideas for educational ministry among children.

In each of these collaborative endeavors the professors functioned as a team. The authors are delighted that once again—as in the first book—authorship includes professors of the

Canadian seminaries, embodying the close connection between the ELCIC and the ELCA. Over this twenty year span, as one would expect, some professors retired and others took their places. But the collaborative spirit continues, not unlike the church itself, working together educationally through the years. In this book, each of the twelve professors wrote one chapter on a topic directly related to the subject of connecting evangelism and education for the lively mission of the churches.

What Is the Connection?

There are many dynamics to these terms “education” and “evangelism.” Certainly education leads to evangelism and evangelism leads to education in many ways.

What is evangelism? What is education? What is the connection? There are multi-faceted answers. The authors have diverse ideas. Likewise readers also will have differing responses to those questions. Diverse views are welcome!

Evangelism, in a broad and deep sense, means reaching out to everyone with good news. This means being an evangelizing community through the means of grace, knowing the pain of the cross and the power of the resurrection, and fully utilizing the ministry of all the baptized.⁹ People need Christian education that provides a real encounter with the Word of God and with one another. As God’s people engage the scriptures, the scriptures engage them, entering their whole lives. Nothing is left outside. We come together around the Word as we are, living in the midst of the human predicament that is in need of God’s unconditional love in Jesus Christ. By the power of the Spirit we are transformed and sent forth, equipped for service and to become courageous workers for justice and healers of humanity in a global community. Christian education itself becomes gospel good news when done well.

Christian education as evangelism reaches children, youth, and adults of every age. How can the entire congregation become transformed to think of itself as an educating and evangelizing parish? How does education build disciples who are able to connect faith with their ministries in daily life? Education is key to helping people re-enter the Church after having been away for many years.

Christian Education is itself “good news” to faith communities where biblical literacy and faith knowledge is low. In order to reach people who have never known the love of Jesus Christ, and to reach people at various stages of faith development, we must listen well in order to know where they are in their perspectives on life and concepts of God. What educational opportunities can the church offer in the community, from early childhood centers to lay schools of theology? The evangelical challenge of education is to reach new people and also to re-evangelize by helping people remember, reclaim, and renew their faith. In today’s society, Christian people may know what they are against but not what they are for. Congregation members (not just confirmands) should be able to articulate their own statement of faith in order to share their faith with others. Life-long learning is an ongoing evangelical vocation.

Education and evangelism are closely and vitally linked. All Christian education must be parish neighborhood education. Education is measured in evangelical mission.

The Chapters: Questions, Possibilities and Challenges

Each author has a distinct voice, distinct views, including about the nature of education and evangelism, but their purposes are the same. Each author has a different style of writing, different background, life experience, and geographical location, but their commitments are united.

Part One: Embracing the Questions

In chapter 1 Diane J. Hymans explores the question of the essential education evangelism connection. She carefully examines the various meanings of “education” as “teaching and learning,” “faith formation,” “nurture,” “discipleship,” “life experience,” and “schooling.” To engage in education is to be in intentional conversation in relationship with other teachers and learners about experience as the people of God in light of the church’s tradition.

In chapter 2 Margaret A. Krych writes that one is hard pressed to know whether the Reformation was an effort in re-evangelization or education. She grounds the connection theologically. Using the work of Paul Tillich, she shows the gospel message has two sides, one of human need that reveals people’s pretenses before God, and the other the incredibly good news of God’s love and merciful forgiveness. This needs to be taught to those who have never heard it and to those who vaguely know it and need to hear it again and to understand it.

In chapter 3 Carol R. Jacobson shows that heart, soul, mind, and strength are all involved in knowing the power and the promise of the gospel. Christian education recognizes and celebrates the involvement of the entire self in the practices of learning to know the gospel. Christian educational practices are always operating on cognitive, affective, and active levels. In this way the gospel is made alive in individuals and in the hearts and minds of the community.

In chapter 4 Donald R. Just, reminiscing from his long experience in ministry, concludes that while most Christians assume that sharing and proclaiming the faith is an essential part of being a disciple, not many would say they have the “gift” for evangelism. He asks not only, “Why is evangelism not happening?” but “Why evangelism?” Just calls for transformative educational experiences so that people cannot help but tell the story of a faithful God’s unconditional love in Jesus Christ.

Part Two: Exploring the Possibilities

In chapter 5 Mary E. Hughes explores the many ways that education and evangelism make good partners. Through stories, and interpretation of those stories, she shows congregations, large and small, learning and relearning the basics of the Bible, becoming

more skilled in talking about their faith journey at work and at home, more comfortably reaching out to people in their neighborhood, and being genuinely welcoming and hospitable. Outreach and education begin within one's own context.

In chapter 6 Eddie K. Kwok shows educational and evangelizing ministry among Chinese immigrants in western Canada. He points to the importance of people encountering the living Christ as they experience and hear the gospel. The challenge of Christian education in a multicultural context calls for the renewal of the Church to become truly the Church in an increasingly globalized world. Kwok emphasizes the importance of being a hospitable teaching community, one that creates space for others.

In chapter 7 Nelson T. Strobert details how Lutheran early childhood centers, day schools, and high schools are a strong arm of education, often cooperative ventures. School administrators and pastors tell how Lutheran schools can and do reach out beyond the congregation to the community. In addition to general education, they share the gospel of Christ through the formal and implicit curriculum, through worship, and extra-curricular activities, building lasting relationships with students and their families.

In chapter 8 Phyllis N. Kersten encourages congregations to reach out beyond their doors to see the problems and pain, the hungers and longing, and the inequities in the world. Jesus places Christians with one foot in the world and one foot in the Word at the intersection of education and evangelism. The chapter describes bible study specifically tailored to the different learning needs of women and men. Congregations need to listen carefully to the questions about life and the images of the deity that people hold and design learning experiences in response.

Part Three: Claiming the Challenge

In chapter 9 Mary E Hess challenges the church, contending that far too often the impulse to share the good news has been combined with a very narrow definition of teaching and learning. She uses seven languages (Kegan and Leahy) to draw people towards patterns of practice for communities of truth. She asks, "What kind of learning environment creates an active space for listening to God's Word? What kind of teaching designs provide opportunities for such engagement? What kind of learning is transformational? What kind of education is evangelism?"

In chapter 10 Kristine A. Lund challenges churches to effectively minister among young adults, a population with a low formal religious affiliation. Faith for today's young adults is often not faith in a particular religious belief, but rather it is a process of seeking and discovering meaning. "Go and listen" to young adults is the challenge for the church today. They yearn for the divine to be present in their current reality. For many young adults, cyberspace is a place where spirituality and present life meet.

In chapter 11 Norma Cook Everist asks how the church can help people use the "languages" of their daily life, e.g. architecture and agriculture, retail and real estates, to learn and live their faith in their ministries all week. Education and evangelism are

translating and transforming experiences. Christian education, if it is to be good news as it relates to people's particular life situation, needs to inquire about the people, their growth in faith, their arenas of daily life, the people to whom *they* speak, and the issues they face in the world.

In chapter 12 Susan Wilds McArver concludes this book by telling the story of the educational process of the ELCA Task Force on Education. Through meetings, hearings, listening posts, forums and individual responses, the task force heard the voices of thousands of people concerned with education in the church. Grounded in Luther's understanding of vocation, our calling is two-fold: "to strive with others to ensure that all have access to a high quality education that develops personal gifts and abilities and serves the common good," and "to educate people in the Christian faith for their vocation" that leads toward discipleship and evangelism.

The book is open-ended in so far as many more topics on Christian education and evangelism could have been included. For instance, particularly in Part Two, "Exploring the Possibilities" chapters could be written about church-affiliated colleges, seminaries, camps and campus ministries, all vital arms of Christian education. The conversation about the connection between education and evangelism continues. Each of the authors developed some facet of that conversation: the questions, the possibilities and the challenges. A theme emerged in many chapters that was unplanned, and yet, in retrospect, not surprising: vocation, the daily life of all the baptized. Christian education must be for all people of all ages; it must be holistic, comprehensive and permeate all of life. Such Christian education equips people to be able to clearly speak their faith in the world in service to the neighbor.

Use of the Book

This book is written for a broad audience. The book is deeply theological and educational, and written in every day language for all to use: directors of Christian education, pastors, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, church councils, boards and task forces. A Christian Education Committee and an Evangelism Committee in a congregation or synod might use this book together. It could be a seminary textbook. It is written to be used by people in many church bodies who face the same question of the education evangelism connection. It could be used by a cluster of congregations, all of one denomination or ecumenically. Likewise it could serve conference, district, synodical, or church-wide groups. It would be helpful for leaders in various educational arms of the church from pre-school to colleges as they think through their evangelizing mission of education.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation. At the end of each chapter are open-ended questions. These are designed for the individual reader and for group conversation. Thus the "study guide" is *within* the book. The questions are intended to help people appreciate

their current educational and evangelizing ministries and to stretch and challenge them more deeply educationally and theologically for their particular ministry callings.

Parish Strategies. At the end of each chapter, parish strategies provide specific, concrete actions that faith communities can do in their own parish neighborhoods and beyond. Each of these arises from the specific content of the chapter. Faith communities will have ideas of their own that may well go way behind the suggestions presented here. The goal is to move from conversation to action.

Appreciation

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