

# ***The Lutheran Educator and the Sunday School Teachers***

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The Sunday School teachers of our area, (or Saturday School teachers, as the case may be), have traveled long distances for a number of years now in order to take part in what we call our Western Sunday School Teachers' Institute. There is good reason behind this expenditure of time, effort and money to take in these institutes. In addition to the inspiration and encouragement received in these meetings with our fellow teachers from sister WELS congregations, the greater appreciation we have for the work of feeding our Lord's lambs, and other benefits realized, there is the very real opportunity for self-improvement offered teachers in these institutes through the presentations, lectures and discussion which take place here. Not only is the teacher given the opportunity to see and study new materials which have been made available, or learn about others which have long been provided, but very helpful advice on how to improve a Sunday School and a teacher's teaching methods is offered through the lectures, discussion, etc.

Sad to say, however, the institute with all its benefits is only a once a year thing. And that only for a few hours during the course of a fall Sunday afternoon and evening. The opportunity for an extensive and in depth treatment of the broad range of subjects which may aid a teacher in many ways is not there under such conditions. This is an inherent, though unavoidable, weakness in these institutes. Thus a method for providing year-around instruction on a broad range of relevant topics for our Sunday School (or Saturday School) teachers would be a beneficial addition to our institutes, for the teachers as well as the children placed under their Christian concern.

Such an aid is available, and it has been provided by our synod for about nine years now. It comes in the form of a booklet called *The Lutheran Educator*, published four times yearly, usually coming out during the months of October, December, February and May.

It will therefore be our purpose here to briefly look at the aim and purpose of *The Lutheran Educator*, and to evaluate it from the point of view of the Sunday School teacher.

## **Purpose**

The first edition of *The Lutheran Educator*, and other later issues as well, have set forth various reasons as to why the "Educator," as it is more popularly known, was brought into existence. It seems that the Educator for 30 years had had a predecessor entitled *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, which in turn had been preceded by *The Minnesota District Bulletin*. In 1933 our Synod resolved to make *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, which originally had appeared only in an "unofficial" mimeographed form, its own official publication, to publish it quarterly in printed form, and to send it to all its teachers and pastors. The *Bulletin* was directed almost exclusively at the needs of the Christian Day school teacher, and held as its goal the promotion of the cause of thorough Christian education for our children through the establishment and maintenance of Christian Day schools.

It was due to the rapid growth of parochial education in our Synod during the '40's and '50's that a "bigger and better periodical to promote Lutheran education among us" was felt to be necessary. Thus *The Lutheran Educator* came into being. In a sense, the words above set forth the purpose of the *Educator* in as concise a form as is possible: the promotion of Lutheran education among us. All the articles contained in the *Educator* will finally be found to conform to this theme. To a certain extent the *Educator* is still directed toward the "professionals" in the field, that is, the teachers at our Day schools and Lutheran high schools, as well as synodical schools such as Northwestern Lutheran Academy. But, recognizing the fact that there are many congregations which do not have a Day school in their midst, the editors also took into consideration "the many things that still could be done for many of our own children and for unchurched children by means of good Lutheran Sunday schools, Vacation Bible schools, and good Bible classes for all age groups." They therefore promised that these part-time agencies for Lutheran education in our congregations would receive their fair share of space and effort in the *Educator*. The latest developments and materials produced for and affecting

these agencies were also to be treated. But together with this an important statement was made. It was emphasized that *The Lutheran Educator* can succeed only if it is read. "If the magazine does well the job it is setting out to do, it deserves to be read by all our teachers, pastors and by many laymen."

It is your essayist's belief that this job has been done exceedingly well during these past nine years, and that the *Educator* deserves greater distribution than it now receives, also in our own midst. We believe that the benefits it offers in helping the Sunday School teacher in his work make it well worth its \$1.50 yearly subscription price.

### **Evaluation**

In order for us to evaluate the *Educator* from the point of view of the Sunday School teacher, we might first skim over some of the topics which have been touched upon over the years. In the 1960 issues there were two topics which were of special interest entitled: "Why a Sunday School Teacher Training Course"—which detailed the need for actual training for our teachers, rather than just assuming that once one has graduated into high school or marriage, he or she is automatically and completely qualified for this important task. Another, entitled: "The Christmas Eve Service" gave advice which would be helpful any year as the time for making out the church's Christmas program comes around.

In the 1961 issues special topics of interest to the Sunday School teacher were such as: "Meaningful Memory Work;" "Problems of the Rural Sunday School"—one that would apply to perhaps the majority of the congregations in this part of the country; "Courtesy and Conduct of a Christian Teacher;" "Hymns in Your Societies;" "I Like Vacation Bible Schools;" "An Evaluation of Our Teaching of the Bible Stories;" "What Sunday School Teachers Expect From Teachers' Meetings;" etc. In later years the topics touched on included: "Becoming Acquainted with the Church Year;" "The Use of Visual Aids;" "Our Part-time Mission Arm;" "Teaching the Liturgy;" "Stimulating the Young Child;" "The Home and the Sunday School;" "What Spiritual Gifts Should a Sunday School Teacher Seek in Particular for His Work;" "Your Sunday School Teacher Meetings;" "The New Sunday School Course;" "Teaching the Trinity in the Primary Grades;" and others of the same nature.

A perusal of any copy of the *Educator* would reveal that it is divided up into a number of special departments. Each department has its own editor, who in turn receives occasional assistance from "guest essayists." As one pages through the 24 page booklet one notes that each issue begins with a meditation directed toward the teacher. Many contain articles directed especially toward the Day School or Lutheran High School teacher under such departments as: Primary Grades, Intermediate Grades, Upper Grades, and High School; but in most cases the basic principles brought out in the advice given in these articles applies to almost as great a degree to the work of the Sunday School teacher. Another department entitled Part time Agencies provides frequent articles directed specifically to the problems and work of the Sunday School, Saturday School and Vacation Bible School, There is usually an article which deals with one aspect or another of music, which is provided by the Music department. In addition, book reviews, reports of a statistical nature, and other items provide information of interest to all teachers in our churches and schools.

An additional feature of the *Educator* which should be noted is that the articles of the May issue are very frequently centered around a specific theme, which varies from year to year. The May 1969 issue, for example, contained a series of articles on the disadvantaged or mentally retarded child and how to work with him. The entire May issue of 1968 centered around the theme, "The Christian Child And His Christian Teacher." The May issue of 1967, the year we observed the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, had the theme, "Our Lutheran Heritage," and contained a number of excellent articles on teaching the Reformation to children, teaching the life of Luther, how to include children's participation in a Reformation service, etc. This special theme for the May issue of *The Lutheran Educator* seems to be a feature which will be continued.

## Conclusion

It is the opinion of this essayist that *The Lutheran Educator* can fill a very obvious need in training for the important task which the Lord has set before us as teachers, parents and pastors—bringing up children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.” The format of the *Educator* lends itself to leisurely study at home as one’s schedule permits. The pastor or superintendent will always find one or more articles in each issue which could be read and discussed in his Sunday School teacher meetings. Finally, the *Educator* provides the spiritual direction which we continually need to carry out this important work of our Lord in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Should every Sunday School teacher at least have access to *The Lutheran Educator*? The answer is an unqualified “Yes!” To ensure that this will take place, we might suggest that the matter be brought before the local congregation of providing for sufficient copies of the *Educator* for each of its teachers. This might also be a special project for a ladies’ aid or other group in the congregation. Or, individual teachers may wish to subscribe for themselves, at least to begin with, to insure delivery to their own homes.

Sample copies of *The Lutheran Educator* have been provided by the Northwestern Publishing House and will be distributed today. (For those who might wish to subscribe at this time already, a sheet will be made available on which you may write your name and complete address, and the order will shortly be sent in with payment enclosed. The annual subscription price of \$1.50 is “payable in advance” according to Publishing House regulations.)

It is our hope and prayer that these valuable aids provided in this little booklet will receive a wide-spread use among our area Sunday School teachers, so that the spiritual benefits it offers may be passed on to the children entrusted to their care.