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TEACHING CHURCH AND SYNOD HISTORY

In our rapidly changing society adults and children are confronted daily with new ideas, new concepts, mores and morals of our society and world.

The church has been faced with the problems since the time of the apostles. The church has been led astray by false teaching, yet by God's grace He has returned it to the correct path. It is well to study the history of the church that we may learn from those early experiences to guide ourselves today.

There is also the rich heritage of the church that the children should become acquainted with and learn to appreciate.

When we begin a curriculum study, it is customary to form objectives. I suggest the following objectives in preparing to teach church and synod history. They are:

1. The realization that the church, "the communion of saints," has been recorded in the Old Testament in the stories of Noah and the Patriarchs.
2. That the Christian Church whose name was first given at Antioch, and whose beginning came at Pentecost is the church to whom Christ gave the commission to preach the Gospel to all the world.
3. That we impart to the children a general knowledge of the church from the time of the apostles to the time of the Reformation.
4. That we acquaint the children with the development of the Lutheran Church from Luther's time to the present.
5. That we acquaint the children of the congregation with the history of their home church.
6. That we instill an appreciation for the symbols and rituals of our Lutheran church.

The teaching of church history can begin with simple teaching units at the K - 2 levels. Units on transportation, community, and others are taught on those levels. So also the unit on church history can be taught. This unit is simple and deals primarily with learning about the church, what it is, and what each part of the church means. This unit can and should emphasize the family nature under Christ. Other learnings about the church can be incidental. Simple truths learned in conjunction with Bible History lessons can emphasize the historical nature of the church. Each of these truths, when added to the whole becomes

cumulative and over the span of K - 2 much historical information is imparted to the children.

As we proceed through the school year, we emphasize the church festivals. All our activities, art, hymns that are learned and sung in church all provide opportunities to note historical facts. As we talk about missions we note the purpose of the church, and on their level can talk of how our church does mission work. The festivals also provide a time to study the symbols of the church. Often art activities, using church symbols, are planned with the festivals in mind. As the art lesson is taught, a brief presentation of its history as well as its meaning will make that symbol more meaningful for the children. The Reformation festival provides an opportunity for teaching about Luther and how the Lord used him to guide the church back to a firm scriptural basis in doctrine and beliefs. A short unit on Luther at the K - 2 level is another plateau in educating our children on the history of the church.

The anniversary celebration of our local congregations is an excellent time to provide simple learnings about the history of the children's own church and even the school. As resource people you might use older members of the congregation who will be able to give a first hand view of the early days of the church.

With the more structured approach in the middle grades the children have developed an increased awareness of time and location. It is this awareness which allows the teacher to correlate church history with social studies. Depending on the grade level and text the amount of material may vary. On the intermediate level time lines are often used. These provide an easy means to insert historical information about the church. The voyage of Columbus correlates with the childhood of Luther. The settlement of Jamestown correlates with the publishing of the King James Version of the Bible. Later on in colonial history the name of Pastor Muhlenburg who served as a member of Congress can also be inserted into the time line.

We can also insert into that time line the immigration of

the German Saxons into the midwest, especially into the state of Missouri. At the same time we can note the beginnings of the Wisconsin Synod which along with the immigration occurs about the time of the California gold rush.

It is at this point that provisions must be made for a detailed study of our synod's history. The text Your and Your Synod starts its study with the settlement of the Wisconsin territory. It provides a good picture of the early settlers and their efforts to establish churches and obtain pastors.

A more detailed study of the liturgy can also be begun at the intermediate level. As the children are better able to participate as their skills in reading have grown, they can be led to a deeper appreciation of the meaning of the liturgy. Those congregations whose churches have stained glass windows quite often have a rich source of church symbols as part of those windows. This is a good opportunity to increase their knowledge of church symbolism.

More detailed study of areas mentioned in connection with the lower level, missions, Reformation, and the outreach of the home congregation can also be done. For the fifth and sixth grade the opening questions in the catechisms can lead into a more detailed study of Luther and his times. The confessions of our Lutheran church as listed in Question 253 will be a good starting point for teaching that portion of church history in Luther's later years and following his death. Areas of those confessions which can be touched on include the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, the large catechism, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles and the Formula of Concord. I am not recommending a detailed study, but it would be good to teach the purpose of each confession and other historical information to provide the children with a nodding acquaintance of their contents.

It is with the upper grades that a formal course in church history can begin. The main purpose of this study should be to acquaint the children with the purpose, structure and organization of our synod. The basic text would be You and Your Synod. There are five units in this text dealing with the beginnings of the synod, the growth of the synod, the organization and function of

the synod, the great commission that faces the synod, and the training of the called workers.

In teaching the unit on the synodical school we emphasize the history of each school but more importantly the purpose. It provides an opportunity for the teacher to do some "recruiting." If we can plant a spark of interest in the teaching or preaching ministry on the part of the child our efforts in teaching church history will have been made even more worthwhile.

As we deal with the unit on the commission of the church, we can instill a greater awareness of the synod's mission efforts, the needs of missions, and the support that we as Christians can offer through our gifts and prayers.

While the text You and Your Synod can serve as a more modern history of the church, we must still consider the other periods of history in the church. On an every other year basis we could consider taking the history of the early church through a study of Acts, the journeys of Paul, or one of Paul's epistles. It is possible that you might undertake a more general study of the New Testament church using The Story of Jesus the Messiah.

The main problem in teaching church history is finding the time slot for it in the very busy school day schedule which each of us has.

Teaching church history in an incidental manner or using short units in the lower grades can usually be worked into the daily schedule. It is when we seek to make church history a part of the curriculum that time problems arise.

In a multigrade classroom the time problem is especially acute. Some suggestions to solve the problem are, using an individual approach, using one Word of God lesson period, or dividing a special time slot in the afternoon in the second semester.

When using the individual approach time is not a problem, but rather the class size and thus how much time can be spent with the individual.

When considering the use of a Word of God lesson period

this becomes acceptable especially when you have only the upper two grades in a room. The one conflict may arise when the confirmation instruction occupies more than four days a week. Perhaps it will be possible to develop one period per week and individual work. The number of possibilities depends only on the teacher's efforts to work church history into the curriculum.

Teaching church history when there is not a basic text to work from also provides a hindrance. Quite often the teacher must devise his or her own materials for certain eras of the church's history. This means extra preparation time well before the class is to be taught.

The last sheet attached to this paper lists source materials that might be used in teaching church history.

In closing I would like to emphasize the rich heritage that we can offer to our children. The story of the church through the ages, and how God has preserved His word that we might know of Him and His plan of salvation.

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David Brohn

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CHURCH HISTORY

OLD TESTAMENT

Bible History texts
Articles from the Northwestern Lutheran
The Story of the Church, A. Moldenhauer
WELS Audio Visual Aids Catalog
Bible Map Transparencies

NEW TESTAMENT

Bible History texts
Articles from the Northwestern Lutheran
The Story of the Church, A. Moldenhauer
The Story of Jesus the Messiah, Re. J. G. Anderson
WELS Audio Visual Aids Catalog
Bible Map transparencies

THE REFORMATION

The Story of the Church, A. Moldenhauer
History of the Reformation, (Syllabus) Rev. J.O. Lang
Martin Luther, Hero of Faith
WELS Audio Visual Aids Catalog

RECENT CHURCH HISTORY

Your and Your Synod
The Handbook to Your and Your Synod
Exercises for You and Your Synod, D. Schultz
WELS Audio Visual Aids Catalog

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