



ETnet Bonus

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Professionalism for Teachers in Lutheran Schools

Who me? I need to read this?

When God chose me to be a Lutheran teacher, and I followed, I also chose to leave mediocrity behind. I began a life-long journey centered in Christ, focused on others, that embraces continual growth and a pursuit of excellence.

Wow! Yikes!

Thankfully God reassures me that He will work in me and equip me to do what is needed to accomplish this tall order.

Hebrews 13:20-21 says, "May the God of peace...the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (NIV).

As teachers gear up for their first, or yet another, school year we begin to make mental lists: "Were the *Faith Alive* workbooks ordered? What new students will I have? Are there new textbooks this year? Are there enough desks in the classroom? I wonder what the new sixth-grade teacher will be like and if she'll fit in?"

Yet another set of questions I urge you to ask yourself involves your level of professionalism from inside and outside the classroom. These could be a partial listing of principles of professionalism.

Below is your first quiz of the school year:

Do you-

1. Welcome new teachers?
2. Invest time to develop or improve teaching skills?
3. Check your work before photocopying or entering it on the Web?
4. Tell the truth and admit mistakes?
5. Discipline in God-pleasing ways?
6. Use correct manners when eating?
7. Pick up trash on the floor?
8. Say *please* and *thank you* often and avoid vulgar phrases?
9. Use Christ-centered teaching styles to nurture the faith growth of all students?
10. Attend church and Bible study and spend time in personal Bible study and prayer?
11. Avoid gossip and protect confidential information?
12. Wear professional, clean, and pressed clothing?
13. Belong to and participate in a professional organization?

- 14. Honor the authority of those who have been placed above you?
- 15. Engage in appropriate social behavior, honoring the sixth commandment?

Did you recognize yourself or others in some of this list?

More importantly, do you remember a colleague that demonstrated a real example in carrying out an individual activity from above in a positive way? Perhaps you can picture the athletic director tirelessly picking up paper left on the hallway floor, or you remember with fondness the fourth-grade teacher who so often thanked you for your part in a school function.

Each of the 15 ideas listed above help us think about how we are doing on the professionalism continuum. We can identify what we do well and what we have neglected. Then we can change toward being a more professional teacher with these principles in mind.



Benefits to you and to Lutheran schools that foster professionalism include improving quality of service, reinforcing trust and respect among the staff, parents and students, increasing teamwork, enhancing the image of the school and church, eliminating apathy, and improving the joy of service.

Teachers, new and experienced, may not think about behaviors that are considered non-professional. They don't know or understand how being a professional will benefit them directly. They may not be motivated to act professionally. Some experienced teachers who once knew better have allowed their professional behavior to slip. The good news is this—professional behaviors can be taught and inspired.

If you are in a position of leadership in your school, consider initiating dialog pertaining to Christ-centered professionalism within the school. Establish rules on manners and respect and review the specific duties of each teacher's call or employment agreement. Provide reminders and reinforcement in the form of discussion, quotes, and case examples. Tell your staff what you expect of them so they know what to strive for. Professional practices should not be left to chance, but taught and practiced.

If you are not in a position of leadership you can inspire by example. Choose specific behaviors that you want to modify or improve. You may want to utilize the 15 questions in the "quiz" above as principles important to professionalism, focusing on several this school year. Consider approaching the leadership in your school with possible concerns, and suggest that several principles be chosen to focus on this school year, possibly using a mentoring system to encourage each staff member.

Some of these principles may seem insignificant, but, like a snowball rolling downhill and over the course of a career, they can have dramatic effects and mean a great deal to the school and congregation you represent. So I urge you—with God's help—to be faithful to the inspired word of God, be responsible in carrying out the specific duties of your call or contract, and demonstrate a serving attitude.

May you have a great school year centered in Christ and focused on others.



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For specific guidance for professional church workers, read the booklet published by the Michigan District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in 2006. It is entitled *Partners in Ministry: Ethical Conduct for Professional Church Workers*. Its purpose is to provide a helpful look at our commitments as shepherds and servants of God's flock. The pdf file is found at the following address. <http://www.michigandistrict.org/pdf/whoweare/EthicsPCW2006.pdf>

An accompanying study guide for individual or staff use is also published and found at the following web address. <http://www.michigandistrict.org/pdf/whoweare/EthicsPsg.pdf> It answers the question: "Is it possible that I can grow in my conduct as a professional Church Worker?"

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