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A study of the faith experiences of Concordia University Wisconsin Lutheran education trained teachers in public education

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A STUDY OF THE FAITH EXPERIENCES OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY WISCONSIN
LUTHERAN EDUCATION TRAINED TEACHERS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

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“A STUDY OF THE FAITH EXPERIENCES OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY WISCONSIN LUTHERAN EDUCATION-TRAINED TEACHERS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION,” a Doctoral research project prepared by ADAM D. PAAPE in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department.

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ABSTRACT

In this study of Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW), Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) education graduates teaching in public education, I examined the following research questions: Do the participants identify challenges in living faithfully in public school settings? How have the participants made it possible to express their faith in public school settings? How has the faith of the participants grown as a result of serving in public school settings? How have the participants nurtured faith in others as they have served in public school settings? CUW and the LCMS trained the participants in this study to be teachers within LCMS schools where they would be teachers of faith. In this exploratory, qualitative research, I used phone interviews as the means to collect information related to the attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of five teachers currently working in public education. Analysis of the interviews revealed nine common themes of experience. These themes were the awareness of teacher rights as people of faith in public education, dealing with inappropriate student behavior, interacting with colleagues, Christian modeling, participants' understanding that students must initiate faith talks, making others aware that the teacher attends church, the teacher's desire to nurture faith in others, public education as a calling and ministry, and collegial support for faith. Within these themes, a state of simultaneous contentment and discontent became apparent for the teachers as people of faith in public schools. Through the analysis of the results, it also became evident that this group of teachers requires further support from CUW and the LCMS. I suggest this support should come in the form of increased specificity in the pre-service-LCMS-program at CUW to prepare LCMS-trained teachers for a potential career in public education. The data also showed a need for continuing education opportunities by CUW and the LCMS to support people of faith in public education.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. They have been a constant source of encouragement, patience, prayers, and hope. To my beautiful wife Darcy, I am indebted to you for the many times you had to hear me say, “I need to work on the doctorate.” Your graciousness, faithfulness, and love in the midst of these years and this project are truly a blessing beyond words. To my daughter Ava, I dedicate this dissertation to you as well. Your passion for life and love for your parents have been a constant motivation for me to complete this project. I also dedicate this paper to my daughter still in the womb. You also provided significant motivation to complete this project in a timely manner.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"Religious liberty might be supposed to mean that everybody is free to discuss religion. In practice it means that hardly anybody is allowed to mention it" (Chesterton & Paine, 2006, p. 230). This quote from G. K. Chesterton, a Christian philosopher and writer of the early 20th century, sets the stage for the study to follow. Chesterton encapsulates the atmosphere that is present in today's public school environment. While discussing religion itself may not be inappropriate, the open practice of that religion has become, as Chesterton said, almost taboo.

The role of the classroom teacher in America today is one of multiple duties. Teachers are not only the individuals who instruct the student in areas of newly-found knowledge, but they are, in fact, much more. For teachers who believe in God, there exists another dimension to teaching. Teachers are using one of the gifts that God has bestowed upon them. It is, therefore, incumbent upon teachers to use their knowledge of the world and God as they influence the children in their classroom.

The discussion of the role of religion in American public education has produced a range of opinions. Some individuals, siding with recent court rulings, have said that individual expression of religious belief has no place in the classroom (Boston, 2007; Singer, 2000). Others support the notion that not only should religion be taught in the classroom, but that teachers (Ziliman & Davidhizar, 2005) and students (Paul & Benavente-McEnery, 2008) should be able to express their faith freely. A third group suggests that the study of religion, specifically the ideals of those religions, within public schools will promote a sense of civic duty in America's student body (Ruyter & Merry, 2009). The courts have spoken repeatedly on these matters as

people on both sides of the discussion have sought to further their ideal for public education. The case law on religious liberty within American public education is extensive.

In the United States of America, recent court decisions have limited the level to which one can express one's own religious beliefs within the public schools (*Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, 2000). The courts have considered the degree to which public schools can allow students to express their beliefs. In the case of *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) the United States Supreme Court determined that a public school could not force students to participate in school led prayer. A somewhat controversial measurement called the Lemon Test sheds light on what a public school can and cannot do in respect to promoting religious practice. "First, the statute must have a secular legislative purpose; second, its principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; finally, the statute must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion" (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971). The rulings of the United States Supreme Court and other lower courts have created an atmosphere that can be both confusing and frustrating for Christian public school teachers. It is their story that this study investigated. With the abundance and changing nature of United States case law, it can be difficult for one to maintain one's faithfulness to one's beliefs and yet adhere to the standards of behavior established by current regulations.

It is this dichotomy of needs, the need to fulfill the spiritual requisites of students and the need to adhere to the laws of the United States, that sets the foundation of this study. Teachers who have worked in private, Christian school environments do not have to worry about the aforementioned dichotomy. They have the freedom to engage their students, colleagues, and anyone else in their learning community openly in the areas of faith and spirituality. However, when those teachers make a move to a secular, public school environment this dichotomy

becomes a new reality of their day-to-day life. The interest of this study centered on these individuals trained by the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) who have since transitioned to the public school system. I used LCMS throughout this study to represent the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. What are the experiences that LCMS-trained teachers have had while teaching in the public schools? Are there newfound joys? Are there newfound frustrations? I investigated these questions in this research.

The first group affected by this study is that of Christian public school teachers who have never taught in LCMS schools. A second audience affected directly by the study is any teacher who has transitioned from LCMS education to a public school. This study will allow these individuals to reflect on the experiences of others who have a story similar to their own. While they may share many of the same public school experiences with the transitioned teachers, they do not share the initial educational conditions of the transitional teachers. The final audience of the study is the Concordia University system schools of education. These schools can use the results of this study as an integral part of the pre-service teacher preparation process. All individuals trained for the teaching profession at one of the Concordia system schools need to receive counsel and guidance in techniques and methods by which they can stay true to the faith in any educational environment. It will be quite profitable to these future educators to learn from those who have experienced the challenges themselves. This study will present information that will allow the LCMS to train these individuals in Christian vocational faithfulness.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research was to examine the faith lives of Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod trained teachers who were currently serving in public schools. Using personal interviews of five individuals, I have explored the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes

connected to their faith while serving in public education. The findings of this investigation will serve to inform the pre-service training program at Concordia University Wisconsin and will provide support for LCMS trained teachers in public schools.

Research Questions

Based on the problem statement, I explored the following research questions.

Research Question #1

Do the participants identify challenges in living faithfully in public school settings?

Research Question #2

How have the participants made it possible to express their faith in public school settings?

Research Question #3

How has the faith of the participants grown as a result of serving in public school settings?

Research Question #4

How have the participants nurtured faith in others as they have served in public school settings?

Definition of Terms

Church worker- This group of people within the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod includes, but is not limited to, synodically-trained teachers, pastors, Directors of Christian Education, lay ministers, and deaconesses employed by LCMS organizations.

Divine call- Graduates from Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod universities and seminaries in church work programs are eligible to receive a divine call from an LCMS school, church, university, or organization. In the LCMS, the divine call is the work of God in placing an individual in the particular role they will serve. The LCMS labels individuals receiving calls as ministers of the Gospel. The LCMS holds the divine call in high esteem as it is God's active work in the church.

Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) – The LCMS is the organized church body to which the Concordia University School system belongs. This church body consists of 2.3 million members and maintains, within America, the largest Protestant parochial school system (The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 2012).

LCMS education – A specific form of theologically based education. Teachers within LCMS education adhere to the teachings found within the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. The Lutheran Confessions are found in the Book of Concord which consists of The Apostles Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Athanasian Creed, The Augsburg Confession, The Defense of the Augsburg Confession, Martin Luther's Large and Small Catechisms, The Smalcald Articles, The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, The Epitome of the Formula of Concord, and The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord.

Pre-service teacher – A pre-service teacher is an undergraduate education student still participating in university coursework and field experiences in preparation for the teaching profession.

Synod – Synod is the name for the larger assembly of organization within a church body.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations - As the research design of this study consisted of personal interviews, I cannot generalize the results to a larger population. By nature, observer bias can be present in personal interviews. While I took every measure possible to correct for the influence my biases, I am also aware that they will inevitably be present as I have a stake in this research. I was conscious of this personal bias when performing the interviews with my respondents.

Another limitation of this study is that Concordia University Wisconsin does not have a system for tracking graduates of the LCMS teacher program who are working in public

education. There is a system in which local LCMS districts track LCMS teachers, but no such system exists for teachers who have transitioned to public schools.

Delimitations - I chose to interview graduates of the Concordia University Wisconsin LCMS teacher-training program who were teaching in the public school system. I chose this group to study as they were of particular interest to me in my role in the training of LCMS and non-LCMS educators at Concordia University Wisconsin. I made no effort to make this a representative or random sample. This lack of effort was in no way a result of researcher neglect, but rather it was due to the specific challenges inherent in identifying participants with a theologically-based, pre-service education who were teaching in public education at the time I conducted the research.

Summary

The study that I performed has filled a gap within the literature. The experiences of Christian educators in public schools have received little attention within the literature. Therefore, there are few studies to compare with this study. Additionally, the lack of other landmark work with the experiences of Christian educators in public schools makes this exploratory research even more important.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Literature on the faith lives of teachers of faith in public schools is limited. The current literature focuses little on the growth and experiences of the teacher of faith, but more on the idea of general spirituality. Case law is a predominant force that creates the religious environment within which the teacher of faith lives. There exists a growing group of educational philosophers and researchers (DeGaynor & Day, 2011; L. Miller & Athan, 2007; Noddings, 2006; Palmer, 1998, 2003; van Brummelen, Koole, & Franklin, 2004) who propose a focus on the spiritual lives of teachers and students in public education. This emphasis steers away from any one religion and more toward the idea of the individual as a spiritual being. Parker Palmer defines the spiritual as the,

Ancient and abiding quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos – with our own souls, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, with the mystery of being alive. (Palmer, 1998)

Others (Marty, 2000) see this attention given to a general spirituality as being too vague. Patti Hoffman identifies a specific fear related to an emphasis on a vague spirituality. “Parents don’t know or don’t bother to find out the values and beliefs of those to whom they are entrusting their children” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 163). I have examined this contrast of the spiritual and the specific religious belief in this literature review.

In addition to the discussion on case law and spirituality, I consider within this literature review the role that religion can play in the curriculum. I survey a general philosophy of LCMS

education to set the landscape for the LCMS educator in public schools. All these factors contribute to the life of the religious person in public education and serve to create the surroundings and experiences that I studied.

In this literature review, I survey various landmark decisions handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court in relation to the role of religion in American education. Starting with the case of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) and concluding with *Zelmon v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), I review the themes of the decisions handed down by the Supreme Court. Throughout my survey of court decisions, the case of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) stands out as a precedent-setting decision by which many courts judge current cases of religion and American education. Over the approximately 85 years that I surveyed, the court's thinking shifted. This shift moved from an interpretation of the Constitution whereby the role of religion in public schools is minimal, to a more recent understanding that individual citizens, parents, and students have rights which allow for a more inclusive position of religion in the schools.

The Legal Status of Religion in American Schools

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution serves as the foundational statement on the role of religion as it relates to government participation. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech" (U.S. Constitution). When the courts combine the Fourteenth Amendment, which connects the rights of citizens of the United States to the rights of a particular state, and the First Amendment, a standard emerges by which all states need to uphold the Establishment Clause presented in the First Amendment (U.S. Constitution).

The case of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) brought into question the existence and legitimacy of private schooling. An Oregon law mandated that all students attend public schools

until the eighth grade. The U.S. Supreme Court found this to be in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. The court declared that all students should attend a legitimate school, private or public. The court also found that the Oregon law seriously deterred students' and private schools' liberty rights (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 1925).

On a number of occasions, the U.S. Supreme Court has also reviewed the question of the constitutionality of school prayer. In *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) the U.S. Supreme Court decided that it was unconstitutional for a public school in New Hyde Park, New York to start the school day with a prayer to God. Even though students were allowed to abstain from participation if they so decided, the court ruled that requiring the prayer was an establishment of government-sanctioned religion (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962).

Nine years later, the Supreme Court presided over the case of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971). The foundational ruling in this case has provided an often-referenced interpretation of the First Amendment, yielding what the courts now call the Lemon Test. The original case concerned the constitutionality of Rhode Island's and Pennsylvania's use of public funds to support non-public institutions, many of which had religious affiliations. The legal precedent that resulted from this case, the Lemon Test, uses three criteria for determining constitutionality. "First, the statute must have a secular legislative purpose; second, its principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; finally, the statute must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion" (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971). The Lemon Test is contested as often as it is used (Conkle, 1993; Myers, 1993; Paulsen, 1993).

Two decades later, the case of *Lee v. Weisman* (1992) came to the Supreme Court. The case centers on the delivery of a prayer at a public high school in Rhode Island. The principal of the high school had a practice of asking local religious leaders to deliver a non-sectarian prayer

as an invocation at high school graduation ceremonies. A parent of a graduating student found this offensive and filed suit. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled by a 5–4 vote that this practice of prayer at public school graduation was a violation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. The court used *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) as a precedent to support the unconstitutionality of this graduation practice (*Lee v. Weisman*, 1992).

Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe (2000) brought student-initiated, student-led prayer into the discussion. The Santa Fe Independent School District allowed students to lead prayers at high school football games. The court ruled this practice to be in violation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. The court decided that a student’s free speech rights were not applicable in this situation because praying at a football game was not private speech. Furthermore, because prosecutors showed that the school had a history of promoting prayer among its students, the court deemed this practice an offshoot of that prior standard (*Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, 2000).

Beyond the concept of school prayer, the U.S. Supreme Court has presided over other cases of individual students’ rights in relation to the Establishment Clause. In *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnett* (1943), Barnett challenged the state of West Virginia’s policy that required all students and teachers in public schools to perform a salute to the American flag at the beginning of the school day. If students would not participate in the salute, then schools could expel the students for insubordination. Some students, due to religious and political beliefs, would not participate in the flag salute. The U.S. Supreme Court determined this practice to be a violation of First Amendment rights. The court found that forcing a student to make a statement of belief, such as saluting a flag or pledging allegiance to the flag, was not congruous with the Constitution (*West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 1943).

McCollum v. Board of Education (1948) continued to establish the courts' view on the role of religion in public schools. Vashti McCollum, a parent of a student in Champaign, Illinois, filed suit against the Champaign board of education for its practice of allowing religious groups to use public school classrooms for teaching religious material during the school day. Students were not required to attend these sessions, but if they did not attend them they needed to go elsewhere in the building to do activities that had a secular purpose. The Supreme Court ruled that the Champaign practice was a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. The decision was based on the fact that the school district was using taxpayer monies to support religious instruction. (*McCollum v. Board of Education*, 1948).

Four years later the Supreme Court presided over *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952). New York City allowed students to leave school to attend off-campus religious-instruction classes. The participating students' families paid for all transportation costs. The case came to the Supreme Court to determine if this practice was in violation of the Establishment Clause. The court ruled that because the school was not funding any of the transportation or any of the off-campus costs, there was no reason to consider the practice as inappropriate. A 6–3 decision maintained the constitutionality of the New York City policy (*Zorach v. Clauson*, 1952).

Fear of indoctrination.

In the *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963), the U.S. Supreme Court considered whether Pennsylvania schools could ask public school students to read Bible passages and recite the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of each day. The district allowed parents to write a note that would excuse their student from this practice. Nevertheless, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the school's policy was in violation of the First Amendment

because the practice too closely resembled an establishment of a religious nature, almost appearing to be a religious rite. Therefore, the Court ruled in favor of Schempp by an 8–1 vote.

The United States Supreme Court presided over the case of *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987) in which the plaintiffs were concerned that schools in Louisiana were teaching a religious view of the creation of the world. The Louisiana state legislature had passed a law that a teacher must pair evolution and creation, if the teacher taught either view of the origin of the world. If neither view were present, then there would be no mandate for the presence of the other. The notion behind the law was to provide a balanced view of origins. The Supreme Court ruled, by a 7–2 vote, that the law was in violation of the Establishment Clause due to its pervading religious nature. The Court noted that the Louisiana law failed when put to the Lemon Test in all three areas (*Edwards v. Aguillard*, 1987).

The Supreme Court presided also over the case of *Mitchell v. Helms* (2000) wherein it deliberated whether Chapter 2 money paid to private schools in the state of Louisiana, specifically Jefferson Parish, was a violation of the Establishment Clause. Chapter 2 allowed private schools to use government funds as long as the money supported programs with a purely sectarian emphasis. Those against this practice deemed that any support to a private school, often Catholic in this particular suit, was promoting a religious endeavor. The court ruled 6–3 that the Chapter 2 policy, which distributed funds to all schools, public and private, for sectarian purposes, was not a violation of the Constitution (*Mitchell v. Helms*, 2000).

The case of *Zelmon v. Simmons-Harris* (2002) dealt with the state of Ohio's practice of providing funding to a program that distributed monies to school families who met particular pre-determined criteria, which included a low household income and residency in the Cleveland school district. The families were required to use the money toward tuition at a participating

school of their choice, private or public. The majority of individuals who participated in the voucher program attended private religious schools. The question raised in the courts was whether or not this practice was a direct promotion by the government of religious practice. The court decided by a 5–4 vote that the practice was not in violation of the Establishment Clause. It was determined that the practice of providing private citizens who met specific financial and residential standards with money to choose freely the school that their child would attend was not a direct governmental endorsement of religion. The court determined that the freedom of choice by the private citizen was enough to warrant their use of the government monies towards private religious education (*Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 2002).

The Equal Access Act.

In 1984 the United States Congress passed the Equal Access Act. Within the Act, Congress established a criterion by which non-curricular groups could utilize public secondary school facilities. The Act states that,

it shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which received Federal financial assistance and which has a limited open forum to deny access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting within that limited open forum on the basis of the religious, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings. (20 U.S.C. §§4071-74)

The application of this act was to focus on the concept of “limited open forum.” Congress defined the limited aspect as a non-curricular group using space during non-instructional time. An open forum meant that the space was open to any group of any kind (Kraus, 2011). It is also noted within the law that any employee or agent of the school must not participate in any of the religious activities of the group.

The United States Supreme Court has used The Equal Access Act to uphold rulings of lower courts in relation to religious groups' gaining access to public spaces. In 1990 the Supreme Court presided over the case of the *Board of Education of the Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*. This case centered on the complaint of a high school student, Bridget Mergens. Mergens and some friends who attended a public high school in Omaha, Nebraska wanted to start a Bible study group at their school. This study would occur during non-instructional time. The principal of the high school prohibited the study, saying that it would be an entanglement of church and state. The Supreme Court ruled in Mergens' favor by an 8–1 vote. The justices ruled that since the school administration allowed access to other non-curricular clubs and activities, the Equal Access Act could apply to the Mergens' group (*Board of Education of the Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*, 1990).

One aspect of the Mergens' ruling was the application of the Lemon Test (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971). The Court found that the policy of allowing religious groups to use public facilities was not rooted in a primary purpose of advancing religion. The Court also noted that exorbitant entanglement of government and religion was not present in this case (*Board of Education of the Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*, 1990).

The United States District Court of New York in relation to *Hsu v. Roslyn Union Free School District No. 3* made another application of the Equal Access Act in 1996. In this case, two students, Emily and Timothy Hsu, sued the Roslyn Union Free School District for restricting their Christian, student-initiated club from maintaining a discriminatory practice. This practice was the requirement for club officers to have a professed Christian faith. The school district had a policy that disallowed any sort of discriminatory practice. The stance of the district was that if

the club would remove its prejudicial practice, then the club could exist (*Hsu v. Roslyn Union Free School District No. 3*, 1996).

The District Court ruled that the school district had violated the Equal Access Act. While part of the club's methods clearly contradicted an established rule of the school district, the free speech rights of the students took precedence. The school district would need to permit the Christian club to exist considering the fact that the district maintained a policy that allowed other non-curricular clubs. Therefore, the district could not force these Christian students to violate their consciences or their free speech rights. The court was careful to note that this ruling did not open the door for deliberately destructive abuses of discriminatory policies within schools (*Hsu v. Roslyn Union Fee School District No. 3*, 1995). The Hsu ruling has not yet been presided over by the United States Supreme Court.

Use of school facilities by district residents.

In 2001, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Good News Club, a group created by two local Milford Central School district residents, in their claim that the school district had violated their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. The district had denied the Good News Club access to district facilities after school hours. The Milford Central School had a policy that allowed residents of the district to make use of facilities, but refused that allowance to the Good News Club because its intention was purely religious. The district believed this to be an entanglement of government and religion. The Court determined that the district could not have a policy of use for some groups and not others on the grounds of what district officials perceived as a particular religious viewpoint. When a district established a limited public forum, that district may not show favor for one group over another. The Court ruled 6–3 in support of the Good News Club (*Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, 2001).

U.S. Department of Education recommendations.

In an attempt to provide counsel for teachers of faith in public education, the United States Department of Education released a document in February 2003 entitled, “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools.” This document refers to a number of landmark cases (Lee v. Weisman, Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe, Engel v. Vitale, among others) that have influenced the climate of school prayer (United States Department of Education, 2003). The February 2003 document counsels state and local educational agencies so they can adequately adhere to current legislation. The primary purpose of the document is to state clearly how and when students may pray in a public school (United States Department of Education, 2003).

The document clearly distinguishes between the concepts of governmentally-forced religious practice and private individual free speech. The United States Department of Education defined this contrast as the essential element for all the following principles. During non-instructional times schools should allow students to pray, read the Bible, and do other religious activities in the same way that students would be able to do other nonreligious activities. Students may have prayer groups and advertise for them if schools allowed other non-curricular groups to do the same. Teachers employed by the school district must remain neutral when present at a student-led non-instructional-time religious activity. However, teachers can have religious interactions with other employees of the district during non-instructional time.

The U.S. Department of Education document also briefly covers release time, homework, and aspects of prayer. Schools should release students from class in order to fulfill a religious obligation or need. For instance, if a student’s religious belief dictates prayer at a specific time of day, then the school is obligated to allow that student to fulfill that particular need. This

practice would almost certainly need to exist as most schools already allow students to leave class for other nonreligious obligations. Therefore, if parents ask the school to release their children for religious needs, they should receive equal treatment. Students have the right to express themselves in their homework in a religious fashion. Teachers grading this work should do so from a purely academic perspective. People may not pray at school-organized functions. However, if the school facility is used by another group, they may pray (e.g. at Baccalaureate ceremonies). Again, the document from the U.S. Department of Education ought to serve as a guideline for public schools in their attempt to maintain constitutionally sound practices within their facilities (United States Department of Education, 2003).

The general tone of the rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court over the past century has changed with respect to American education and the integration of religion. In the last decade, the courts have supported a more open interpretation of what the government can do to support private religious education. The secular mindset in public education and judicial rulings that support private religious education will continue to meet in the arena of societal opinion. As new justices join the U.S. Supreme Court, their particular interpretation of the Constitution will determine the future of American education and its connection to the domain of religious beliefs.

LCMS Education

As one begins to investigate the purpose and history of the schools of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), one must look at the teachings of Martin Luther. Luther, the great reformer, was a major proponent of education. Luther was a well-educated man and believed that all, including the poor, ought to be educated. His contributions in the world of theology are well known, but his thoughts on education seem to take a back seat to his better-known works. By translating the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible into German, Luther was

responsible for increasing the literacy rates of the general populace in Germany. However, this work to make the Word of God accessible to the masses was not his only contribution to the world of education.

In his sermon on the importance of sending children, specifically boys, to school, Martin Luther passes on an impassioned plea to his fellow pastors to speak his message. Luther's sermon has become one of his best-known essays written specifically on the topic of education. The overall thrust of this strongly-worded discourse is that parents ought to send their boys to school so that these boys may have the chance to become pastors in the church. Luther writes,

For when you can teach your child, and it is capable and desirous of learning, and you do not aid but hinder it, (mark my words well!) you are responsible for the injury that comes to the world through the decline of the ministry and the neglect of God and His word.

(Luther, 1971, p. 111)

Throughout this particular sermon, Luther puts much of the responsibility for the sending of children to school on the parent.

While Luther notes in his sermon that preparing young men for the office of the ministry is of the utmost importance, he also argues that there is a need for individuals who could fulfill civic offices. He writes, again addressing parents,

You must be an insensible and ungrateful creature, to be ranked among the brutes, if you see that your son may become a man to help the emperor maintain his dominions, sword, and crown – to help the prince govern his land, to counsel cities and states, to help protect for every man his body, wife, child, property, and honor – and – yet will not do so much as to send him to school and prepare him for this work! (Luther, 1971a, p. 132)

Luther's view of God's simultaneous work in two kingdoms, the kingdom of all that occurs in the earthly realm and the kingdom of all that Christ has done towards the eternal realm, is reflected in Luther's desire for schools to train up students for civic duty (Moulds, 2011).

Near the conclusion of his sermon on the importance of sending children to school, Luther makes one of his only comments that specifically pertains to the profession of teaching. After again urging parents to send their children to schools, he writes,

If I had to give up preaching and my other duties, there is no office I would rather have than that of school-teacher. For I know that next to the ministry it is the most useful, greatest and best; and I am not sure which of the two is to be preferred. For it is hard to make old dogs docile and old rogues pious, yet that is what the ministry works at, and must work at, in great part, in vain; but young trees, though some may break in the process, are more easily bent and trained. Therefore let it be considered one of the highest virtues on earth faithfully to train the children of others, which duty but very few parents attend to themselves. (Luther, 1971a, p. 145)

This sermon by Luther was forceful in how it urged, pleaded, and counseled parents to educate their children. Luther viewed schools as the place that passed on the ministry of God to educated students. He saw the teaching profession, in some ways, as being as valuable and esteemed as the office of the pastoral ministry.

In Luther's essay entitled, "Letter to the Mayors and Alderman of all the Cities of Germany in behalf of Christian Schools," he sets forth an appeal for a specific sort of education. Luther, speaking in reference to the value of Christian education, writes, "We should give a hundred florins to protect us against ignorance, even if only one boy could be taught to be a truly Christian man" (Luther, 1971b, p. 49). He continues building his argument for the necessity of

Christian schools by writing, “Let this, then, be the first consideration to move you, that in this work we are fighting against the devil, the most artful and dangerous of men” (Luther, 1971b, p. 50). Luther viewed Christian schools as places to fight the devil, that whatever the monetary cost, these schools needed to exist. Later in this essay, Luther establishes that the student of these Christian schools only need attend class for one or two hours a day. The rest of the time during the day should be devoted to the child’s learning a trade or working in the home. He also highlights that the best and brightest of children should be set apart and receive more instruction in the hope that they may become able and skillful teachers, preachers, and workers (Luther, 1971b).

Luther believed that schools trained individuals to become Christian men and women prepared for all the workings of life. Luther saw parents as important educators in the lives of their children and spent much time encouraging and equipping parents to do this eternally important job. Luther also focused on the methods of instructing children and understood the importance of adapting lessons to meet the needs of the individual. In addition, Luther was a proponent of compulsory education to ensure that all children were able to contribute to the general good of their local communities (Painter, 1889).

Philip Melanchthon, a contemporary of Luther, was also concerned about issues relevant to LCMS education. Melanchthon believed in a well-rounded education that included the studying of what he called the lower arts which would enable one to understand the higher arts. He was one of the first to promote a liberal-arts education for the masses (Melanchthon, 1999). Melanchthon, as did Luther, believed that a connection should exist between churches and schools. He continued to build the argument for the need for Christian schools in that they would be the place where God’s purpose for His Word could continue. Melanchthon believed

that since God wanted His Word to last forever, there needed to be a means to pass along those truths. Melanchthon concluded that this could best be accomplished in the schools (Melanchthon, 1999). A constant theme within Melanchthon and Luther's writings was the importance of individual study of the Word of God. This rigorous study would serve as one of the foundational blocks of LCMS schooling in the United States. Undergirding all LCMS teaching is the idea that the Word of God is pure and holy. Luther and Melanchthon both taught that without the Word of God there was nothing good in the world (Luther, 1987). The LCMS and its schools consistently maintained this high view of the Bible as they grew.

Philosophy of LCMS education.

In the 1972 report of the Board of Parish Education for the LCMS, Arthur Miller articulates a philosophy of LCMS education. Miller insists that there exists a philosophy of education in every classroom across the nation. Miller contends that teachers within the LCMS classroom can fully address questions of philosophical importance. He highlights the significance of being able to address issues in a school setting of being, reality, spirit, mind, absolutes, and the problem of knowledge, freedom, among others. Within an LCMS paradigm these are all answered from the Bible where the written Word of God is held as truth and is given the utmost respect (A. L. Miller, 1972). It is this distinctive of talking about matters of theological importance that is a hallmark of LCMS education. There is also a simultaneous emphasis, as Melanchthon noted, on the need for rigorous study of the world around us, which will ultimately lead one to a greater knowledge of God (Melanchthon, 1999).

LCMS schools fulfill two purposes. One is to build up the student in the area of academics and the other is to build up the soul of the student. It is a truly LCMS view that both the mind and the spirit exist simultaneously within the student. Another way of explaining this

view is that the person is all at once a temporal and an eternal being (Jahsmann, 1960). An LCMS view of education is that God is the one who created the world. Therefore, He is the one for whom and by whom we are educated. LCMS education has as its ultimate goal the glorification of God. To glorify God one must, in an LCMS view, be aware of one's sin and realize that it is in Jesus Christ that one finds the only remedy for this sin. As students participate in LCMS education, they are receiving instruction that guides them to the goal of perfection in Christ. The LCMS faith is not one of being dependent on rules, but of being forgiven of sin and living boldly in the God who accomplishes this feat (Jahsmann, 1960).

A history of teacher training within the LCMS.

Shortly after the early structures of the LCMS in the United States, it became clear that there would be a need for a school to train teachers. In 1846 the LCMS started its first school in Fort Wayne, Indiana. By 1855 there was an ever-growing need for more teachers; consequently the LCMS created a teachers' seminary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Synod did not initially control this school. However, eventually the Synod did take over and decided to move the school back to Fort Wayne, where it was believed to be more centrally located (Beck, 1939).

During these early years of teacher education, the length of a teacher-training program was approximately four years. The LCMS created the Fort Wayne and Milwaukee schools during the era of the Civil War. The number of students attending LCMS training schools shrank during the Civil War, and the conditions at the training schools deteriorated during this time. Even though the training schools were experiencing difficulties, the demand for teachers was great. Ultimately, the LCMS placed inadequately trained teachers into schools prior to receiving all their schooling to fill the pressing need for teachers (Stellhorn, 1963).

In 1864 the LCMS decided to devote most of its teacher-education resources into a new training school called the Addison Teachers' Seminary, in Addison, Illinois. The school trained most of the Synod's elementary teachers at the Addison location until 1913. It was at that point that the institution moved to River Forest, Illinois (Schmidt, 2001). This school is still in existence today as Concordia University Chicago. At the Addison school, as with other institutions of higher education, a preparatory department helped to remediate learning in students. It was quite common at the time that schools of higher learning would admit students without any secondary school training. This lack of prior schooling created a necessity for schools like the Addison school to provide a significant amount of remediation for students (Schmidt, 2001).

A theme throughout the beginnings of teacher training in the LCMS was the continued German influence. A pastor in Germany by the name of Reverend Brunn would regularly send men to the United States to have them trained in the teaching profession. If the men, whose age would range from 14 to 30 years old, had some prior academic knowledge, they stood a good chance of the LCMS sending them to be a teacher at a school too quickly. Because German was a dominant language in the early Lutheran church in America, a newly immigrated German speaking teacher in training could fit in well at a school (Stellhorn, 1963).

By 1893 the LCMS built another teachers' seminary in Seward, Nebraska. Yet another was established the same year in St. Paul, Minnesota (Stellhorn, 1963). Both of these institutions exist today as a part of the Concordia University System of schools. It was at the teachers' seminary in Seward, Nebraska that the first women were formally trained by the Synod for the teaching ministry in 1919 (Stellhorn, 1963).

The LCMS experienced so much growth in numbers during the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century that people started to understand that more institutions of teacher training needed to exist. The Synod feared that by creating more schools, they might water down the quality of education at the schools that were already in existence. This was not the case, at least for most of the 20th century. Today, each of the schools in the Concordia University System operates a school of education. These institutions are in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Bronxville, New York; River Forest, Illinois; Selma, Alabama; Seward, Nebraska; St. Paul, Minnesota; Irvine, California; Portland, Oregon; Mequon, Wisconsin and Austin, Texas. Many of the institutions within the Concordia system offer not only bachelors but also masters degrees in education, with one, Concordia University Chicago, offering a doctorate in education.

While each of these institutions operates a school of education, some worry about the direction that LCMS higher education schools are taking. One particular school, Concordia University Wisconsin, which began as a school for training up teachers and preachers, currently has a population of approximately 7,500 students. Of these students, approximately twenty percent of traditional undergraduates are in teacher education programs. This is the second largest group on campus after health care professional students, who make up approximately 30% of the student body. Men studying to be LCMS ministers and other theological majors make up only about 4% of the student body (Concordia University Wisconsin, 2011). The worry, as noted above, is that the Concordia University System schools may be becoming too secular.

The Teacher as a Spiritual Being

Parker Palmer (1998) and Nel Noddings (2006) believe that the separation of church and state is appropriate in public education. However, they propose a focus on the spiritual

dimension of life and education. Palmer notes that, “the spiritual is always present in public education whether we acknowledge it or not” (Palmer, 1998, p. 8). He also writes, “The most important step toward evoking the spirit in public education is to bring teachers together to talk not about curriculum, technique, budget, or politics, but about the deepest questions of our teaching lives” (Palmer, 1998, p. 9). The basic premise behind his understanding of spirituality is that all people, regardless of their professed faith, carry with them a deep sense of wanting to connect. It is this connection and the questions that come with the journey to connection that define spirituality. Nel Noddings notes that “spirituality – seeking instead of dwelling within an established religious organization – can be a tendency found on the edges of those organizations” (Noddings, 2006, p. 280). The organizations to which Noddings refers are the formal faith-based organizations.

Palmer has developed a program by which educators in public schools can explore the spiritual dimension of their profession and lives. The Teacher Formation Program “is a two-year sequence of eight four-day retreats for groups of 25 K-12 teachers” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). At the heart of the program is Palmer’s concern that we have “a system of education so fearful of soulful things that it fails to address the real issues of our lives” (Palmer, 2003, p. 379). Teachers in this program meet outside the school environment so to provide a safe place to explore together the questions of who they are and whose they are. Palmer designed the Teacher Formation Program not for teachers to fix each other, but rather to provide a place to explore with each other the inner dimensions of their true selves. Palmer notes that teachers who have participated in the program have developed a better sense of who they are at school and home, have improved themselves as teachers due to their ability to better understand their students’ true selves, and have become better coworkers at their schools. Palmer notes that this program has

positive attributes, but sees the next step of implementing the Teacher Formation Program within schools to continue exploring the spiritual dimension of education (Palmer, 1998).

In a fashion similar to Palmer's idea that, "we seek to know reality in order to lay claim to things, to own and control them" (Palmer, 1993, p. 24), Martin Marty (2000) proposes a concentric circle model of personhood. Marty notes in his book, *Education, Religion, and the Common Good*, that individuals know their reality through their experience in six circles of life. The circles are the core of one's being, personal and social identity, sexuality, family, education, and health and well-being. Marty highlights the fact that these circles of influence and identity may be adjusted in rank of importance, but all of them exist to define religious personhood (Marty, 2000).

Marty also speaks to the level of spurious concerns about religion and education, particularly in the public sector – fears of establishment of religion by the government, relativistic thought by religiously minded people, and overall indifference by others. Marty contends that if religion is taught as a subject without any of the faith that is contained within those religions, it may very well become "so bland that it leads to a misreading of religion or become something so volatile that it will disrupt school and community life" (Marty, 2000, p. 46). Others note that a solid curriculum with religion as a critical piece will "help children to understand beliefs other than their own and to explore the role of religion in shaping the U.S. and other cultures" (Dever, Whitaker, & Byrnes, 2001, p. 220).

Gloria and Julia Stronks (1999) have theorized that the climate in which religion has become a taboo topic of discussion may itself be a form of religious belief. In reference to this paradigm the Stronks write, "It is important to realize that what often masquerades as 'neutral' thought is, in fact, based in foundational belief. This foundational belief is the functional

equivalent of religion” (Stronks & Stronks, 1999, p.113). In its current form, our public educational system is attempting to work under this concept of neutrality which may in actuality be promoting, as the Stronks mention, a functional equivalent of religion.

Baumgartner and Buchanan (2010) speak of the need to fulfill each child spiritually, even at a very early age. Baumgartner and Buchanan write, “It is impossible not to address children’s spirituality every day in every early childhood classroom. Even when a teacher chooses to ignore spirituality, a child may receive spiritual direction” (Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010, p. 93).

From his study of students in Chicago and Los Angeles, William Jeynes (2009) concluded that a relationship existed between the increased levels of biblical literacy in public and private school students in Chicago and Los Angeles and their academic achievement. His study showed statistically significant connection between higher levels of biblical literacy and academic performance (Jeynes, 2009). Jeynes did not study family socioeconomic status and overall family stability, which could be stronger determining factors on academic achievement.

Teaching for religious literacy.

While some, such as Palmer, propose a focus on the spirituality of education, others (Bishop & Nash, 2007; Dever et al., 2001; Lewy & Betty, 2007; Rosenblith & Bailey, 2008; Webb, 2002) suggest an approach whereby the world’s religions would be taught as content and for the sake of religious literacy. Dever, Whitaker, and Byrnes (2001) are teacher-education professors at Utah State University. They recommend an approach whereby exposure to the world’s religions begins for children in public education as early as kindergarten. Dever, Whitaker, and Byrnes suggest that schools inform parents prior to the exposure of what will be going on in the classroom and by what means the teaching will occur. The primary means of

teaching about religion will be by stories. Dever, Whitaker, and Byrnes provide a list of various books with themes from an assortment of religions. The authors note that teachers need to prepare for the student discussions that will follow hearing the religious stories. Stories from Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam are listed as good ways to show young children examples of how people express their beliefs in their regular daily lives (Dever et al., 2001).

Dever, Whitaker, and Byrnes continue to promote an understanding of the variety of religious celebrations that exist in culture. If religious celebrations are highlighted as themes during class time, they must be given equal time. They give the example of light to allow young students to learn about Hanukkah, Christmas, and Diwali. Exposure to these celebrations shows children the value of the celebrations to other people (Dever et al., 2001). Yet another suggestion by Dever, Whitaker, and Byrnes is for teachers to focus on the role that religion has played in the histories of local communities. Teachers can discuss religious groups in connection with the history of the local municipalities. Third and fourth graders typically focus on communities. These teacher educators also provide suggestions for how to weave religion into the study of current events, associating the events with the religions that are involved. Additionally, they advocate correlating religion with civic duty and social activism. By discussing the religious underpinnings of various aspects of civil life, the authors believe, “It can also enable children to have an accurate understanding of the role that religion and religious beliefs have played in shaping cultures” (Dever et al., 2001, p. 228).

In their article, “Teaching for religious literacy in public middle schools,” Penny Bishop and Robert Nash (2007) submit a number of additional teaching strategies related to the topic. They note that many public school teachers fear the separation of church and state to the point

that they are almost loath to broach the topic of religion. Bishop and Nash suggest a focus on teaching about religion and on providing a fair and accurate portrayal of the various religions. They suggest the following pedagogical approaches: “attributing beliefs appropriately, using moral conversation, promoting inner dialogue, teaching from the inside-out, asking and encouraging meaningful questions, moving from teacher-talk to student-talk, and relying on an interdisciplinary approach” (Bishop & Nash, 2007, p. 23).

In order to attribute beliefs appropriately, Bishop and Nash suggest that a teacher be cognizant of presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the religion impartially. This practice will allow students to draw their own conclusions. To allow for a focused discussion, Bishop and Nash underscored the following questions:

What is the other person trying to say? Where is it coming from? Why does it matter so much for the person? What is the author saying to me personally? What do I especially like about what I hear? How can I affirm the person’s beliefs? How can I learn more about these beliefs? Is there any overlap between the person’s beliefs and my own?

(Bishop & Nash, 2007)

According to Bishop and Nash, all these questions allow students to be reflective and respectful of each other and of the various religions they studied.

Bishop and Nash (2007) contend that establishing an environment whereby students and teachers can have a moral conversation is a positive teaching strategy. There are three essential rules to this sort of conversation. First, students must recognize the assumed good within a person’s motivations. Second, students need to show genuine concern for the other student who has a divergent view from their own. Finally, students must try to work towards an agreement with their fellow student (Bishop & Nash, 2007).

In promoting inner dialogue, teachers need to encourage students to put into words their thoughts on hypothetical situations involving people of faith. The student would develop a best case scenario of how these postulated individuals might interact with each other. The teacher questions students in a way that encourages them to grow through their writing. The authors also encourage teachers to ask students to write letters to religious role models. "Writing to a grandmother, to God, to a best friend, to a teacher, to a minister or rabbi are all means through which students can learn to focus not solely on the content, but rather on the sense they are making of that content" (Bishop & Nash, 2007, p. 25). Using the-inside-out method of instruction, the teacher creates a learning environment whereby the students can draw conclusions and connections on their own. One example would be to have local authorities of various religions to come into the classroom to talk objectively about their particular faith. The teacher would need to be careful in selecting presenters. The presenter would need to be able to tell the students about the various aspects of the religion. The presenter would also need to be able to explain his or her religion without proselytizing. Projects can also be assigned where students are required to do their own research of religions using the Internet or pre-designed questionnaires (Bishop & Nash, 2007).

Finally, Bishop and Nash argue that teachers should ask and allow meaningful questions and help students to do the same. Teachers should look for opportunities to ask students questions about religious material. The strategy can work from a general-to-specific or a specific-to-general paradigm. The intention of this focused questioning strategy is to foster student buy-in (Bishop & Nash, 2007).

Teacher religious identity in public school.

Jason Nelson (2010) studied the dispositions of two women teachers in the south because these dispositions relate to their identity as people of faith in public education. One of the women studied was a middle-aged Caucasian woman named Gwen, and the other was a 30-year-old African American woman named Jada. Both women had varied denominational affiliations over the years, but at the time of the study were attending members of the same Baptist congregation. Both professed a faith life that was important to them (Nelson, 2010).

In interviews with the researcher, Jada acknowledges her belief that God led her to become a public school teacher, i.e. God called her (as she put it) to be a teacher. She professes a need for Christian teachers in public schools. Jada tells the interviewer that she stands behind each of her students during high-stakes tests and prays for them individually. Jada is somewhat outspoken about her religious beliefs within the school environment. She believes that school is an appropriate place for her to express her religious identity (Nelson, 2010).

In a contrasting style, Gwen, while identifying her faith as Christian, focuses on the spirituality of herself and others, much in the same way as Palmer (2003) and Noddings (2006). Gwen notes that young elementary-aged children, the age group she teaches, still exhibit elements of a spiritual nature, primarily influenced by their parents. Gwen is intentional in her efforts to be inclusive of people of other faiths in her school (Nelson, 2010). Gwen repeatedly noted during the study that she was concerned with maintaining an open mind about the religious beliefs of others. She felt that sneaking in something Christian was a dishonest practice. She noted that individuals in a pluralistic society needed to acknowledge the beliefs of all people. She also emphasized that a fear of broaching any topic of a truly religious nature would create an

environment in which religion is never addressed (Nelson, 2010). This thought echoes Marty's (2000) notion of creating a purposeless milieu of non-religious dogma within schools.

Ultimately, as Nelson looked for themes of congruence between the experiences of Gwen and Jada, he found that both saw themselves as unprepared for the delicate balance between being a person of passionate Christian/spiritual belief and that of a public school teacher. They did not feel they were knowledgeable of the laws as they relate to faith and schools. They also indicated that they were unaware of formal school policies on such matters which helped create an even more uncertain environment for the dichotomy of faith and public educator (Nelson, 2010).

The role of faith in teacher persistence.

Stanley (2011) explored the mechanisms that teachers used to deal with stressful work environments. All the teachers in the study worked in school settings where emotionally disturbed students were present in the classroom. Stanley selected teachers based upon their own perception of their own high self-efficacy in these difficult work environments. The interviews revealed that teachers used common methods to deal with stress, including prayer and spiritual meditation. "The most common methods labeled as spiritual were deep breathing, exercise, long drives, prayer, time with family, Pantheism, meditation, relaxation exercises, martial arts, church attendance, hiking and camping" (Stanley, 2011, p. 52). Teachers noted that they avoided certain coping mechanisms when in public view but tended to use others, like praying and meditation, due to their private and inward nature (Stanley, 2011).

While all the teachers interviewed worked in what Stanley described as a somewhat hostile work environment, some teachers were particularly frustrated that their schools did not allow them to share more about their personal beliefs. One respondent confessed, "Though she,

and others, mentioned that proselytizing should never be allowed, she felt that her rights as a U.S. citizen were being violated as were the students' entitlement to receive the best education possible" (Stanley, 2011, p. 52). She indicated that she was not being who she fully thought she could be or ought to be.

Teacher spirituality and professional identity.

Kimberly Franklin (2010), in her dissertation work entitled, "The dialogical relationship between spiritual and professional identity in beginning teachers: context, choices and consequences," explores the world of Christian teachers in public education. In her findings, Franklin notes that the nine new educators she interviewed would more regularly choose to conceal their Christian spirituality than to reveal it in their public school contexts. These educators also noted a high level of personal conflict when it came to the balance of being a person of faith and their role as a public educator. The educators also had a perception of how they should behave as Christians in public education that influenced their conflicted feelings. Franklin noted that these teachers would look for a place of sanctuary to give themselves additional time when feeling conflicted about their professional roles and personal beliefs. Franklin's participants expressed a shift from an explicit assertion of belief to a focus on being attentive to the relationships the teachers had with students and colleagues (Franklin, 2010).

Conclusions from the Literature

The courts have formed a specific landscape within public education as it relates to the person of faith. As I noted within this literature review, varying factors contribute matters of consideration for the person of faith. Decades of court cases have created an environment where a teacher must be aware of the legality of different expressions of faith. The courts have often ruled in the favor of students and their rights to express themselves in a spiritual and religious

manner. However, the teacher of faith, as the courts have ruled, must be far more aware of what he or she says and does within the walls of schools. A significant gap exists within the literature related to the experiences of Christians in public schools. The aim of this research was to help address this gap.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

Based upon the body of research on faith in public education and the individual experiences of people of faith in those schools, I have concluded that a gap exists. This gap relates to teachers trained by universities in their pre-service education to be teachers of the faith, but who ultimately became teachers in public education. I researched this nuance. Therefore, the focus of this study was to examine the faith lives of Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS)-trained teachers who were currently serving in public schools. Using personal interviews of five individuals, I explored the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes connected to their faith while serving in public education. The findings of this investigation will serve to inform the pre-service training program at Concordia University Wisconsin. The investigation will also provide support for LCMS-trained teachers in public schools. In addition, it will help fill a gap in the academic literature on this topic.

I used an exploratory, qualitative research design, utilizing personal interviews, to collect data related to the faith experiences of Concordia University Wisconsin LCMS-teacher-education graduates who were currently teaching in public education. I interviewed these teachers as the means of collecting the data. I took measures to assure the confidentiality of each participant.

The design of the research was such that I was able to articulate the themes of participant experiences related to the following questions. Do the participants identify challenges in living faithfully in public school settings? How have the participants made it possible to express their faith in public school settings? How has the faith of the participants grown as a result of serving

in public school settings? How have the participants nurtured faith in others as they have served in public school settings?

Participants, Sampling, and Research Design

The participants were individuals who graduated from the Concordia University Wisconsin LCMS-teacher-education program who were currently teaching in the public school system.

The sampling strategy was a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling with a sample size of five. Researchers use purposive sampling when the group of respondents desired by the researcher is very specific in nature. Researchers use this nonprobability sample to focus on the chosen homogeneous qualities of the respondents. By nature, researchers do not use purposive sampling to generalize from the sample to the greater population. Purposive sampling was necessary for this study because I was interested in the specific experiences of a particular group (Berg, 2009).

A snowball sampling strategy was also necessary because the sample I was interested in was difficult to locate. Snowball sampling is a distinct form of purposive sampling. Researchers employ snowball sampling when a group may be difficult to reach. Generally, within snowball sampling, the researcher will identify a participant based upon predetermined characteristics. The researcher then relies upon the participant to suggest or recommend others who fall into the same predetermined characteristics. This process is continued until the desired number of participants is identified for the study (Berg, 2009).

The difficulty of locating the sample in this study was due to the fact that neither the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod or Concordia University Wisconsin kept records of teachers trained by the Synod who were now serving in public schools. If teachers chose, they may have

the Synod list them as a “candidate” in the Synod’s annual report, but this does not necessarily mean that these teachers were working in public institutions. It is, therefore, necessary to use a snowball sampling strategy to identify participants. I used Facebook to petition participants who fit my sample demographic. The School of Education at Concordia University Wisconsin maintains an alumni page on Facebook. I posted a request for participants there. I also asked a colleague, Dr. Mary Hilgendorf, to post a request for participants on her Facebook page. Mary had been an education professor at Concordia for many years and maintained contact with a large number of Concordia’s graduates. Once I identified some participants, I applied snowball sampling to select more candidates for the study.

Research Ethics

I obtained participant consent through email. I sent my participants an attachment of a Microsoft Word file that contained the informed consent document (Appendix A). The participant returned the document to me with an electronic signature.

To assure participants of their identities remaining confidential, I did not use participant names or locations of work in any of the reporting of the data in this study. I referred to participants by gender, years of experience, grade level they teach, geographic region, and assigned pseudonyms. I noted these assurances of confidentiality in the informed consent form that the participants reviewed and sign.

I stored the data, including the informed consent forms, audio recordings, and transcribed manuscripts, in a locked cabinet in my office at Concordia University Wisconsin. I will personally destroy consent forms, recordings, and transcribed manuscripts three years after the completion of my dissertation.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

I collected the data for this study as a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. I performed personal, telephone interviews that lasted an average of 35 minutes. Telephone interviews were necessary due to the inherent difficulty in finding participants that fit this sample. Participants for this study lived in a number of different states, which added to the need for telephone interviews. I noted within the informed consent document that I was going to record the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I told the participants when I began the recording. Using predetermined guide questions (see Appendix B), I petitioned responses from the respondents to explore their perceptions, feelings, and attitudes as people of faith in public education. I made use of follow-up questions when I needed clarification for a response given by a participant. I used follow-up questions to investigate issues, ideas, and concepts that I did not anticipate prior to the actual interview. Once I had completed all the interviews and recorded them digitally, I transcribed the interviews into written form.

I used multiple technologies in the process of recording and transcribing the interviews. I used an Olympus TP-8 telephone pick-up microphone along with a Sony ICD-UX512 digital voice recorder to capture the phone interviews. I then made use of Express Scribe dictation software to allow me to start, stop, and adjust playback speeds. I also made use of Dragon Naturally Speaking 12 Home edition to dictate the interviews. This software package took my speech and converted it into written text.

I used a process combining open, axial, and selective coding to analyze and interpret the data. Open coding is the initial read through of the transcribed interviews. During this read-through, I identified key patterns and ideas. I labeled the categories that I refined later. In open coding, I identified a large number of initial categories. I used the process of axial coding to narrow down the number of categories. I continued to refine and define labels and categories

that classified congruous experiences. The last level of coding was selective coding. At this stage of coding, I looked for relationships between the experiences of the participants. I also chose the categories to which the data were most relevant to emphasize as results of the study. Ultimately, I identified themes that served to create theory about this sample.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I had personal interest in this endeavor. I was a doctoral student at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I performed this study as a means to graduate from my program. I was also a faculty member in the School of Education at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, Wisconsin and, as such, had an interest in the results of this study to serve our education program and students.

Because I had a stake in this project, I upheld the highest professional standards as I worked towards the success of this venture. I recruited ethically and treated my participants well. I made every effort to collect the data in an honest manner. I drew conclusions that I believed were true to what the data represented. All these tasks I took on with the intention of representing truth and moral integrity.

Potential Contributions of the Research

My desire for this study was to develop a robust profile of the experiences of teachers who transitioned from the LCMS teacher-training program at Concordia University Wisconsin to public education. Concordia University Wisconsin will use the results of this research to inform the instruction of students as it pertains to public school instruction and faith life. It was my intention to allow the teachers in this study to tell their stories in such a way that their experiences would serve as a teaching tool for future educators in both Christian and public education.

While this research stems from a population of students from one institution, I believe that the results of this study could be beneficial for other Christian institutions of higher education that have teacher education programs. I anticipate that this research will open further avenues for studying other aspects of this particular population of professional educators. Moreover, this research fills a gap in the scholarly literature. Many have explored the role that religion should or should not play in public schools. The courts will continue to preside over cases related to religion in the secular arena. However, there has been little to no investigation into the faith lives of Christian educators, in particular LCMS, in public education. Therefore, this research was a needed commodity for its academic contribution.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Through this study, I have addressed the research questions that follow. Do the participants identify challenges in living faithfully in public school settings? How have the participants made it possible to express their faith in public school settings? How has the faith of the participants grown as a result of serving in public school settings? How have the participants nurtured faith in others as they have served in public school settings? Throughout this chapter, I have reported on the contexts of the participants' history in education from personal K–12 to current teaching assignments, their connection to the LCMS, and their experiences in public education.

I conducted phone interviews with the participants. I recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the interviews through an organized coding process. As the nature of this research was exploratory, themes became evident during analysis of the transcripts. The narrative expressions of the participants will serve as the data throughout this chapter. Ultimately, I will focus on nine themes that emerged from this research.

The Participants

Frank.

Frank is a 12-year veteran of high school teaching. He is confident and well spoken. He grew up in the LCMS and attended LCMS schools from fourth grade through college. He has a Master's degree in education from a public university. Over his career, Frank has taught in three schools; two of these were public and one was LCMS. Frank began his career in public education right out of college. He has one year of experience teaching in LCMS schools. He enjoyed the experience, but returned to public education to allow his family to move back to a

part of the country with more extended family. Frank is actively involved at his local LCMS congregation and is a member of the leadership board at the church. Frank sends his children to the LCMS school connected to the church.

Kelsey.

An energetic speaker, Kelsey has taught middle school for close to six years. Five and a half of those years were in LCMS education. She has since transitioned to a public school over 500 miles away. She had taught at this public school for close to five months at the time of the interview. Her personal educational experience began in a public school for kindergarten, LCMS schools for first grade through freshmen year of high school, back to public schools for the rest of high school, and Concordia for college. One of Kelsey's parents is a church worker in the LCMS. Kelsey is currently working on a Master's degree in K-12 studies. She enjoyed her teaching experience in an LCMS school and found herself struggling to adjust to some of the differences in public education. Kelsey attends an LCMS church and makes a long drive to drop off her children at the school connected to her congregation.

David.

David has been a teacher and administrator for 17 years. His history as an educator spans two LCMS schools and one public school. As a public educator, he currently serves as an administrator with a primary role as a disciplinarian and athletics coordinator. David grew up in LCMS schools where both of his parents were church workers for the LCMS. Prior to his current position, David had experienced an entirely LCMS education world. David has a Master's degree in educational administration. As David spoke, he was careful with his words and introspective. He and his wife lead a Bible study at their LCMS church and his children attend the LCMS school connected to his congregation.

Abby.

Abby has taught high school for 12 years. She has an effervescent personality. Abby began her elementary education in an LCMS school, but then transitioned to public schools for the rest of her K–12 schooling. Her first year of teaching was in an LCMS school. However, she had challenges with some colleagues that caused her to leave the school. She has taught at a public school since that time. Abby has a Master's degree in computer science. One of Abby's parents was an LCMS church worker, and she currently attends an LCMS church where her children attend the school.

Cindy.

Cindy has taught middle school for two-and-a-half years. Cindy likes to reflect on her experiences. All her schooling was within the LCMS system where she had taught in an inner-city LCMS school for her first two years of teaching. In the midst of that teaching experience, she came to realize that the LCMS was not something she wanted to be a part of anymore. She moved to another state, took a year off from teaching, and began attending a non-denominational church. Her return to teaching was within a public school where she had taught for five months at the time of the interview. Cindy is not married and has no children.

Do the participants identify challenges in living faithfully in public school settings?

The participants each recounted a variety of challenges that they had faced in public education. While some saw the challenges as frustrating, others saw them as opportunities. It is important to note that each of the participants felt that it was possible to maintain a faith-filled life as a believer in Jesus Christ while serving in public schools. However, participants viewed the way in which they could express this faithfulness differently. None of the participants received any sort of training from their school districts with respect to what they could or could

not say in matters of faith and religion. Frank noted that the handbook in his district says that employees should not persecute anybody for their religious beliefs, but no other participant was aware of any sort of prescribed district guidelines for dealing with faith issues at his or her school. Many of the participants were unaware of their specific rights as people of faith with respect to dealing with inappropriate student behavior, and interacting with colleagues.

Awareness of rights.

I asked the participants about their awareness of what they could or could not say about their faith in public schools. Their responses indicated that they were not fully aware of their rights. The teachers each had an understanding that as long as a student mentioned faith, then the teacher could respond. David, a 17-year veteran of teaching and an administrator, said,

That was kind of an eye-opening experience in and of itself. Even to this day, I feel like I am not totally clear on what I can and can't say. So, I would say unfortunately I ere on the side of not saying things. So I just kind of let people know who I am by my actions and not so much my words.

David's uncertainty with respect to what he could or could not say left him feeling as though he could not say much in respect to his faith. A focus on personal actions became his primary means of faith expression.

Adding to the theme of uncertainty regarding the rights of teachers to make expressions with faith-related undertones, Cindy told a story about the intersection of her beliefs and teaching science in her school. I asked Cindy if she ever felt that she might have crossed a legal boundary in sharing her faith. Cindy recalled the following:

Maybe [I have crossed a legal boundary], I guess I'm not sure because I don't know what all the legalities are. We were learning about evolution and the Big Bang theory and the

different ideas with that and so the kids started asking me about if I believed if there was a creator or a God. So just talking about that and I was supposed to teach about Darwin's finches ... So, I might have crossed it then when I was talking about how I don't necessarily believe in the big idea of evolution and Homo sapiens and then in December with all this talk about the end times. Maybe I crossed it then when the kids asked me if I thought that the world was going to end. I told them, "No, because my personal beliefs state that other things haven't happened yet to say the end was that close."

Cindy then went on to reflect on the fact that these instances came up early in the school year, and she had yet to get to know her students well. She thought that the early timing of this experience in the school year might have added to her concern of overstepping her bounds to express some element of her personal beliefs.

With the exception of Abby, all participants expressed a deep desire to be able to say more about their faith to their students than they could. I asked each participant if there was ever a time that he or she desired to say more to a student about his or her beliefs. Kelsey, a teacher new to public schools with over five years of LCMS-school-teaching experience, thought back on her experience.

Oh, absolutely (said with emphasis) ... I asked them (her students) to draw a picture of what represented them. One student actually put on there, God. She talked about how God was the number one in her life and I thought that was awesome to hear that she felt that she could still do that in the classroom. I just smiled really big (laughs). I would've loved to, yes, absolutely loved to elaborate. I have to obviously try not to push just to one person, but I thanked her for sharing, and then from that some more kids added.

Kelsey felt like a quiet cheerleader for the students in her classroom that made expressions of faith. Her awareness of not trying to push her beliefs on others inhibited her from doing much more than giving a smile of support to her student of faith. Frank reflected on his desire to say more about his faith in the classroom. He said,

Absolutely, probably on a daily basis. I'm finding the students who are struggling the most are the ones that I really wish that I could reach out and connect with them and find out if they are Christians and if they are Christians, if I could talk with them about the Christian aspect of kind of what is expected and how we are supposed to treat each other. You know we can help support each other. I don't always have that opportunity and so I find ways to talk about treating people the right way. I just don't get to talk about Jesus. I don't get to talk about the Bible. I don't get to talk about why. I just have to hope that they'll listen to me when I tell them how they're supposed to act and how they're supposed to treat other people.

Frank had the desire to connect more with his Christian students, but felt that he could still influence them without using words by being an example of Christian behavior.

David also reflected on his desire to say more in his connection with students. He said the following:

Yeah, I would say that comes up a lot ... They may not really have a mom or dad that is really worth anything that takes care of them. They are kind of raising themselves. There have been times where I just really have wanted to be more of an influence for them because I can tell they are searching for things and you know ... they didn't grow up the way I did ... that had parents that taught them about Christ. I can tell that they are searching.

David wanted to be able to fill a parental void that was present for some students. However, his lack of awareness of rights and his passion for the hurting students around him left him conflicted.

Both Frank and David desired to say more to allow for a better role-model relationship with students. While many of the participants wished to say more about their faith in their current education context, they each did express ways in which they could live faithfully as a public educator. I have addressed these expressions of faith in the results for research questions two and three.

Dealing with inappropriate student behavior.

David and Kelsey, the teachers with the longest amount of time serving in an LCMS school, were challenged by classroom management. Kelsey experienced strife when dealing with issues of student behavior. She spoke of a lack of respect as a big issue at her school, in spite of a school-wide emphasis on developing student character. She felt that the administration was not supportive in her attempts to discipline students, which left Kelsey feeling frustrated. At times during the interview, Kelsey let out long sighs of bewilderment as to what to do with her current situation. Kelsey compared her current public school-discipline experience to her LCMS school experience, saying,

It's one thing when you're in a Lutheran school, I think. When you can go and refer back to the Commandments and respecting authority because that's really classroom management. You can relate it back to that, but in a public school that management, that respect, you have to ... I guess working with kids and showing them, modeling for them what you expect. Expect respect. That's the big thing.

Kelsey then went on to talk about students stealing calculators in her classroom and the fact that her worst day with student behavior at her previous school is like her best day at her current school. Of all the participants, Kelsey appeared to be the individual with the deepest conflict between her Christian values and her perception of who she needed to be as a public educator.

Cindy felt that her training at Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) had not given her a background in how to deal with student behavior. She also noted that her two years of LCMS teaching had been a “small bubble” that kept her protected. To her, public education was more difficult and often ignited spiritual battles. Cindy wanted to make sure that pre-service teachers at CUW were prepared “to see Satan in action, in full force, and strong.” Even as Cindy mentioned these challenges, she did not sound frustrated by them but rather saw the challenges as an opportunity to “be careful not to be sucked into negativity in the devil’s schemes.” Both Kelsey and Cindy are new to public education and they present contrasting responses to the challenges present as people of faith are intriguing.

Each of the participants, with the exception of Frank, made a statement with respect to the difference of the kind of students that they dealt with in public schools compared to LCMS schools. Abby and Kelsey noted that their public-school students came from a wide range of demographic backgrounds. This range, according to both Abby and Kelsey, is quite different from their LCMS school experience in which parents are financially involved in their students’ education through paying tuition. Kelsey indicated a level of frustration with a lack of parental involvement as she described her efforts to make phone calls and e-mails to parents. She also said, “I have 80 kids in my classes and only four parents show up for back-to-school night.” In addition, as I noted earlier, David saw a lack of parental influence as a main contributor to

student misbehavior. Frustration with a lack of support from administrators and parents was a common theme among the participants.

Interactions with colleagues.

Each of the participants, with the exception of Cindy, indicated some level of confrontation with colleagues in matters of faith. While these confrontations were not heated interactions, they did present challenges for the participants. Frank disclosed that he felt himself to be quite different from his colleagues in his views on politics and faith. Furthermore, David recalled an experience that had a deep impact on him. He said,

Early on when I got there ... [in] the staff lounge, there was a bulletin board down there where people seem to be posting political things from the Democratic Party and different things about gay rights and women's choice and that kind of stuff. So I put a little flyer on there about a different perspective, and I can recall the reaction there when they saw it. Someone said something to the effect of "Who the hell put this out here?" and "Who do they think they are?" and so I just kind of made a decision at that point that it was really not going to be a good idea for me to try to use the workplace as some kind of platform for my views and beliefs and that it really was just not a good idea to do that because it really created such a strong emotional response in some of the staff, and I just felt that it was inappropriate. So, I quickly got rid of it and made a mental note that I'm not at (Name of his old school) anymore, and it's just a different deal.

From that point on David noted that his beliefs were quite different from those of some of his colleagues. This experience that David had early in his service in public education left a lasting impact and continues to influence his interactions with his colleagues today.

Abby explained that while she had experienced similar confrontations with her colleagues, she did not perceive them as a bad thing. When asked if she found herself standing up for a particular position on issues, she said the following:

Oh yes, (laughter) definitely. Even though I have ... I think I'm the only Missouri Synod Lutheran one in there, but there are few Catholics in there, but they are still very liberal Catholics. But, I do feel like I am the one standing up for the same-sex marriage or abortion stuff like that. I'm the one saying no, no, no, no, no, but as the years have gone on, I've also learned not to say as much. I am [comfortable] because they are my friends and they know my views on things, as well at this point. So, I am comfortable with it.

Abby reflected on the fact that her relationships with her colleagues allowed her to express herself as a person of faith. Because of these friendships, Abby did not fear being a person of faith in interactions that could be emotion-filled.

Kelsey found herself addressing colleague behavior through modeling what she considered appropriate behavior. She said,

I think definitely setting an example. I worked with ... not just with the students, but an example to the fellow staff. Just the way they talk, sometimes they get on kids for using inappropriate language. Well, when its teachers talking to teachers, they often use inappropriate language as well, and I'm not afraid to share with them when they ask, "What are you doing this weekend?" I'm going to church.

Kelsey perceived that if she would make her colleagues aware that she was someone who attended a church, she could set an example for them. I explored this expression of "I'm going to church" as a witnessing strategy in a research question yet to come.

Overall, the participants indicated that challenges do exist for them as people of faith in public education. However, each of the individuals had found ways to reconcile these challenges with their beliefs. Kelsey, the teacher who expressed the greatest amount of challenges, asserted that she had “grown, in the sense that I think you grow with every experience.” These teachers all affirmed the place for challenges in their roles as people of faith, but also felt that this was not something abnormal to others in the same position as them.

How have the participants made it possible to express their faith in public school settings?

Finding a way to share their faith was important to all the participants. While all participants acknowledged they were not able to say the name of Jesus as often as they would like, that they still found ways to express their faith in Christ in a genuine way. Abby said, “I can never say Jesus to them, but I can act like he would try to act.” Cindy also indicated a need to stand out as different from others in how she acted. Cindy asserted that

If you really are a person of faith, that you’re going to stand out pretty boldly. You are going to stand out like a sore thumb and what I’ve been learning is that you’ve got to be bold and not ashamed of the gospel and people will wonder ... question why you are the way that you are.

Christian modeling and standing out through day-to-day actions was the most common method that these LCMS-education-trained teachers used to profess their faith in public schools.

Additionally, the teachers identified two specific strategies by which they would engage people in conversations of belief in God. They created circumstances where students could first initiate talks, allowing the teacher to respond with a faith influenced response and let those in his or her circles of influence (students, parents of students, and colleagues) know that they attended a Christian church regularly.

Christian modeling.

By far, a desire to be a Christian model was the most commonly used expression of faith. Each participant saw this as a vital component of being a person of faith in an environment where he or she was sometimes uncertain of the legality of spoken expressions of faith. Abby said that being a person of faith in a public school was about being able to be present for kids. She stated,

I feel [I can be] a Christian model to where the kids, they do know I'm a Christian. Like I said, they know they're aware of that. I don't try faith on any of them, but just in my behavior and how I treat others and how I treat them and respect them and behave. I think is a big way that I can quietly pass on a little bit of my beliefs, not my beliefs, but how I was raised and how a Christian and a person should behave and how I deal with situations and stuff like that.

Abby reported that she was able to impart some of her Christian values to her students by being a respectful and well-behaved role model.

Cindy said that she felt the need to stand out as a person of faith, that there should be something different about her. Cindy claimed,

[People will wonder] where the spark comes from in the morning, because most people look angry and upset to be there in the morning, but I'll be the one that's kind of chipper around and so they give me some grief about it, but I just ... I get used to it, I guess, because that's where I get to share God's peace with them is because I have something else to look forward to in the day where they may not be looking at life that way.

Frank also emphasized the importance of showing happiness in the morning as an expression of his faith in Jesus. He recalled,

One of the big things I get from students a lot is they will always ask me is, “Why are you always smiling so much?” and “Why are you saying good morning and hi to everybody?” I just kinda tell them I’m just glad to be here. I’m glad to be working with you. You know sometimes they will come in afterschool and they’ll start to ask, “What is it that makes you so glad?” So, there are times that I do have opportunities you know to share that ... you know. Where I can talk about the faith that I have, the assurances that I have, and the hope in a Savior, Jesus.

Cindy and Frank expressed that their happiness throughout the day was something that was important to them as a profound witness to the Christian joy and hope they possessed.

Cindy, who was one of the two teachers with the least experience in public education, referred to her view on Christian modeling on six different occasions within her interview. She said,

I think it makes me think a lot more about how important sharing the Gospel and God’s peace is. That I really do have to live it out, rather than just speak it or just say that I do it. I actually show it.

To Cindy, being in a public school as opposed to an LCMS school had forced her to think more about her faith.

David, the lead disciplinarian in his school, encouraged his students to have good character traits. He explained,

For the most part, I think I ... less words, more actions. In talking with students about their conscience and how that’s a good thing and that voice inside their head is their conscience telling them right from wrong and that’s a good voice for them to be listening to etc. etc. To try to still have good character traits and encourage those, but stopping shy

of saying you know it's because of Christ loving me that this is important to me and that kind of thing.

David does this to instill in them Christian qualities without specifically noting to the student that this is his intent.

A student must initiate faith talks, the teacher never can.

A common strategy among all the participants was to wait for students to bring up matters of faith. Generally, the participants saw student-initiated faith statements as unforeseen opportunities, as opposed to teacher-planned moments. The participants were more comfortable when these opportunities were with an individual student or small groups of students. If a faith-related issue came up in a whole class discussion, the participants were uncertain as to how much they should or could say about their personal beliefs. However, all the participants acknowledged that this paradigm, students initiating the conversation, was an appropriate opportunity for them to share their faith.

Kelsey declared, "I think just from what I've been told. I can't impress upon the students my faith, but if I'm asked, I'm not going to withhold." Frank said, "Basically, I guess I've always been under the impression that if a student asks you what you believe, you are allowed to talk with them about it as long as it's not in front of the classroom." While referencing an opportunity to express his faith through a student initiating the conversation, David recalled the impact that his wearing a cross could have with students at his school.

I mean I wear a ring that has a cross on it. So, I think that in that way every once in a while I will have kids say, "That's a really cool cross." You know in a Lutheran setting I used to always respond, 'I wear that because Christ loves me' or I'd see another kid wearing a cross and I'd asked them, "What does that mean to you?" So, I'd kinda give

them the opportunity to practice talking about their faith. Now that I've been in the public sector I really have not ... unless a kid specifically asked me, "Why do you wear that?" That kinda opens the door for me then to share what my belief is, that it's not just a cross for me, it's a symbol of my faith. You know that I can share briefly. I definitely don't go into any great detail and I usually keep it pretty brief, because I just want to be cautious about not overstepping my bounds in that, because I feel that I can be an influential person without having to be too much about, you know about preaching or giving kids Bible verses and those kind of things. I can live out my faith. They know that I am someone they can come to and trust and talk to and somebody that will help them.

David saw his cross ring as a witnessing strategy that could help a student to initiate a faith conversation. However, even if a student started a conversation about the ring, David did not want to overstep his bounds. David wanted to show that he was a person of faith but did not feel comfortable making a lengthy verbalized expression of that faith.

Cindy regularly wrote prompts for her students during the first class of her day. Sometimes the prompts had moral implications woven into them. If a student shared a Bible passage in his or her response to the prompt, Cindy would write back to the student on the assignment with an affirmation that she felt the same way about what the student expressed. Cindy also allowed her athletes to pray before a basketball game she had coached at the public school. When asked about the reaction of parents to this expression of faith by their daughters in a public school context, Cindy replied, "I think they noticed." Cindy had no fear that the parents would react adversely to the prayer.

"They know I go to church."

Each of the participants indicated that they willingly told others in the public school community about their attendance at a church. While this does not seem significant on the surface, this profession of being a person of faith was common among the participants. Abby, in reference to her life as a churchgoer, highlighted,

The kids are very aware, too. I do make it known at the beginning of the school year, telling about myself that my father's a Lutheran minister. You know, so if that ever opens a door for any of them too, they do know that I was brought up in a Christian household.

Most of the statements made by the participants in respect to their church attendance were a variation of "They know I go to church." This expression seemed to be a safe way that the participants identified themselves as people of faith to the greater public school community. David reflected on the fact that he knew of colleagues who were also churchgoers and how he desired to connect with them as fellow believers.

The primary focus of the participants in the expression of his or her faith was the modeling of Christian care and behavior. The participants did not use specific words connected to Christian theology in this modeling behavior. Nonetheless, they were generally comfortable with how they could express themselves as people of faith. The reactive strategy of waiting for students to engage issues of faith and religion was the prevailing means by which the participants felt the most comfortable using words to express faith. Letting people know they attended a church was a non-combative means by which the participants were able to identify themselves to others as people of faith.

How have the participants nurtured faith in others as they have served in public school settings?

Throughout the interviews, all the participants professed a deep belief in God. However, the number of specific references to how they were able to nurture the faith of others in public schools was small. David indicated that he wanted to be able to continue planting seeds in his colleagues. Kelsey saw the opportunities that came from the character-building programs at her school as the openings for her to nurture and support students who made faith-related assertions. Cindy wrote Bible passages on the papers of students who shared Bible verses with her. Overall, there were few instances that the participants recalled where specific nurturing of another's faith had occurred. However, Abby shared a story about a student that she was able to influence. She recalled,

Can I tell one more story? I have a student who graduated last year. I had her starting her junior year. She came from a very rough home, without a lot of support. She had had a very rough life. This girl had done many drugs, was very promiscuous, but I connected with her and had many conversations with her and through that I always stood the ground with her about how her behavior is wrong and not right and that she shouldn't be acting that way. I kind of portrayed myself as a mother to her, how her mother does not do. And she still texts me all the time, even when she moved out of state for college and we still talk and she still comes to me for advice because she knows I'm going to give her, you could say, the Christian advice that I feel is very important. So even though I didn't say those things while she was in school, she's out now and so I can say all I want to her. I do think making those connections with those kids and then being a Christian really helps in that aspect. That role modeled for her, and she even told me that. I got a really nice card from her that said she wouldn't have done as well, if it wasn't for me pushing her. I love that girl.

In this story, it is apparent that Abby had genuine concern for this student and that Abby hoped that this student would become a person of faith. Despite a lack of specific references from the participants in respect to nurturing the Christian faith of individuals in his or her school setting, these teachers expressed repeatedly that their consistent Christian modeling was the primary way in which they could have an impact on others for Christ.

How has the faith of the participants grown as a result of serving in public school settings?

The participants indicated two consistent themes in respect to their growth as people of faith while serving in his or her public school settings. The first manner in which the participants expressed this growth was through his or her perception of what they did in public education as a ministry and a calling from God. The second theme of participant growth was through the support of colleagues who were also people of faith.

A calling and a ministry.

Frank, a 12-year veteran of teaching with one year of experience in LCMS education, confessed that he felt conflicted by a decision he had made to reject a formal call to an LCMS school. He described the situation of the teaching position itself, the teaching load and the overall environment in the school, as ideal. He and his wife both had initially felt moved by God to accept the call. However, they decided to decline the call and remain where they lived. Frank continued to teach in public education. He said,

I feel like still to this day that I felt God tugging on me to go and that I said no. So that's one of those things where I still think about that to this day, and you still question your own human nature of the decisions you make when God is pulling at you and trying to lead you in a direction and you wonder if your human side sometimes doesn't allow you to listen.

In spite of his conflicted profession of his calling, Frank goes on to make the following statement.

I guess a lot of times for me, I think back to when Jesus talks about it. It's not the people who are well that need a doctor; it's the people who are sick. For me, I see myself in a public school as a chance to try and shine God's light. You know, there's a lot of kids whose families go to church and I don't think those kids always get the support or backing, because I think a lot of times the families think that if I bring my kids to church that's enough. I kind of like to think about the fact that I'm teaching at a public school, as a Christian man hoping to at least show them how they can live their lives and how they can, you know, teach and interact with one another in a positive way. You know in a supportive way. You know where you can still live out your faith, even if you can't talk openly about it at certain times.

Frank felt that his calling from God to serve in a public school allowed him to show people at his school how to live a godly life. This assertion by Frank related to the dominant theme that emerged from this research: LCMS-trained teachers in public school felt that Christian modeling was their prominent method of faith expression in his or her secular contexts.

Cindy was the participant who expressed the largest desire to minister on a daily basis in her school. In respect to her calling to the people in her school, she said,

We (Cindy and a colleague) both see ourselves as a huge ministry opportunity. Where the kids need to be shown love and God's love and unconditional love and discipline that's based on love and if we're not here to do it, who else will be here?

Cindy saw her role, as a Christian public educator as filling a void that no one else could fill. I got the impression from Cindy that she felt pressure to be one of the few people at her school who would provide Christian love to the students.

Collegial support for faith.

This theme of participant faith was split between a desire to have more collegial support for faith growth and a current support system for growth. Frank, Kelsey, and Abby did not report any specific faith support from colleagues. Kelsey and Frank reflected on the faith support they had received while teaching in an LCMS school. However, David and Cindy both noted specific instances and people that helped and supported them in their Christian walk in public schools. David recalled, “I have a couple of coworkers who, you know, that I’ve gone to Bible studies with and we prayed together and that kind of things. That’s been rewarding to kind of have that support network.” Later on in his interview, David expressed a heartfelt desire to make more connections with colleagues in matters of faith. However, he felt conflicted in how to initiate and accomplish these interactions.

Cindy had developed a relationship with another teacher at her school that provided a constant source of encouragement to her. She noted,

The teacher that is next door to me, we share devotions and usually every week or two would make up a list of five to seven students to pray for. It’s pretty typical every day that something will be brought up about God and seeing the devil at work and school and after things have been going really well for a while, we noticed something slipping up. So, we have, kind of, talked a little bit about maybe a spiritual warfare type thing and sharing Christian songs with each other. She gave me a gospel CD to listen to.

Cindy also referred to a Bible passage that gave her encouragement as a Christian teacher in public education. She paraphrases Romans 5:3–5, “Just to persevere, because suffering produces perseverance and perseverance makes character and character eventually builds hope and our hope is in Christ Jesus.” Cindy’s citation of this passage showed her commitment to her role as a public educator. The passage she cited also showed that she viewed her service to her public school as a place to work hard with the ultimate hope of life in Christ.

Summary of the results

These narratives of the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of the CUW LCMS-trained teachers in public education highlight nine specific themes. These themes were the awareness of teacher rights as people of faith in public education, dealing with inappropriate student behavior, interacting with colleagues, Christian modeling, participants’ understanding that students must initiate faith talks, making others aware that the teacher attends church, the teacher’s desire to nurture faith in others, public education as a calling and ministry, and collegial support for faith. The following chapter will include an examination of the results, implications, and recommendations for further research in this area of study.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

I have based the following conclusions on the results of the themes found within the narrative descriptions of five CUW-Lutheran-education-trained teachers currently working in public schools. Through the themes that I identified in chapter four, I have focused my discussion on three areas of significance. These areas include the influence that theology had on Lutheran-trained teachers in public education, the psychological impact of a public school environment on a person of faith, and the range of strategies that the teachers used to express their faith.

Theological Influence

The theology of the LCMS shaped all the participants. Their understanding of LCMS theology is at the center of the strife between the teachers' religious-self and the secular requirements of their employment. A key source of support for this participant group would be to reinforce proper teaching about the doctrine of vocation. Having a clear understanding of how God uses the variety of vocations one possesses allows an individual to find fulfillment in using the gifts and abilities God has given them. Additionally, equipping LCMS-trained teachers with a more robust view of the two kingdoms of God can provide an opportunity for participants to rectify the struggle between vocational fulfillment and evangelical guilt.

All the participants in this study went through the curriculum prescribed by CUW for its LCMS-teacher candidates. The LCMS and CUW designed the curriculum to qualify knowledgeable, Lutheran ministers of the faith in LCMS schools. Two courses in particular,

“Theology of the Lutheran Confessions” and “Biblical Theology,” work to equip future LCMS teachers to explain the faith to students they encounter in their teaching careers. All the participants in this study were able to use this theological training for a minimum of one year in an LCMS school. Participants reflected on the ease with which they were able to incorporate faith into all aspects of their curriculum and interactions with others while in an LCMS school. However, most of the participants expressed that they desired to share more about their faith in their current teaching environments in public education. This contrast of the satisfaction felt through the expression of theological knowledge in LCMS schools and the desire to express more of a teacher’s faith in public education is something that I will address later in this chapter.

Vocation.

The LCMS view on vocation centers on the multitude of ways that God equips his people to serve his purposes. Within this view is the belief that God works his purposes in all the vocations that a person may have. Christian public school teachers have many vocations. They may have the vocation of father or mother, husband or wife, neighbor, mathematics teacher, and many more. Each of the vocations one has allows the individual to serve the world as God has equipped him or her. It is in the teaching of mathematics that the Christian mathematics teacher serves God and passes on the gifts of God to the students that he or she teaches.

This research revealed that CUW-LCMS-trained teachers have a mixed view of the doctrine of vocation. All the participants mentioned numerous times that they modeled Christian behavior, which is part of their vocational life as a Christian. Still, none of the participants mentioned the teaching of their content as an expression of godly living. The participants made other distinctions about their lives as Christian teachers that had a vocational attribute such as caring, praying, loving, encouraging, and disciplining others. Yet, CUW’s education and

theology departments need to address this oversight. Graduates of CUW need to recognize and believe that good teaching is an exposition of who they are as people of faith.

Two kingdoms.

As Russ Moulds (2011) mentioned in his essay on the two kingdoms of God, the left-hand kingdom is where God works through his people to accomplish the everyday tasks of life for the greater common good and justice. The right-hand kingdom is where God does all the work of accomplishing salvation in his people. A proper understanding of these two kingdoms will allow LCMS public educators to view their work as good teachers of content as enough. Again, the teachers in this study were somewhat aware of the distinction of the two-kingdom approach. None of them used the words *two kingdoms*, but they did view their places of work in public education as different and unique compared to their Lutheran experiences. Once LCMS-trained public school teachers can relinquish a self-imposed responsibility for the salvation of lost souls in their schools, they can better become the teachers that God equipped them to be. This is a difficult task for teachers trained to be ministers of the Gospel. Nonetheless, the LCMS public school teacher must find a way to balance vocational fulfillment and evangelical guilt.

Psychological Implications

For three of the participants in this study an internal conflict existed that could create psychological stress. They hinted at a perceived clash between their task as a Christian public school teacher and their spiritual well-being. David remembered what it was like for him during his years in LCMS education and how he felt that his faith was in some ways not as strong as it used to be. He also expressed a feeling of guilt for having left LCMS teaching. In his role as a disciplinarian in an LCMS school, David was able to use the Bible to deal with behavior, in a public school he could not. CUW had trained David to apply his faith in a particular manner as

an LCMS teacher in an LCMS school. When his new teaching context prohibited this same application, stress occurred. This stress is real and can become a significant issue for teachers like David.

For Kelsey and Cindy, the teachers with the least experience in public education, I saw two different approaches in respect to their lives as people of faith. Cindy was aggressive in her approach to being a Christian in her setting. She actively sought out ways to show that she was a believer in Christ. I could tell that Kelsey also wanted to share more of who she was, but she expressed pain and frustration that she could not. They both identify themselves as devote followers of Christ, but the ways in which they have developed their Christian identity in their public school contexts are quite different. I could see one or both of them reaching a point of psychological distress in their workplace due to being unable to become who they perceive they need to be.

In her work with teachers who were people of faith in public education, Kimberly Franklin (2010) noted that her participants had to work to find a balance between their spiritual identity and their professional responsibility. I find that the LCMS teachers in this study had similar experiences to the Christian teachers in Franklin's research that withdrew to a place of sanctuary to allow more time to figure out faith-related issues. The participants interviewed for this LCMS study expressed a desire to have more assistance from an outside source as they navigated living faithfully as public educators. I believe that CUW and the LCMS have a responsibility not to only prepare these teachers properly during their pre-service training, but to provide continuing education opportunities to support the psychological well-being of these teachers.

The Range of Strategies for Those who Express Faith in Public Education

What does it mean to share one's faith?

To the participants in this study, how one shared one's faith varied quite a bit. For some, it meant to find ways to motivate students to bring up issues related to faith. For others, it meant to be nice and smile as much as possible. The difference between these explicit and implicit efforts is important. Cindy was the teacher in this study who came across as the individual who was the most attentive to opportunities to show her faith, often in a verbal manner. It appeared that if she could not express herself verbally, she felt that she was falling short of her evangelical call to influence those around her for God. She viewed her life in her public education job as an opportunity to witness. The participants used verbs such as expressing, witnessing, living faithfully, professing, and confessing to communicate the various ways that they perceived their active life as people of faith in their schools. However, an interesting note is that one individual's meaning for a word, such as witnessing, could mean a very different thing for another individual.

I believe this individualization of the meanings of words is another point of interest. While it is not abnormal for people to mean different things when they use the same word, it is striking that the teachers in this study, many of whom shared very similar educational and spiritual backgrounds, have developed profoundly different assessments of their ability to share their faith in their teaching contexts. Generally, the teachers expressed a desire to be able to witness, live faithfully, profess, and confess who they were as people of faith. However, they would also make comments that showed frustration with not being able to do those exact things. Yet, in the next sentence, they would express contentment with their ability to model Christian behavior. This all-at-once feeling of fulfillment and conflict is the most meaningful observation from this study. CUW-LCMS-trained public school teachers appear to be contented and

discontented with their lives as people of faith in their schools. They find fulfillment in showing the qualities that come from their identity as a person of faith, but they are conflicted by not being able to share with those around them why they have these qualities.

What are the strategies these teachers use to express their faith in public schools?

The participants expressed their faith primarily by modeling Christian behavior and letting others know that they attended a church. I believe that this is yet another instance of a conflicted state of spiritual expression for the LCMS-trained public school teacher. These teachers wanted others to know that they were people of faith. They wanted to tell others that they attended a church regularly. However, this somewhat passive expression of faith existed due to the legal atmosphere within their schools. Therefore, since CUW trained these teachers to be ministers of the Gospel, some of the teachers experience internal conflict connected to their ability to express their faith.

Conclusions

The degree of contentment and discontent expressed by this group of teachers indicates the need for rethinking both the pre-service LCMS-education program at CUW and the need for the LCMS and CUW to continue to support these teachers. To begin, the teachers that are currently in CUW's LCMS-teacher-education program take one course that involves a focus on pedagogy and strategies for instructing K-12 students in matters of faith. This education course entitled "Teaching the Faith" addresses some of the issues that I have raised in the discussion section. However, an increased emphasis on a proper understanding of the doctrine of vocation and two-kingdom theology is essential for LCMS pre-service teachers. In addition, CUW's theology department will need to play a role in connecting LCMS theological practices and the life CUW graduates may experience in the public sector. For all the CUW-LCMS-trained

public-school teachers, they took a course load similar to an academic minor in theology. This heavy emphasis, while not a bad thing in itself, needs to address the potential for life outside LCMS church work. Pre-service teachers in these theology classes need to be encouraged by theology faculty to learn and apply a doctrine of contented vocation whether in LCMS schools or non-LCMS schools. There would also be value in spending time within both the education and theology curriculum to create experiences for students to contemplate what life would be like for them in school contexts that differ from what they are training to be. While this might seem like a waste of time, it would be a valuable exercise in preparing these teachers for the reality of a life outside of LCMS education. It would also provide mentorship from education and theology faculty in Christian living and application, not just the theoretical and book-oriented exercises.

In addition to a change within the pre-service education curriculum, CUW should also develop a continuing education program whereby graduates of both the LCMS-teacher-training program and the non-LCMS-teacher-training program could receive training and support as people of faith in whatever context they may find themselves. The participants of this study expressed on numerous occasions that they were not fully aware of what they could or could not say in their schools in respect to their personal beliefs. It also became evident that this unclear legal world influenced the way in which these teachers expressed themselves in matters of faith. CUW would be a perfect venue to create a continually revised curriculum to inform teachers of their rights based on current legal decisions. This sort of program and curriculum would also allow CUW graduates to know that they are not alone in their calling to public education as people of faith.

Implications for Further Study

As this was an exploratory research project, the sample size was small to allow for a deep investigation into the experiences of a few individuals. In the future, I envision a larger sample size to allow grounded theory to be established. The larger sample size would also serve to support or refute the conclusions that I have made from the results of this study.

One of the unexpected commonalities among the participants in this study was that each of the teachers interviewed had at least one year of teaching experience within an LCMS school. A future study would be to investigate the experiences, feelings, and attitudes of public educators who were LCMS-trained but had not taught in an LCMS school. Would there be as much conflict within their experience in relation to how they perceive the sharing of their faith? Would they feel as guilty about not being able to share their faith? What level of contentment do LCMS-trained teachers without LCMS experience find in their public school teaching? All these questions are worthy of investigation to serve both the future educators training at CUW and the graduates of CUW's programs.

Teacher attrition has long been an area of academic research. However, no one has studied this particular group of theologically trained teachers and the reasons they leave LCMS teaching for a career in public education. A study focusing on the reasons for departure would help in teacher retention. The participants in this research study left LCMS teaching for reasons ranging from a better job opportunity, disagreement with the LCMS, strife with LCMS colleagues, to moving to be nearer to family.

All four of the teachers with children that I interviewed chose to send their children to LCMS schools. The participants desired to have their children in an LCMS school because of the environment, values, and faith-filled opportunities that the LCMS school could provide. Some of the teachers I interviewed drove long distances to fulfill this commitment to LCMS

education. A future study investigating the connection or lack of connection between an LCMS teacher in public education, their identity as an educator, their identity as a person of faith, and the value they put in their child's education within LCMS schools would be of value.

The information gained from this research has opened multiple avenues of investigation for further study. LCMS-trained teachers experienced various degrees of contentment and frustration with public education. Support for these people and further investigation of others like them is the responsibility of CUW and the LCMS.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Consent

A Study of the Faith Experiences of Concordia University Wisconsin Lutheran Education Trained Teachers in Public Education

Dear Professional Educator,

My name is Adam Paape and I am an assistant professor of education in the School of Education at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, Wisconsin. I am also a doctoral student in educational leadership at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am conducting research on the faith experiences of teachers who have been trained through the Lutheran education program at Concordia University Wisconsin and are now teaching in a public school. You are invited to engage in a personal phone interview that will last between 45 and 60 minutes. The interview will be a series of questions that focus on your experiences and perceptions of the role of your Christian faith while serving in public education.

The findings of the research will be used to better support the training of teachers in the Concordia University School of Education. The findings will also better inform Concordia as to what it can do to support teachers who are already in the public schools.

The risks associated with this research are minimal. The personal interview questions are designed in such a manner to allow you to reflect on your experiences and stories. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to continue at any time or decline to answer any question at your discretion.

The results of this study will only be used for research purposes in relation to the completion of my dissertation at George Fox University and may be used for presentations at a professional conference and/or academic publications. The personal phone interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. The information received from the interviews will be analyzed and presented in a manner that maintains your anonymity. No individual will be personally identified. I will work to maintain your personal information and identity confidential.

All research materials (i.e., audio recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be locked in separate, secure locations for a period of no less than three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete audio recordings.

I truly appreciate your consideration of participation in this project. If you decide to participate, please be aware that you are making a contribution both to Concordia University Wisconsin's teacher training program and to the support of other educational professionals like yourself. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at (262)243-4203. If you have any additional questions, you may contact my dissertation chair at George Fox University, Dr. Ken Badley at (503)554-2843. You may also contact my dean at Concordia University Wisconsin, Dr. Michael Uden at (262)243-2612.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant signature _____

Researcher signature _____

APPENDIX B

Personal Interview Guide Questions

1. What is your educational background (LCMS/Public/A mix)? Where did you go to school prior to Concordia?
2. What is your faith background? Do you attend a church now?
3. Do you have any degrees from other institutions? If so, from where?
4. When did you graduate from Concordia?
5. Describe your teacher education training at Concordia University Wisconsin.
6. How did it prepare you for teaching in public education?
7. Tell me about how you got a job as a public educator.
8. What is your job history as an educator?
9. What grade level / content do you currently teach/work in?
10. What kind of training did you receive from your current employer that told you about what you could or could not do related to matters of faith within your job setting?
11. Describe the atmosphere within your school in respect to religion or matters of faith.
12. Has there ever been a time where you wished you could say more to students about your beliefs?
13. Have you ever felt that you may have crossed a legal boundary in the sharing of your faith?
14. How aware are you of your rights as a teacher when it comes to the expression of your faith?
15. What kind of faith related interactions have you had with students while at the public school?
16. What kind of faith related interactions have you had with the parents of students while at the public school?
17. What kind of faith related interactions have you had with your colleagues while at the public school?
18. What kind of faith related interactions have you had with your administrators while at the public school?
19. Based on what you have said about your life as an LCMS-trained teacher in public education, what does it mean to be a person of faith in a public school?
20. Given what you have explained in the interview, where do you see yourself in the next five years?
21. What insights have you gathered that would be beneficial for a CUW-Lutheran-education student who might become a teacher in public schools?
22. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that I haven't asked you about?