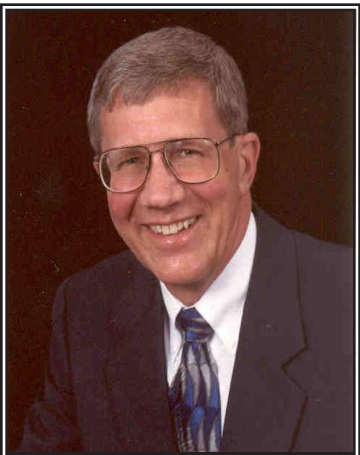


FROM THE PRESIDENT

Education Is Imperative



**LIFE
LINES**

Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.
District President

I suspect that when we hear the term, "The Great Commission," most of us think of Christ's command "to make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) as a call to evangelism, which it surely is, but I would like to argue that it also includes Christian education!

To become a Christian means that one has "learned Christ" ... Knowing Him is not just accumulating information about Jesus, but entering into a living relationship with Him. For this to happen one must be taught "in Him."

Let me not only share with you why I am convinced of this, but also encourage you to embrace an "evangelism and education" response to the Great Commission, and personally continue to study yourself and to teach others — as long as you live!

In Ephesians 4:17-24, Paul challenges his readers to live the new life in Christ and not follow the way of the Gentiles, for he tells them, "That is not the way

you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him, and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus." To become a Christian means that one has "learned Christ."

While this is an unusual expression, for we normally speak about "learning about someone," it highlights the truth that being a Christian involves becoming acquainted with and knowing Christ in a personal way. Knowing him is not just accumulating information about Jesus, but entering into a living relationship with him. For this to happen, however, one must be taught "in him."

Shortly after Jesus called the first disciples to follow him, he sat down on the mountain "and taught them." (Matthew 5:2) As the subsequent Sermon on the Mount illustrates, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be his student, to learn who he is, what he stands for and to follow him. When Jesus sent his followers

out on his mission, he taught them, "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master." (10:24)

When Jesus invites people to come to him that he might give them rest, he says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (11:29) Evangelism

clearly involves education!

At this point, let me seek to apply the above Biblical truth to our congregations. When Paul confronts the Ephesians with, "That is not the way you learned Christ," he is emphasizing that following Jesus means doing certain things and not doing other things. The Christian faith has content! This content, which centers in the Lord Jesus Christ, determines one's outlook and one's conduct. In other words, we are not on our own to decide what to believe and not believe, to do and not do!

For those of us in leadership positions in our congregations, this truth lays an important responsibility on us. We *must* teach our members and inquirers the basics. How can they follow Christ if they do not know him? Not to communicate effectively and passionately the truth as it is embodied in Jesus Christ is to fail in our duty. It is to cheat our members out of the resources they need to deal with the stresses and strains of life, the challenge of sorting out what is true and false, how to live in relationship with other people.

Surely we must feel a keen responsibility for our youth, that they may have a sure foundation on which to build their life's house. While Confirmation instruction may challenge us today because our youth think education should be entertaining and their schedules are filled to overflowing with competing interests, I believe we must invest heavily in educating our youth, lest we lose a generation of them and deny them the firm basis for shaping their future lives.

If we think of basic Christian education as "learning Christ," then his methods of teaching can likely instruct us. He used stories to engage his students in the learning process. He so related with them that they were not afraid of asking questions, "Explain to us the parable

with an object lesson. Taking a child and putting him in their midst, he explained that unless they became like children, they would never get into the kingdom. (18:1-5)

Stories and sermons, questions and answers, object lessons, and on the job

Through a positive attitude toward ongoing Christian education and actual involvement in it, we will discover strength, wisdom, and encouragement for living — and experience why Jesus encompassed education in the Great Commission ... It's not just about accumulating knowledge! It's learning to know Him, that we may follow Him, for that's really living!

training were all part of Jesus' repertoire for teaching, preparing and forming his disciples. We have another wonderful asset: the parents of our youth. By enlisting them in the teaching/learning process, we can help whole families come together around the Savior and the wisdom of his word. In this way, our children can be raised as God's children and parents will have their own relationship with Jesus Christ deepened, as they refresh the basics.

One of our pastors, who falls into the baby boomer generation, once confided to me that in his opinion, his generation had generally failed their children, because they had adopted the approach of letting them make their own decision about the faith, rather than intentionally and purposefully passing it on. As a consequence, we have a generation of people who for the most part do not know the basics with any amount of depth or accuracy.

The Bible is an unknown book and Jesus an unknown Savior. Whether his assessment is true or not, I am not sure, but this I do know: unless we pass on the faith to our children, it is not likely they will know Christ. Such knowledge

was all that was necessary, we would not need the letters of Paul. The people in the churches which received his letters had had a basic course in the faith. They had "learned Christ." Nevertheless, they encountered questions and challenges for which they

needed help. The strength of their sinful nature lured them from the good beginning with which they started. The enemies of the faith sought to pull them from their sure foundation. They needed assistance. The letters of the New Testament are powerful testimony to the church's ongoing need for instruction, so that the wisdom of God's Word might have its way in the church and the lives of its members.

May I illustrate the need for ongoing Christian instruction by highlighting one area of concern today? Currently we're dealing with a credit crunch in our country. Individuals are faced with foreclosures; businesses are facing hard economic times; some banks are struggling because of mortgages they floated; etc. Might these difficulties suggest we would do well to dig into the resources of God's word relative to our attitude toward the "stuff" of life? Might such study reveal insights that we have neglected or ignored? Might we grow in the area of our stewardship and discover it's about a whole lot more than "the church is always asking for money?" In fact, we might discover that we're off base if that is what we understand stewardship to be all about.

When I think of who the Scriptures reveal Jesus to be, I can find no better reason for lifelong learning. How can one even fathom the treasures embodied in this one person? After all, he is "the faithful witness," making God the Father known to us; "the firstborn of the dead," whose resurrection guarantees our resurrection; and "the ruler of the kings of the earth," before whom every knee must bow (Rev. 1:5).

He is the Son of Man who "gave his life as a ransom for all." (1 Tim. 2:6) Jesus is Immanuel who promises to be with all the days to the end of the age (Matthew 1:23, 28:20). In him are "hidden are

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of the weeds of the field." (Matthew 13:36) It was a teachable moment Jesus could claim to instruct his disciples.

There were others as well. When the disciples could not heal the epileptic boy — for which Jesus had sternly rebuked them — Jesus not only cured the boy by casting out a demon but responded to the disciples' call for an explanation, "Why could we not cast it out?" (17:14-20)

When they asked him, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?," Jesus answered

does not happen by osmosis or by chance. Introducing and developing a relationship with him takes commitment, work, and effort.

This leads me to my second emphasis: the need for ongoing Christian education by all of us. Christian education is not just to give our youth or people inquiring about the faith a basic introduction to the faith. If a basic course

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Every congregation is a church in mission, and every member is a missionary; with all of us working together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, empowered by His Gospel to share His love.

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