



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection
Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for

Schools in a Pluralist Culture

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us discern the common good and advance it in ways that are consistent with our calling as disciples. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

- Raising Resident Aliens** 2
As Christians we are also “citizens” of another kingdom. If faithful disciples experience life as “aliens and exiles,” then a good Christian education must include helping children and young people understand as well as practice what it means to be resident aliens.
- Schooling the Young into Goodness** 4
Moral education should provide the young with an understanding of life worthy of themselves—a compelling account of goodness and how to achieve it. If we ask the young only to pursue their desires, should we be surprised if, instead of being uplifted by the freedom we hold out to them, they become bored and disenchanting?
- What Teachers Love about Teaching** 6
Teaching is such a personal art, so context-dependent and unpredictable, that it cannot be reduced to a method or set of skills. So what do teachers really love when they talk about how much they love teaching?
- Listening in the Classroom** 8
The classroom as a pluralist space should not be seen as a space of contention and disagreeableness, but should be appreciated for its potential to cultivate peace and extend moral awareness. As teachers and students listen—to texts, to marginalized voices, for privilege, and through activism and experiential learning—they can work together to create learning rooted in justice.
- Teaching as a Christian Vocation** 10
Regardless of the role to which their abilities and “deep gladness” lead them, teachers soon discover that their profession demands tremendous effort and commitment. Hope, grace, and hospitality are the keys to teachers’ flourishing amid the obstacles and frustrations that could easily breed disillusionment.



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Focus Article:

- 📖 Raising Resident Aliens
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 11-19)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 When Education Comes Home
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 71-75)
- 📖 Teaching about Religion in Public Schools
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 71-75)

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Raising Resident Aliens

As Christians we are also “citizens” of another kingdom. If faithful disciples experience life as “aliens and exiles,” then a good Christian education must help children and young people understand as well as practice what it means to be resident aliens.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:17-21 and 1 Peter 2:9-12

Reflection

Because “we enter the world as strangers not knowing who we are,” we need guidance to discover our identity, Perry Glanzer observes. When we are young, schools play a major role in shaping our identity – what we think about ourselves and the world, and what we desire. Perry and his wife notice this in the public school experience of their son who has dual Canadian and American citizenship. “Canadian identity has simply not been addressed or nurtured,” he writes. “We recognize that the cultivation of his Canadian identity will take a special effort.”

Christians face a similar challenge in learning their identity as disciples. Our “citizenship” is in God’s kingdom (Philippians 3:20), and so we live as “residents and aliens” in the world (1 Peter 2:11). “Education can inform children of their identity but it can also warp their self-understanding,” Glanzer warns. “One study of high school texts books found, ‘The underlying worldview of modern education divorces humankind from its dependence on God; it replaces religious answers to many of the ultimate questions of human existence with secular answers; and, most striking, public education conveys its secular understanding of reality essentially as a matter of faith.’ Young resident aliens may lose their identity unless parents and the resident alien community, the Church, carefully cultivate it.”

Schools help students cultivate and prize a national identity through the subjects they teach and practices they share.

- ▶ *The public school curriculum focuses on inculcating national identity. “More than simple teaching about basic reading skills or social studies takes place,”* he notes. Children study American history, the American Constitution, and American heroes. They memorize the Pledge of Allegiance, sing “The Star Spangled Banner,” and compose essays on “What makes you proud to be an American?” Older children take field trips to government buildings, study democratic practices, and memorize the names of past and present political leaders.

“Christians will need to teach their children about a whole different range of heroes such as the martyrs, the church fathers, and the saints,” he suggests. More importantly, Christian resident aliens need to learn about Christ, for “we gain the best insight about what it means to bear God’s image and be fully human through Christ. By imitating Christ’s sacrificial love, humility, servanthood, forgiveness of enemies, and acceptance, we learn how to be more fully human.”

- ▶ *Much of what it means to be a citizen is transmitted through a school’s ethos of symbols, icons, and calendars.* Presidents’ portraits, the American flag, and state flags are displayed; each day opens with



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a ritual saying of national and state pledges; and the school year revolves around secularized holidays.

“Resident-alien homes and communities must embody a whole different ethos,” Glanzer says. Practices of prayer and worship, daily lectionary readings, Christian artwork, structuring the year with the church calendar, and service to others can help young people find their identity as disciples.

When the identities formed in school conflict with Christian identity, how should parents respond? “Christians often discuss whether forming their own schools would be better for educating resident aliens,” Glanzer admits. “We should be wary about giving a simple answer to this question. After all, the Christian story reminds us that the corrupting influence of the Fall shows up in unexpected places, as does God’s special grace. In this regard, we can observe possible weaknesses with any form of education. Public schools may lead a child to love being a *resident* too much while home or private schooling may not adequately train students to live in this world (though as an *alien*).”

Study Questions

1. What does Perry Glanzer mean when he says Christians are “resident aliens”?
2. Should public schools inculcate state and national citizenship and shared cultural beliefs, or should they try to limit the curriculum to teaching basic academic skills?
3. “Christian parents who send their children to public schools must seek to supplement the education their children receive from the state with education for another form of citizenship,” Glanzer writes. Do you agree? How can they do this?
4. What factors should parents consider when deciding whether to educate their child in public school, private school, or home school? Discuss Charles and Edna Christian’s experience with “homeschooling that...maintains a relationship of mutual support with the public school system.”

Departing Hymn: “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” (vv. 1-2)

Savior, like a Shepherd lead us,
much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,
for our use thy folds prepare:
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
thou hast bought us, thine we are.

We are thine; do thou befriend us,
be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,
seek us when we go astray:
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear, O hear us when we pray;
blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus,
hear O hear us when we pray.

Dorothy A. Thrupp (1779-1847), *Hymns for the Young* (1836)
Tune: BRADBURY



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Focus Article:

📖 Schooling the Young into Goodness
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 35-45)

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Schooling the Young into Goodness

Moral education should provide the young with an understanding of life worthy of themselves—a compelling account of goodness and how to achieve it. If we ask the young only to pursue their desires, should we be surprised if, instead of being uplifted by the freedom we hold out to them, they become bored and disenchanting?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 1:3-11

Meditation†

When we teach our children to be good, to be gentle, to be forgiving (all these are attributes of God), to be generous, to love their fellow men, to regard this present age as nothing, we instill virtue in their souls, and reveal the image of God within them. This then is our task: to educate both our children and ourselves in godliness.

John Chrysostom (347-407)

Reflection

Moral education should initiate students in “habits and practices that will form them in the distinctive excellences of human beings,” Darin Davis and Paul Wadell write. It should cultivate “a resilient passion for justice, a costly compassion, and the abiding conviction that fulfillment comes not when our lives are guided by calculated self-interest, but when we expend ourselves for the sake of others.” Yet in a pluralist society we are “reluctant to take up these important tasks because they involve making normative judgments about different ways of life, the practices we should adopt, and the behavior we ought to embrace.” Often we commend freedom, authenticity, and tolerance, but give students “little idea of why what they choose might matter.”

When we reduce moral education to personal values clarification in this way, we foster acedia—the “crippling melancholy that dominates the lives of those who abandon aspirations to moral and spiritual excellence, and replace them with an endless series of stimulating and pleasant distractions.” Acedia is nurtured not only by relativism and individualism, but also by cynical suspicion of others’ motives. “When cynicism prevails, every saint is a stooge or collaborator, every hero a rascal in disguise.”

Davis and Wadell commend these five antidotes to acedia:

- ▶ *Affirm the fundamental appeal of goodness.* We are created “to hunger for what is true and good and beautiful,” they write, “because goodness completes and perfects us, particularly the unexcelled goodness that is God.” Goodness calls us out of ourselves to appreciate and love the “other,” whether it is a flower, a symphony, a poem, or a person.
- ▶ *Model zeal for goodness.* Students won’t “be enflamed in their love for the good and they will hardly appreciate its beauty or believe its power, if they see in us the same diffidence we are urging



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them to discard," they note. "The lure of goodness will captivate them when they see how it has deepened and transformed our own lives, and when they see the rich joy that can be found in steadfast love and costly commitments."

- ▶ *Encourage magnanimity, the virtue of "great soul."* As we develop our capacities for knowledge and love, we confidently "reject puny ambitions and middling hopes, and instead focus our lives on purposes, projects, and goals that demand that we expend ourselves for the sake of something noble."
- ▶ *Inculcate courage.* We face many obstacles—in ourselves, in others, and in society—to the pursuit of excellence. "With courage, we find the resolve necessary to appraise counterfeit narratives of human fulfillment as the illusions they truly are, and the resolve to continue our initiation into goodness with both hope and joy."
- ▶ *Encourage friendship.* Good friendships are schools of virtue, calling out "qualities such as thoughtfulness, generosity, compassion, patience, and forgiveness" and providing "the support, encouragement, counsel, and companionship... [we need to] pursue the quest for goodness."

"If acedia bedevils us, and if the young are especially vulnerable to it," Davis and Wadell conclude, "then helping to initiate students into a way of life that is truly worthy of them should be the central task of moral education in a pluralist culture."

Study Questions

1. No English word fully captures the phenomenon of acedia. How does the word "sloth" capture part of its meaning? What part of acedia's meaning is quite different from sloth?
2. Do you agree that acedia is widespread among young people today? What symptoms do you see?
3. According to Darin Davis and Paul Wadell, why is acedia so common? To what extent are older generations responsible for acedia among young people?
4. Discuss the five antidotes for acedia that Davis and Wadell recommend. How can you put these remedies into practice in your life? What practices of your congregation support each remedy?

Departing Hymn: "What Is Our Calling's Glorious Hope?" (vv. 9 and 14)

What is our calling's glorious hope,
but inward holiness?
For this to Jesus we look up;
we calmly wait for this.

Be it according to your Word;
redeem us from all sin;
our hearts would now receive you, Lord,
come in, O Lord, come in!

Charles Wesley (1742), alt.

Suggested Tunes: LLANDAFF or DUNDEE

† John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. by Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 44.



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Focus Article:

📖 What Teachers Love about Teaching
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 20-26)

Suggested Article

📖 Pursuing Knowledge
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 46-49)

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What Teachers Love about Teaching

Teaching is such a personal art, so context-dependent and unpredictable, that it cannot be reduced to a method or set of skills. So what do teachers really love when they talk about how much they love teaching?

Prayer

Responsive Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 2:15-17a, 23-25a

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, and their talk will spread like gangrene.

Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness.

Reflection

What is it really like to be a teacher? The snapshot of wise teachers in 2 Timothy 2:14-26 reminds us what an important role they play in a community that strives to live truthfully. Their ability to "rightly explain the word of truth" goes far beyond speaking and writing about the truth clearly, powerfully, and correctly. Wise teachers avoid one-upmanship, do not needlessly pick fights, and control their anger with those who disagree with them and would be contentious. They have no infallible method, but they exhibit certain traits—righteousness, faith, love, peace, patience rather than being quarrelsome, and gentleness in correcting opponents—that draw others toward the truth.

Stephen Webb invites us to examine the art of teaching. On the one hand, it "is simply a more condensed form of the need all of us have to pass something valuable down to the next generation. Teachers are just people who are on more intimate terms with the limits and frailties of communication than most people." But this does not mean the practice of teaching is simple. Indeed, he says, "Teaching is to talking what a symphony is to humming."

Webb warns that teaching is such a personal art and so much depends on the interaction between the teacher, particular students, and the subject matter, "that what works can change from minute to minute, let alone day to day." Nevertheless, he notes that wise teachers share the following practices.

- ▶ *They set boundaries and build trust with their students.* Teachers do not perform like entertainers. They create "a real intimacy of minds" by making a safe place and time for students to "share stories, information, questions, and ideas in confidence, without worrying what other people might say." For this reason, "Distraction is the enemy, and focus is the goal. Sometimes students talk only to the teacher, as if nobody else was in the room.... When the learning gets going, however, the students begin talking to each other, and parallel play turns into a free for all, with the teacher



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trying to orchestrate the chaos. There is a sweet spot in every class where a question, text, or problem will take off and find a life of its own, both absorbing and replenishing everyone's energy."

- ▶ *They avoid the fashionable buzzwords*—like formation, service, tolerance, and transparency—that focus too much on how students learn instead of what they should learn, Webb writes. "Teaching has to be grounded in great and enduring questions." Moral formation and citizenship are worthy ends, service opportunities are valuable, tolerance (rightly understood) is good, and understanding processes of education (through "transparency") is helpful, but these should not displace "old-fashioned goals of education. Teaching has to be grounded in great and enduring questions, and inviting the student to join in those questions is to some extent asking the student to leave behind their old patterns and habits of learning."
- ▶ *They humbly recognize the limits of theories about teaching.* "Perhaps teaching, in the end, is just too integral to human nature to ever be amenable to careful delineation," Webb concludes. "We teach what we know, and thus, to a significant extent, we teach who we are, and so a good theory of teaching, to cover the field, would have to describe human nature in all of its subtle complexity."

Study Questions

1. List the virtues of a wise teacher in 2 Timothy 2:14-26. Do you agree these traits are important? Would you add other traits to the list?
2. Recall the teachers, in school or church, from whom you learned the most. What traits made them good teachers? What methods did they use in the classroom?
3. Stephen Webb writes, "Teaching is a private activity because the classroom has to be separated from the outside world if the teacher wants any chance of success." Discuss what he means by this. Do you agree?
4. Perhaps Webb's most controversial claim is that teachers should be wary of these four "buzzwords": formation, service, tolerance, and transparency. Why does he resist shifting the focus toward each one? Discuss his views.
5. "'Assessment' is a big buzzword these days...often to the annoyance of most teachers," Webb notes. Assessing learning in the classroom "is like cooking food, feeding your guests, eating with them, and writing a restaurant review all at the same time." Why have we focused so much on assessment? Is it good for education?
6. Discuss the artist Raphael's profound vision in *School of Athens* of education as a conversation among friends across centuries and human cultures. How does his vision relate to Webb's description of the good classroom?

Departing Hymn: "God, You Give Each Generation"



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Focus Article:

- 📖 Listening in the Classroom
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 27-34)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 One Makes All the Difference
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 62-65)
- 📖 Teaching ESL to Immigrant Families in Public Schools
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 66-70)

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Listening in the Classroom

The classroom as a pluralist space should not be seen as a space of contention and disagreeableness, but should be appreciated for its potential to cultivate peace and extend moral awareness. As teachers and students listen—to texts, to marginalized voices, for privilege, and through activism and experiential learning—they can work together to create learning rooted in justice.

Prayer

Father, grant us your grace that we may love
those who are different than we are,
those who are in need of our time,
those who have hurt us or offended us,
those who may not love us back.

In the presence of your Son, Jesus Christ,
and through the power of your Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 145:14-21

Meditation†

At a moment when childhood poverty is shamefully widespread, when many families are under constant stress, when schools are often limited by lack of funds or resources, criticism of the public schools often ignores an essential truth: we cannot believe that we can improve public schools by concentrating on the schools alone. They alone can neither cause nor cure the problems we face. In this context, we must address with prayerful determination the issues of race and class, which threaten both public education and democracy in America.

Reflection

In elementary schools through graduate schools across America, there is more and more religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity among students. These increasingly pluralist classrooms provide wonderful opportunities for what Mercy Oduyoye calls “a globalization of shalom”—a deeper understanding and wider realization of the justice and peace God intends for the world—if we can learn to listen to one another.

“Intentional listening is required from both teachers and students,” Melissa Browning writes, “to create space not only for individual voice finding, but also for communal moral formation.” She commends these good listening practices:

- ▶ *listening to texts.* “A good course...includes the seminal texts on the subject,” Browning notes, but what counts as “seminal” depends somewhat on the context. Do the assigned texts—books, articles, artwork, and so on—present mutually enriching perspectives? Do they draw students into the conversation? “Selections written by women, by individuals in the Two-Thirds World, and by others who have been historically marginalized can create space for students from these same contexts to find their own voice.”
- ▶ *listening to marginalized voices.* Some voices are not represented in the “bodies of literature...developed and extended by those with privilege, education, and the time to write.” So, Browning enriches here classes with ethnographies, or life stories. One of her



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colleagues requires students to interview “someone of a different culture, socio-economic class, or gender” in order to help them “anchor the content of the course to issues of race, class, gender, and privilege.”

- ▶ *listening for privilege*. Some classrooms represent the privilege associated with race, ethnicity, and wealth more than others. A pluralist classroom “can be a site for recognizing and examining privilege,” Browning writes. Stereotypes and myths can be identified and then replaced with new patterns of understanding and moral practices. “As these stereotypes arise in the classroom and interfere with our seeking the truth, we must take the time to explore why they exist.”
- ▶ *listening through activism and experiential learning*. In every academic subject, “connections can be made to historic or present injustice.” Classroom activism and service learning will not change the world, but it can “help students develop moral habits. The ten hours of community service they log may do little for the service agencies they assist, but it may have a significant impact on the students’ moral formation.”

The goal is for teachers and students “to *hear one another into speech*,” Browning writes. “As we learn to listen both to marginalized voices and to our own places of privilege, the classroom becomes a space to cultivate peace and discern the contours of our common moral obligations. As we listen together through activism and experiential learning, we develop a solidarity of listening that can lead to justice beyond the classroom walls.”

Study Questions

1. Consider the increased diversity in your city or town over the past few decades. What factors account for this change? What challenges and opportunities has this shift in population caused for schools and churches in your community?
2. How might the listening practices that Melissa Browning describes lead to *individual voice finding*? How might they encourage *communal moral formation*?
3. Will the listening practices that Browning mentions *support* or *interfere with* the main goals of education in a classroom?
4. Discuss how the KIDS HOPE USA mentoring program, which Virgil Gulker describes in “One Makes All the Difference,” incorporates some of the listening practices that Browning commends.
5. Discuss how the Learning English Among Friends family literacy program, described by Randy Wood in “Teaching ESL to Immigrant Families in Public Schools,” incorporates some of the listening practices that Browning commends.
6. How does Carolyn Winfrey Gillette’s hymn, “God, You Give Each Generation,” help us see the pluralist classroom as an opportunity to love God’s children?

Departing Hymn: “God, You Give Each Generation”

† National Council of Churches, *The Churches and the Public Schools at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (1999).



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Focus Article:

- 📖 Teaching as a Christian Vocation
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 76-82)

Suggested Article:

- 📖 Spiritual Nourishment for Teachers
(*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, pp. 88-92)

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Teaching as a Christian Vocation

Regardless of the role to which their abilities and “deep gladness” lead them, teachers soon discover that their profession demands tremendous effort and commitment. Hope, grace, and hospitality are the keys to teachers’ flourishing amid the obstacles and frustrations that could easily breed disillusionment.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Meditation[†]

The basis of all ministry is the experience of God’s unlimited and unlimiting acceptance of us as beloved children, an acceptance so full, so total, and all-embracing, that it sets us free from our compulsion to be seen, praised, and admired and frees us for Christ, who leads us on the road of service. This experience of God’s acceptance frees us from our needy self and thus creates new space where we can pay selfless attention to others.

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)[†]

Reflection

The Apostle Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth that wise teachers have been appointed and given special abilities by God to build up the body of Christ. Yet their words—like other gifted leaders who prophesy or speak in tongues—can strike listeners as so many annoying “noisy” and “clanging” sounds, if their teaching is not suffused with faith, hope, and love.

Minori Nagahara recalls she often felt simultaneously gifted but uselessly noisy, divinely called and yet clanging, when she was teaching sixth graders a Bronx, New York public school. “The challenges I faced as an inner-city teacher included working with students who came from dangerous home environments, were involved in gang activity, or were mentally ill, just to mention a few. These challenges were in addition to the daily grind of school life with its many tasks, campus politics, and—in the current educational climate—the constant pressure to raise test scores.”

Christian faith, hope, and love became for Nagahara “the key to survival and to flourishing in the midst of obstacles and frustrations that can breed disillusionment.” She identifies three aspects of effective teaching that require these spiritual resources.

- ▶ *Being an ongoing learner.* Teachers ask students to learn complex concepts, master difficult skills, and reflect on their lives. To do this well, teachers must commit themselves to continual intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Not only must they continue their academic studies, they must do research in their classrooms—gathering information, testing new ideas and methods, critiquing their practices.
- ▶ *Teaching and learning to live in community.* Teachers want the classroom to be “a just community in which students can thrive,” Nagahara notes. They can help by modeling care and respect for students. “Each day will bring new opportunities for problem solving and conflict resolution, as teacher and students—broken human beings that they are—learn to care for one another and



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work cooperatively to maintain peace in the classroom. Within this laboratory community, students will get a sense of what a thriving, healthy community looks like and how to be a contributing member of it.”

- ▶ *Being an agent of grace and hospitality.* Despite their best efforts, teachers and students make mistakes and hurt one another. Teachers can make the classroom “a place where forgiveness is offered when mistakes are made, where reconciliation and restoration are prioritized, where each person is loved and treated with fairness,” writes Nagahara. “Given the ever-growing ethnic and religious diversity in classrooms across the country, Christian teachers have a wonderful opportunity to [practice hospitality and] affirm their students’ God-given dignity, in spite of how others may rank them, or how students may rank themselves, in societal hierarchies.”

“The freedom that we experience in our identity as beloved children of God allows us to pursue our calling – whether that is teaching or in some other field – joyfully,” Nagahara concludes. “As we do so, we delight in the fact God himself delights in us and in the work of our hands that we offer back to him.”

Study Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the most difficult, frustrating, or disillusioning aspects of being a teacher today?
2. How do Christian faith, hope, and love help teachers flourish in the three dimensions of teaching that Minori Nagahara discusses – continual learning, teaching and learning to live in community, and being an agent of grace and hospitality?
3. According to Nagahara, how can a young person discern if “teaching is part of their Christian vocation and not just a passing interest or one career option”?
4. “Being a teacher is an isolating and lonely profession,” Sheila Gler claims in “Spiritual Nourishment for Teachers.” Do you agree? How could your congregation support teachers?

Departing Hymn: “Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord” (vv. 1 and 4)

Take thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray,
give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
grant us in all our thoughts to honor thee.

Take thou ourselves, O Lord, heart, mind, and will;
through our surrendered souls thy plans fulfill.
We yield ourselves to thee – time, talents, all;
we hear, and henceforth heed, thy sovereign call.

William H. Foulkes (1918)

Suggested Tunes: BREAD OF LIFE or ELLERS

† Henri Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 58.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Raising Resident Aliens

Lesson Plans

| <i>Abridged Plan</i> | <i>Standard Plan</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Prayer | Prayer |
| Scripture Reading | Scripture Reading |
| Reflection (skim all) | Reflection (all sections) |
| Questions 1 and 2 | Questions (selected) |
| Departing Hymn | Departing Hymn |

Teaching Goals

1. To discuss how Christian education should help children and young people to understand and practice what it means to live as a “resident alien” in this world.
2. To consider how public school education trains children in state and national citizenship.
3. To examine how Christian parents and communities can supplement public school education.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” locate the familiar tune BRADBURY in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

“Identity-shaping stories do more than provide a sense of human worth; they also shape our affections and desires,” Perry Glanzer notes. He describes how his public school experience trained him “to *think* and *desire* like a citizen of this world and not a resident alien. For example, while pondering the overwhelming array of occupational options during my senior year in high school, I eliminated the alternatives with a simple question: What career will fit my interests, provide long-term job security, and generate a high salary? I decided upon engineering for the simple reason that there were numerous job openings promising plentiful pay. In retrospect, I cringe at the thought of my earlier reasoning. Why did longings about salary and security guide my decision about a college major? Fundamentally, I forgot who I was and how my Christian identity story should guide my life purpose and desires. Instead, I let myself be shaped by a different story. Neil Postman in his book, *The End of Education*, labels it the narrative of Economic Utility. ‘The story tells us that we are first and foremost economic creatures and that our sense of worth and purpose is to be found in our capacity to secure material benefits.’ I longed for financial success and security in this kingdom and not treasures in the kingdom of God.”

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for discernment as you prayerfully study how to educate our children as citizens of God’s kingdom.

Scripture Reading

Ask two group members to read Philippians 3:17-21 and 1 Peter 2:9-12 from a modern translation.

Reflection

In this pluralist culture where the goals, institutional forms, and content of education are deeply contested, how

can we humbly cooperate with others to discern the common good in education and advance it in ways that are consistent with our calling as disciples? Perry Glanzer invites us to approach this question by considering Christians to be similar to “dual citizens,” or to “resident aliens” whose citizenship in another country. (He illustrates this approach with the experience of his son, who is a dual citizen of Canada and the United States, in the American public school system.) As he explores how public schools thoroughly inculcate state and national citizenship, he considers how Christian parents and communities can teach citizenship in God’s kingdom. How can they best do this in concert with public schools? When should homeschooling and private schooling be considered as live options for some children?

Study Questions

Perry Glanzer borrows the term “resident alien” from *Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon’s Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (1989) and *Where Resident Aliens Live* (1996). The metaphor is based on the scripture passages in this study guide. The basic idea is that Christians should not bemoan the end of “Christendom” – the long era in Europe and the Americas when Church and nation-states were more or less united in all of their purposes. They should not attempt to re-control government institutions like public schools. Instead, they should live as a distinctive people who realize their true citizenship is in God’s kingdom, and thus they are “resident aliens” in their nation-states.

Glanzer does not promote indoctrination that removes a child’s ability to internalize and choose the life of discipleship. He commends Jon Amos Comenius (1592-1670) as a model of “how resident aliens should approach education.” Because every child is created in God’s image, “with regard to the structure of education, he became one of the first educators to suggest the radical idea of ‘providing education to the entire human race regardless of age, class, sex, and nationality’ including ‘young and old, rich and poor, noble and ignoble, men and women – in a word, of every human being born on earth.’” He did not shy from teaching Christian children that “the ultimate end of man is beyond this life.”

1. Three curricular goals – teaching basic academic skills, inculcating state and national citizenship, and teaching widely held cultural beliefs – are remarkably interwoven in the curriculum and ethos of American public schools. A challenge arises for Christians when the inculcation of citizenship and teaching of widely-held cultural beliefs compete (or even conflict) with Christian practices, virtues, and beliefs.

In what aspects of the public school curriculum and ethos might Christian students encounter “identity conflicts” between being state and national citizens, members of the culture, and resident aliens? Some people suggest the best solution is for public schools to teach only basic academic skills. Is this really possible? Is it desirable?

2. Do members agree that children and young people *will not* and *should not* be trained to be Christian resident aliens by public schools? If so, where will this training happen? Is it the responsibility of individual parents, the local church community, or Christian educational institutions? Consider how congregation-based instruction (through Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, catechism class, children and youth study groups, summer camps, mission trips, service work days, and so on) can supplement, interpret, and critique what students learn in public schools. Discuss the roles parents and older youth play in the home in raising children as resident aliens. Do you agree with Glanzer that regular worship, celebrating the Church calendar, and studying Christian saints are important?
3. Charles and Edna Christian evaluated academic, social, and spiritual aspects of education before deciding to homeschool their two sons. They wanted higher standards, varied experiences, and more focus on “practical living skills, self-care, and home management.” They desired that their children interact with peers from different economic, racial, and religious backgrounds. They wanted to incorporate their moral and spiritual values into their children’s education. To balance these three aspects, they participate in a public school-sponsored homeschool resource center and a church-based homeschool cooperative.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Schooling the Young into Goodness

Lesson Plans

| <i>Abridged Plan</i> | <i>Standard Plan</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Prayer | Prayer |
| Scripture Reading | Scripture Reading |
| Meditation | Meditation |
| Reflection (skim all) | Reflection (all sections) |
| Questions 2 and 4 | Questions (selected) |
| Departing Hymn | Departing Hymn |

Teaching Goals

1. To recognize the widespread symptoms of the debilitating spiritual condition that early Christians called “acedia.”
2. To identify the central goal of moral education as forming character and changing hearts.
3. To consider what practices in our families, congregations, and schools can provide moral education and be antidotes to acedia.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “What Is Our Calling’s Glorious Hope?” locate one of the familiar tunes LLANDAFF or DUNDEE in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Comment

“No one is called to become rich or powerful or beautiful or famous. But they are called to become good,” Darin Davis and Paul Wadell observe. “We should want young persons to become excellent students, students who can dazzle us with their knowledge and expertise. But we should also want them to become excellent human beings, young men and women who dazzle us as well with their commitment to justice, their compassion for others, and their tireless devotion to something greater than their selves.... There is no more noble aim, and certainly nothing more urgent, than to encourage students to see that moral and spiritual excellence is not impossibly beyond their reach, but is the very thing for which they are made and through which they will be fulfilled” (*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, 44).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for grace to be good and to inspire young persons to reach for moral goodness.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 2 Peter 1:3-11 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This discussion refocuses moral education on its “founding inspiration” of initiating young people into habits and practices that form them in the distinctive excellences of human beings. Darin Davis and Paul Wadell

identify the chief obstacle to moral education as a debilitating condition that early Christians called “acedia.” In a pluralist culture many people are tempted to reduce moral education to identifying and strengthening personal values that young people already hold. Ironically, this “values clarification” approach can make the problem worse by encouraging acedia. Davis and Wadell focus on five practices to break free from acedia, which are also fundamental practices of moral education. Encourage members to discuss how they can nurture these practices in their families, congregation, and schools.

Study Questions

1. Darin Davis and Paul Wadell explain that acedia “is ‘a morbid inertia’ that can totally shut down a person’s life because he or she long ago stopped believing that life might involve something more, something better, something of such consummate goodness that it demanded their utmost devotion. Dulled by the stupor of acedia, we renounce great hopes and grand ambitions for lives that move relentlessly from one activity, one distraction, one titillating triviality to the next. Moreover, because we are busy, stimulated, active, and entertained, we are hardly aware of how empty and meaningless our lives have become, or of the morally and spiritually dangerous predicament in which we have placed ourselves.”

Early Christians noted two opposing symptoms of acedia: (1) sadness and disinterested boredom with the good, and (2) frantic and distracting activity to fill the spiritual void. Both symptoms are forms of escape from disillusionment about and frustration in pursuing goodness. (Think of it this way, when a person wants to escape from a love relationship that has become tiring and sad, he or she might retreat into a stupor of sleep or drunkenness, or escape into busy activities.) “Sloth” seems to capture the idea of boredom and tiredness, but not the idea of distracting activity.

2. “Brian Hook and Rusty Reno...contend that ‘our age is allergic to heroic ambition and inured to the attractions of excellence.’ We witnessed this not long ago when one of our students remarked on a course evaluation that while the course material was mildly interesting, ‘I just want to live my life and not waste it questioning everything,’” Davis and Wadell write. Such “casual nihilism and calculated indifference” represents the first symptom of acedia. “The problem is not that [students] seek job security, professional certification, and economic survival, but that they often seek nothing more.” On the other hand, many students are adept at disguising this first symptom with its opposite, busyness and entertainment. “Like the adults who have formed them, these students, plugged into cell phones, iPods, and Facebook, ‘float on an ocean of pleasant distraction.’”

To what extent do young people suffer from acedia? Which of these symptoms seems to be more common? Encourage members to give specific examples of each symptom.

3. Davis and Wadell think adults have nurtured acedia in young people in two ways. On the one hand, their individualism and relativism quickly lead to nihilism. Adults have been “reluctant to judge one way of life better than another.” This sends a signal implicitly (and sometimes quite explicitly) that nothing matters beyond personal freedom and authenticity. “If there is nothing more than ‘one’s own truth’ and no meaning to be found in any experience other than the stultifying realization that it is one’s own, nothing finally matters.” On the other hand, acedia is reinforced by moral cynicism—the “distrust of anything that is noble, heroic, or magnanimous.” They continue, “No one would really prefer a life of disinterested service rather than a life of self-advancement, cynicism counsels. Thus, instead of emulating the good persons, we dismiss them as fools or frauds.”
4. You might create three to five smaller groups to brainstorm the five antidotes. One group might brainstorm how to practice the first two antidotes—affirming that human beings are created to love goodness and modeling this attraction to goodness—which are closely related. Another group could explore the related virtues, magnanimity and courage. And a third group could discuss how to nurture good friendships among young people and between them and adults. Consider not only what individual families can do, but also how congregations can practice these five remedies to the toxins of acedia.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

What Teachers Love about Teaching

Lesson Plans

| <i>Abridged Plan</i> | <i>Standard Plan</i> |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Prayer | Prayer |
| Responsive Scripture Reading | Responsive Scripture Reading |
| Reflection (skim all) | Reflection (all sections) |
| Questions 1, 2, and 3 | Questions (selected) |
| Departing Hymn | Departing Hymn |

Teaching Goals

1. To identify the traits of wise and good teachers.
2. To discuss how teaching is a personal art that is context-dependent and unpredictable.
3. To consider how good teaching creates space for “a real intimacy of minds.”

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide.

Distribute copies of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with an Observation on “Observations”

Stephen Webb describes the intimacy of discussion, the trusting give-and-take of debate, in a classroom. That is why, “When someone is visiting my classroom...it often feels like the delicate climate I have struggled for weeks to create has been hit by a threatening weather pattern. Students who had sunny dispositions just a couple of days ago now act like a fog has descended into our room. This is such a small sample of my work, I want to cry out, a snap shot of a long and interesting drama that would need to be filmed to do it justice! Silences get heavier, I get chattier, and my jokes fall flatter when visitors enter my class. The result is a twist on that parody of a philosophical question about whether a tree falling in a forest makes any noise if nobody is there to hear it. In my classroom, the tree is perfectly quiet when someone comes to watch me chop it down.

“Can a visitor ever see or hear what a teacher sees and hears in the classroom? Visitors see a silent kid in the corner, but they do not see the eye contact with the teacher or the conversations after class. Visitors hear a stilted comment while the teacher hears the end product of weeks of coaxing and cajoling. When people visit my classroom, I get defensive, as if someone were crashing the annual Webb family reunion. I want to pull them aside and explain that Uncle Paul is not always like that while Aunt Mary is actually paying more attention than you might think” (*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, 21).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by thanking God for the gift of wise and good teachers in schools and congregations.

Responsive Scripture Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

In this discussion we explore Stephen Webb’s considered vision of good teaching as “a personal art.” Since teaching is like a well-crafted, intimate conversation, it is similar to experiences everyone shares. Yet this also means teaching is not easy to predict, regulate, and measure. Take this opportunity to reflect on the abilities

and traits required for good teaching, and to thank God for gifting persons in our schools and congregations with those abilities and traits.

Study Questions

1. The traits highlighted in the scripture passage include the ability to explain truths correctly and carefully, righteousness, faith, love, peace, purity of heart, and gentleness in correcting others. These virtues are opposed to pride, self-righteousness, envy, and anger. The “worker who has no need to be ashamed” cares about the truth, not one-upmanship over others.
Members might add traits that help teachers resist other enemies of good teaching such as laziness, fear, and carelessness, or virtues that are related to respecting and caring for students, planning and working cooperatively with others, interpreting complex texts, managing discussions, etc.
2. The teachers from whom we learn the most are not always the ones we enjoy the most. Good teachers often challenge and expand our thinking, make us work hard, and introduce us to ideas that make us uncomfortable. Members might compare and contrast two or three of their best teachers in school or church. Did they have similar traits, or different traits that were matched to their academic disciplines or students’ ages and abilities? Did they use similar or differing methods and approaches?
Were they gifted in ways that would serve well in your congregation as well as in school? What is your congregation doing to encourage and develop future teachers with such traits to serve in the congregation and in schools?
3. Webb does not mean classroom discussions are unrelated to “real life.” Rather, he says “the classroom has to be separated from the outside world” in the sense that it is free from worries and distractions that would lead teacher and students away from the truth. This context of safety and trust is necessary for the teacher and students to explore ideas, ask honest questions, and develop intellectual friendships.
4. Webb seems to worry that formation, service, and tolerance are goals external to and in competition with seeking the truth and mastering essential intellectual skills. He also objects that teachers are ill-prepared to guide moral formation, that service education may come with a social agenda that is not open to question, and tolerance can undermine moral education. The call for “transparency” that he resists is the version that encourages teachers to let students determine the curriculum. If we agree with Webb that the focus of education should be on seeking the truth, could there be a proper role for these other goals?
5. Increased classroom assessment has been touted as a way of making schools more accountable for tax money spent on education, comparing teaching approaches and schools, rewarding good teaching, standardizing curriculum across schools in a highly mobile society, improving school performance, and promoting basic academic skills. Can we focus too much on testing? Critics say it has reduced education to “teaching for the test,” ignored teachers’ varying strengths, and driven imaginative teachers from the classroom.
6. Raphael’s *School of Athens* depicts “an activated and lively intellectual debate” among moral and natural philosophers (i.e., astronomers, physicists, and mathematicians); it is paired with frescos that represent theology, poetry, and jurisprudence. The balanced, symmetrical composition links thinkers from several ancient centuries; Raphael later inserted an image of his older contemporary Michelangelo. Stephen Webb focuses on defining a space and time for students to develop bonds of trust (see the response to question 3 above), but he might welcome Raphael’s idea of extending this sort of friendship to include those who have developed the ideas and texts that bring the students together.

Departing Hymn

“God, You Give Each Generation” can be found on pp. 53-55 of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Listening in the Classroom

Lesson Plans

| <i>Abridged Plan</i> | <i>Standard Plan</i> | <i>Dual Session (#1)</i> | <i>Dual Session (#2)</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Prayer | Prayer | Prayer | Prayer |
| Scripture Reading | Scripture Reading | Psalm 145:14-21 | Psalm 146:5-10 |
| Meditation | Meditation | Meditation | Meditation |
| Reflection (skim all) | Reflection (all sections) | Discuss the listening practices | Consider creating programs like KIDS HOPE USA and LEAF |
| Questions 1 and 2 | Questions (selected) | Questions 1, 2, and 3 | Questions 4, 5, and 6 |

Teaching Goals

1. To describe the challenges and opportunities presented by increasing religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity within school classrooms.
2. To discuss listening practices that can promote individual voice finding and communal moral formation in a pluralist classroom.
3. To consider how congregations can support learning in pluralist school classrooms.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

The diversity of her students' ethnic backgrounds became clear to Melissa Browning when she invited them to identify the countries they were connected to. "Using an online travel map, we went through each country and they answered 'yes' if they or a member of their immediate family had lived in or visited that country. Among the forty-three students, 149 countries were represented. According to the travel map's calculation, our class was connected to two-thirds of the world." The university where she teaches is located in a Chicago neighborhood where eighty languages are spoken. She notes, "The migration movements associated with globalization that have shaped urban populations for years are broadening to include midsize cities and small towns. The resulting religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity in classrooms has both positive and negative consequences" (*Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, 27-28).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer in the study guide in unison.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 145:14-21 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

The increasing religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity in school classrooms makes teaching more complicated and learning more difficult today. In the previous study guide, "What Teachers Love about Teaching," Stephen Webb reminded us that teachers engender "a real intimacy of minds" by creating a safe place and time

for students to “share stories, information, questions, and ideas in confidence, without worrying what other people might say.” This is more difficult when teachers and students bring suspicions, stereotypes, and distrust about one another into the classroom. Melissa Browning commends listening practices to help us “*hear one another into speech*” – to question the stereotypes and overcome the fears that may divide us.

You might extend this discussion to two sessions. In one session, examine the listening practices described by Browning. In the other session, discuss how you can support pluralist classrooms in local schools through creative programs like KIDS HOPE USA (KHUSA) and Learning English Among Friends (LEAF). For a free information kit and DVD about starting a KHUSA chapter in your community, visit www.kidshopeusa.org. For information about developing a program like LEAF, contact Dr. Randy Wood at the Center for Christian Education at Baylor University (Randy_Wood@Baylor.edu).

Study Questions

1. Outline the changes in religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic demographics of your city and town over the last few decades. What are the major causes: immigration, the attraction of new educational institutions or industries, job losses due to industry plant closings, changes in agricultural land use, and so on. How have local schools and congregations been affected by these demographic shifts? Have they experienced growing pains, or difficult losses in participation? Discuss both the challenges and positive opportunities that have resulted.
2. Melissa Browning believes the two goals – individual voice finding and communal moral formation – are not only compatible, but also mutually reinforcing. On first glance, the practices of listening to texts and listening to marginalized voices seem to emphasize giving voice to individuals, while the practices of listening for privilege and listening through activism and experiential learning emphasize communal moral formation. Yet as students study texts and ethnographies together, there will be communal moral formation, and as they critique conditions of unacceptable privilege or plan and carry out service projects, they will have opportunities to listen carefully to one another’s individual perspectives.
3. Stephen Webb, in “What Teachers Love about Teaching,” stated his concern that moral formation and service projects can distract from the primary educational goals in the classroom. Browning suggests they are integral to the formation of the trust among students and teacher, which is essential for any learning environment. Encourage members to share and examine their own classroom experiences, or the experiences of their children with these practices of listening. Did they create a better learning environment?
4. In KHUSA, adult mentors provide a listening presence to at-risk elementary school students. Many of these students come from marginalized families or groups. The mentor’s presence and guidance helps them voice their anxieties and overcome barriers to learning. The volunteer mentors grow through activism and experiential learning.
5. In LEAF, volunteer mentors help immigrant students and their families understand the school learning environment and take advantage of educational opportunities. Immigrants’ voices are heard and volunteer mentors grow through activism and experiential learning.
6. In the Trinitarian structure of Carolyn Winfrey Gillette’s hymn, the first verse reminds us all children are created by God. The goal of education, therefore, is guiding them toward maturity in God’s image. Verse two describes how the neighbor love that Christ exemplifies should draw us together as a community to support all schools. Verse three, which describes the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, draws these threads together in “a vision / of a world that’s just and fair,” and prays that “enriching education / touch the lives of rich and poor.”

Departing Hymn

“God, You Give Each Generation” can be found on pp. 53-55 of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Teaching as a Christian Vocation

Lesson Plans

| <i>Abridged Plan</i> | <i>Standard Plan</i> |
|---|--|
| Prayer Scripture Reading Reflection (skim all) Questions 1 and 2 Departing Hymn | Prayer Scripture Reading Reflection (all sections) Questions (selected) Departing Hymn |

Teaching Goals

1. To review the major sources of frustration, loneliness, and disillusionment in teaching.
2. To discuss how Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love can encourage and strengthen teachers in their work.
3. To consider how congregations can support teachers.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Schools in a Pluralist Culture (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord" locate the familiar tune BREAD OF LIFE or ELLERS in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

"For many Christian teachers, the act of teaching—of creating opportunities and conditions which allow students' learning and growth to take place—is not just a career choice, but is part of their vocation, their calling from God," Minoru Nagahara observes. "I remember once, during my first year of teaching [in a public school in the Bronx, New York], walking home from school after a particularly difficult week of breaking up fights, trying to reason with angry, rebellious pre-adolescents, meeting with parents and administrators, and enduring unusually rowdy class sessions with my sixth graders. Trudging along, I mentally replayed various scenes from the week and worried about what the following week might bring. As my mind wandered to a list of other jobs in which I would not have to deal with the particular difficulties and challenges that I faced as a teacher, for a fleeting moment I wondered if I should have chosen a different line of work."

"What kept me going at that point and at many other low points in my journey as a teacher was not a sense of grim determination to make things work, nor was it any extraordinary strength of character on my part. Rather, what allowed me to persevere was the belief that my work was meaningful and that I had been called to serve that place at that time.... Teaching had become a very concrete way in which I could practice and express my faith on a daily basis."

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 from a modern translation.

Reflection

As Minoru Nagahara reflects on her experience teaching sixth grade in an inner-city public school in the Bronx, New York, she recalls not only sources of frustration and disillusionment, but also the spiritual resources in her Christian faith that enabled her to flourish where God had called her. You might focus on those difficulties, on the spiritual resources she identifies, or her discussion of how young people can discern their gifts and calling to teach.

Study Questions

1. As you discuss the difficult aspects of teachings, encourage teachers in your group to share their experiences. They may mention difficulties related to students (e.g., lack of interest, focus on grades, behavior problems, lack of parental support, learning disabilities, tensions arising from diversity, drug problems), colleagues and institutional environment (e.g., lack of collegiality, unclear expectations, restrictions on the curriculum, emphasis on testing, poor administration, lack of resources), the community (lack of appreciation, demanding parents, low pay, new expectations for schools, social problems, lack of volunteers), or themselves (inadequate preparation, anxieties, distrust of colleagues, loneliness, vanity about their abilities, envy of others, regret, burnout, anger toward students or colleagues).
2. The need for *continual learning* makes teachers feel vulnerable about mastering new material, dealing with classroom problems, experimenting with new classroom practices, etc. They need faith that God has called and gifted them for these complex tasks, love for their students, and hope that God is working for good through friends and colleagues who help them face these tasks. *Teaching and learning to live in community* requires respect and appreciation for one another. Faith reminds teachers that their students are “created in the image of God and gifted with strengths and talents,” and love helps them “set the tone in their classrooms and...create an environment of respect for the variety of divine giftedness that we find in one another.” Every day requires “problem solving and conflict resolution, as teacher and students – broken human beings that they are – learn to care for one another and work cooperatively to maintain peace in the classroom.” *Being an agent of grace* means modeling the forgiveness one has received from God; grounded in God’s generous love, Christian *hospitality* welcomes and values students from diverse backgrounds and with various gifts. Grace and hospitality are based on hope, for they perceive the immense promise in individuals and help them “become all that God would have them to be.”
3. To discern if teaching is part of our vocation, Nagahara suggests we identify and affirm “the talents and abilities we have been given. This cannot be done with pride or arrogance.” In congregations, teachers can mentor young people to lead a discussion, prepare a lesson, or manage an activity for children in church classrooms or on mission trips. Another aspect of discernment is “to notice and care about different aspects of our broken and hurting world.” Congregations can help young people understand and care about specific educational needs within the congregation, the wider community, and beyond.
4. “Teachers make most decisions entirely alone,” Sheila Gloer explains. “They reflect on how to improve their teaching on their own. When looking for new ideas they turn to textbooks and resources that they search by themselves. They enter the classroom early in the morning full of hope for a new day with lessons carefully planned, materials ready, and procedures posted. When the students arrive, the door is shut and the teachers are alone with their charges. The students all have individual needs, individual learning styles, and individual goals to achieve. This is a daunting responsibility, and most teachers face it by themselves.”
 “Positive and constructive dialogue with colleagues and with other adults can help build community among teachers and lessen the feelings of isolation that result when teachers view their practice as a strictly private effort,” Nagahara agrees. Yet, she notes, “Teachers feel vulnerable when they allow others to enter their classroom to see their strengths as well as their shortcomings.”
 A congregation can publicly affirm teachers, help them network as spiritual friends as well as colleagues, encourage them to interpret their work as part of their Christian vocation, and provide opportunities for them to exercise and develop their gifts in service to the body of Christ. Sheila Gloer discusses devotional resources for teachers; a congregation might form a small group for teachers to enjoy these together.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.