

### Facilitator theological notes

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#### Responding to issues relating to theology of creation and learning and teaching in Lutheran schools

1. **Is there a 'distinctive Lutheran' approach to learning and teaching based on theology of creation?**

In considering learning and teaching in Lutheran schools, the best insights from educational philosophy, theory, psychology, history, pedagogy, etc, must be brought together with relevant insights from theology. While it may be difficult to argue that this produces a 'distinctly Lutheran' approach which is different from schools from other theological traditions, it is important that Lutheran schools develop an 'authentic approach' which consistently incorporates a Lutheran theological basis. This also means that Lutheran educators need to evaluate continually how they approach learning and teaching to maintain this 'authentic approach'.

The LEA framework, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* [2005] provides a clear presentation of 'Beliefs about learning'. It is not only crucial that all teachers in Lutheran schools are aware of these, but that there is an on-going re-evaluation of these both educationally and theologically if Lutheran schools are to be and to remain 'authentic'.

2. **Theology of creation and the individual**

The theology of creation reminds us that all people are made in the image of God and are unique and special creations. This influences the way we view others in the school community and value them as individuals irrespective of factors such as social status, culture, religious belief or situations in life. Creation theology reminds us that while all people are to be equally valued and appreciated each person is different not only in appearance but also in relation to personal attributes and abilities. For this reason, there will be a diversity of educational ability in every classroom and students will react in different ways to the learning situation.

Learning and teaching will have to be planned to enable all students to have the opportunity to develop as individuals and to explore their God-given talents. Learners with special needs are catered for within a setting of acceptance and recognition of their uniqueness. Again here the LEA framework, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* [2005] provides 'Beliefs about learners' which are crucial for Lutheran educators.

3. **The learning community**

Creation theology stresses that people are created for relationships. In Genesis 2:18, God said, 'It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him.' The nature of the learning community is important for the success of learning and teaching. The LEA framework, *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools* [2005] outlines 'Beliefs about learning communities' which are important guidelines for Lutheran schools to use in evaluating their own communities.

4. **The learning and teaching curriculum**

Since creation theology teaches that everything has been created by God and that everything was 'good' [according to his plan], all of God's creation is open for exploration in the process of learning and teaching. This means, for example, that insights from the arts, from literature, from science, from philosophy and all other human investigations and researches are relevant to the Lutheran school curriculum. While from time to time there may be some areas where the relationship between reason and revelation seem to be in some sort of tension, this does not allow the Lutheran school to simply ignore those matters or rule them out of consideration.

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In this regard it is important to recognise that different areas of human investigation operate with their own paradigms and students will need help in understanding these. However, as they explore creation and try to understand how God has ordered creation so that it operates as he had intended [apart from the impact of sin], students will develop critical awareness in respect to truth and the distinction between 'provisional truth' and 'absolute truth'. If Jesus' claim to 'be the truth' is accepted, then all truth must relate in some way to Jesus Christ and what he has revealed to us.

From this perspective, any exploration which looks for truth is relevant in Lutheran schools. The Lutheran school curriculum is free to explore areas such as the relationship between science and revelation also in respect to the origin of the universe. It means that careful and sensitive introduction of contentious social and moral issues are a vital part of such a curriculum. Here careful explanation will be necessary also to parents.

#### 5. **Responsibility for creation**

Creation theology links human beings with the ground from which they were created as dust made alive by the breath of God [Genesis 2:7]. It also emphasises God's mandate that human beings are to be careful and responsible stewards of all that God has created. Lutheran schools should therefore be leaders in learning and teaching related to issues such as ecology, care for the environment, social justice, global perspectives, distribution of wealth, and similar concerns. As discussed in *Two ways God cares encounter*, this applies to both ways in which God cares for the world. It is therefore relevant to all members of the Lutheran school community whether or not they recognise God as creator. Learning and teaching in this area should go beyond an awareness of these matters to the promotion of lively participation in activities which promote responsible stewardship in the local and global community.

The theology of vocation is relevant here. Students need to become sensitised to the various areas of responsibility in which they can serve others. They can be helped to appreciate that they can use their gifts and abilities not only for their own benefit, but in serving others.

#### 6. **Learning and teaching and the biblical concept of 'wisdom'**

The link with creation in the biblical concept of wisdom provides interesting and important insights for learning and teaching. In starting with the presupposition that the human grasp of truth can only remain partial, it recognises there is an aspect of mystery and wonder in creation which human beings can enjoy and celebrate but not fully understand. However, this is not an excuse for ignorance but a stimulation for further exploration and investigation while recognising that the starting point for all of this is 'the fear of the Lord'.

Biblical wisdom recognises as well the interrelatedness of life and the unity of knowledge. This emphasises the importance of helping students to grow in their understanding of integration and to develop patience in becoming more aware of reality. A question arises here about the appropriate time for students to specialise in their learning and so leave behind important areas for a rounded approach to life. Students also need to appreciate that wisdom is based on the accumulated experience of people. An appreciation of the past and input from other cultures is important here. Very often the emphasis can seem to be rather more heavily on the present and the fascination of the future.

This is a real challenge in an environment which often operates with instant access to disconnected data and individual fragments of information through the various means of rapid communication provided by ever developing technology. Learning in Lutheran schools can help students appreciate the benefits of technology while recognising their limitations in the accumulation of wisdom.

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### 7. **Christian Studies a core area of learning and teaching in the Lutheran school**

Learning and teaching in Lutheran schools takes very seriously the spiritual and religious dimension of learning. Only such learning addresses the development of the whole person. While in Lutheran schools there is a concern for the Lutheran heritage of the schools, there is also an openness in the Christian Studies Curriculum Framework [CSCF] to the exploration of other faith experiences and their impact in the world. The pedagogy to enable this to happen in the school is clearly presented in the CSCF materials.

An important question here is whether Christian Studies can be more than a core area of learning and teaching. Following the biblical concept of wisdom, can Christian Studies provide the integrating framework for the whole school curriculum? Even for students who may not share a faith in Jesus Christ, involvement in a curriculum which takes seriously the spiritual dimension can provide a very helpful basis for a full and purposeful approach to life even if aspects of that world view are subsequently rejected. Such a curriculum recognises that there is truth which lies beyond our immediate comprehension but which is reflected in our best human endeavours.