

Dear, parents, family, teachers and staff of Evergreen Lutheran School, and dear students and candidates for graduation,

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”
(Proverbs 22:6, NKJV)

This is good advice whether one is talking about church or school, whether one is talking about school or home, or whether one is talking about, home or the world. **“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”**

Dear parents, you are to be commended for heeding this text and for the sacrifices you have made to see to it that the proper training of your child has been done—sacrifices of both time and treasure, and might I add, no small amount of love and concern for the gift God has given you in your child. There are few things in this life more precious, there are few things more important for the success of your children as they make their way through this life, than the treasure you have provided for them in a rock solid and Lutheran education.

For the welfare of your children is not the only thing riding on their education; the welfare, and indeed, the very survival of this city we have grown to love, and more than that, this great land we call the United States of America, depends on the intelligence, the wisdom, and the virtue of its citizens, and for your children, that intelligence, that wisdom, that virtue, has been nurtured and strengthened here at Evergreen Lutheran School. Their education here, I am convinced, will prove indispensable to everyone of us in the future.

We well know that there is more to Lutheran schooling than the three r’s of reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic. As Christians, we are in this world to proclaim the Gospel. Every part of our life is a confession of what we believe about our God, and we should always want the people we meet and work with to become Christians. Therefore, Lutheran teachers and the students they teach are salt and light in a lost world that knows no god but those of human imagining, and more often than not, denies the One True God altogether.

Lutheran schools and their teachers and staff do not create the Church, nor do they “grow” the Church; what they do is teach children the secular skills they will need to function and be successful as adults in a world hostile to their faith all the while reinforcing what they learn in their Christian homes and in their churches; that they are to love and serve God, by loving and serving their neighbors. Human reason and knowledge teaches only the mind of a man; God alone teaches the heart. This, they have learned here, and by sending them here you are fulfilling your vocation as parent and caregiver. You have seen to it that your child is trained up in the way he should go.

Dear teachers and staff, you too, have followed and honored your vocations, not only as teachers, but as priests in the priesthood of the baptized. You see, priests do three things. First, they speak to others about God. Second, they speak to God about others, and finally, they offer sacrifices.

As St. Paul writes to the believers of the congregation in Rome: **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** (Romans 12:1-2, NKJV) Your vocation as “priest” is what makes Evergreen Lutheran School Christian, and dare I say, Lutheran.

While the first two functions of a teacher as priest, that is, teaching the children in your care about God and praying for your students, may be self-evident, for you are, after all, a Christian educator in a Christian school, how much you sacrifice may be less well understood. Yet, your sacrifice is a direct function of your vocation as we Lutherans understand vocation. For vocation, by its very nature, involves being a servant, that is, loving and serving God through loving and serving your neighbor.

Your loving and serving God stems from your own new life in Christ; it is faith active in love. Thus, your new life in Christ, which Baptism brings, expresses itself not only in prayer for your students and in speaking about God with your students, but is just as much present in the everyday self-sacrificial service you perform in your daily vocation as teacher or staff. In your priestly vocation as teacher you have indeed, trained up a child in the way he should go.

And finally, dear students. Do you want to be a leader? Then don't settle for second best. Do you want to contribute to your community and your country? Then don't settle for mediocrity. Do you want to make a difference in someone's life? Then learn to love your neighbor more than you love yourself. Do you want to be successful in this life? Then set your standards high, and just when you think you have achieved success, raise the bar; never accept the status quo.

You see, life is not a sprint; it is a marathon, and those who are truly successful in this life, those whom history remembers, never accept things as they are, but strive always to improve them. Truly successful people never rest on their laurels and pat themselves on the back, but actively seek out the next challenge and press on toward the new goal. Truly successful people know that the real rewards in this life are not having achieved the goals; they know the real rewards are found in the journey that gets us there and the people we meet and the things that we learn and experience along the way.

And oh yes, one other thing about success and successful people—successful people are never defeated when they fail to achieve a goal. Instead, they learn from failures, pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and start again.

And finally, success means accepting responsibility. It means never placing blame for one's failures except in the very place it belongs—squarely on one's own shoulders. So don't be satisfied until you are the best you can possibly be in whatever vocation our good and gracious God sees fit to call you. Don't rest on your accomplishments. Never believe that you have mastered all there is to know and work as though everything you do is for the glory of God and His Church, for indeed, this is so. For you are a Christian; a light set upon a hill. It is for this you have been trained.

Soli Deo Gloria