

# The Advocate

for Students with Special Learning Needs

Winter 1995

FOUNDED 1873 • Formerly Lutheran School for the Deaf

Volume 65, Issue 3

## We want Hannah to keep her smile!

Hannah's smile is contagious! When she arrived at school this August, she had a gigantic multi-colored backpack strapped on her back and a huge smile on her face. She was happy to be back at school.

Hannah has confidence in herself now—and it shows. This eight-year-old is loving and tender, and is always expressing her happiness with her smiles, with touches, with hugs.

Hannah's mother, Faye, is a teacher. "When Hannah was in preschool, I taught school in the room next door. I knew where she should be, what level of progress, for her age. She wasn't there," Faye said.

"I thought at first that she might just be a little slow in catching up to the other children, because she had been a sickly baby," she added. As an infant, Hannah had illnesses that resulted in hearing problems—and therefore speech problems.

During the two years Hannah went to preschool, she also went to speech therapy. At the end of preschool, Hannah seemed to be ready for kindergarten.

However, Hannah's kindergarten teacher had difficulty teaching her and thought she should be tested by the public school system.

"When she was tested, then I knew it was a more serious problem," Faye said. The tests showed that Hannah is currently considered "educably mentally impaired." A normal 8-year-old would be in the third grade; however,

Hannah's mental, adaptive and academic ages are more consistent with a kindergartner.

Hannah's parents admit that it was hard to find help for Hannah. "We kept thinking that there must be some help out there—and that we just had not found it yet," Faye said. It was hard to find support groups, and to find help for a child like Hannah.

### Finding what's best for Hannah

Finally, Faye was referred to Lutheran Special Education Ministries for help. After additional testing and several supportive meetings, Hannah was placed in the loving hands of Noel Gregory. Her 30 years of experience teaching handicapped children with Lutheran Special Education Ministries was a real blessing.

"This was a life-saver for us. We were feeling lost," Faye said. She admits it was hard to make decisions about what was best for Hannah, but everyone at Lutheran Special Education Ministries was so helpful and supportive. "They included us in all the decisions made for Hannah's wel-



When Hannah came to the first day of school at Bethany Lutheran in Detroit, she carried an enormous bookbag!

fare. We really appreciated that," she added.

Others had not been so kind or considerate. "The staff made us a vital part of the decisions and direction of education for Hannah. I may not be a special education teacher, but I do know my child. I know things about her that no one else knows—what's important to her well-being and happiness, and her performance in school and in her relationships with others."

Even though she is a teacher, Faye wasn't trained to help children like Hannah. But Mrs. Gregory provided special supplements and learning aids. Faye watched how Mrs. Gregory worked with Hannah, then she would do the exact same thing at home in order to repeat her training and help her to learn.

(Continued on next page.)



## Changes for Hannah

But perhaps the most important result of Hannah's experience was the change in Hannah herself.

Before, she didn't want to go to school. She cried every day. But with Lutheran Special Education Ministries' support, the other students accepted Hannah right away, were nice to her, and Hannah was happy. She became more outgoing and became involved in special things like the Special Olympics—and she was so proud of herself.

According to Faye, "She has more confidence in herself. She likes to learn now because she has learned that she can do it." She's in a small classroom, where the teacher understands her problems and works to help her. The other students accept her as she is. This made Hannah feel so good about herself that she likes school now.

Hannah is able to communicate and be friends with the other children because she is not afraid anymore. She doesn't feel inferior and is no longer frustrated. She feels better about herself because she can do her own work just like the other kids.



*Hannah enjoyed her time in the sandbox this summer—but she did look forward to going back to classes.*

Faye hadn't expected to see such immediate improvement in Hannah's learning either. But Hannah started school at Lutheran Special Education Ministries in December, and by the end of the school year, she was ready to read.

## A Christ-centered education

Another important aspect of Hannah's education was that she

learned about Christ's love for her. It was very important for Hannah's parents that she learn about Jesus as her Savior. She needs to learn how to love others and how to treat other people. "This is not something that you learn for the day," Faye added. "It's something you must live 24 hours a day."

"I know how important a Christian education is," Faye added. In a Christian school, the teachers reinforce what Faye already teaches Hannah at home.

## Perseverance

"We would not give up," Faye said. "We were going to find the right help for Hannah. And we did.

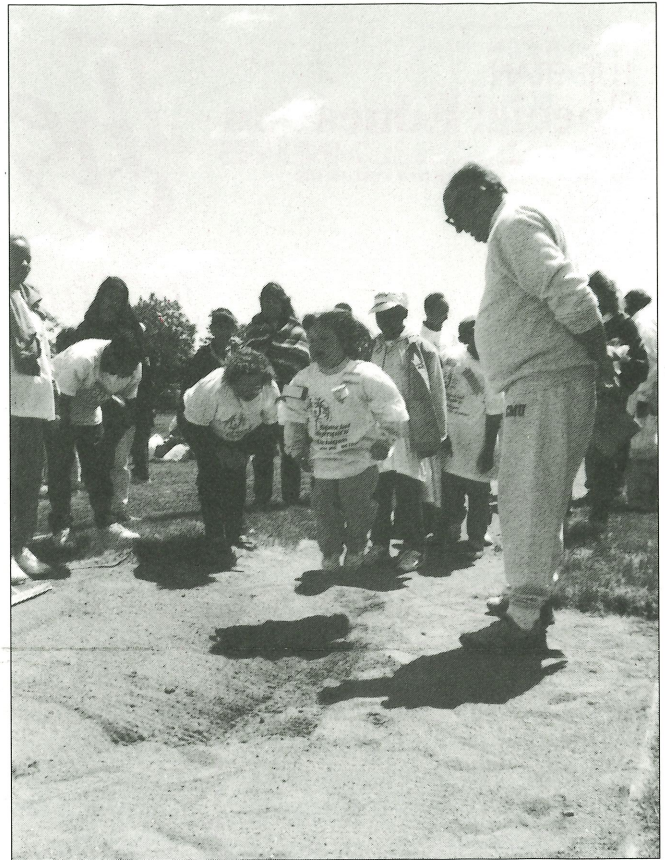
Just because she has a lot of difficulties learning, that does not hinder her in every way."

"If you could meet Hannah," her mother says, "you would see how personable she is." Hannah may not go to college, but she will fulfill her life in other ways. "There are things in this world that can make people happy, and things they can do, even if they have problems learning," Faye added.

Hannah's parents admit that it is still hard at times to realize Hannah needs special help, that there is something wrong. They have two other daughters, neither of whom have any learning problems. In fact, the older daughter is a straight-A student. They found themselves thinking, "Why is she like this? She should be like the others."

But because they found help for Hannah's problems, Faye believes

*We're glad we were able to help Hannah keep her smile!*



*Hannah gets to participate in many school activities—along with all the other first graders.*

these problems don't have to stand in the way of her happiness and response to others—"and they won't stop Hannah from being successful."

## Lutheran Special Education Ministries

"I saw for a short time how Hannah's future would have been if she did not receive help. She would have been frustrated with failures, and would have lost her smile. But she is happy—and smiles every day. I don't like to imagine what would have happened if we didn't find Lutheran Special Education Ministries. It would have been awful to see Hannah lose her smile!"





# 1995 Ephphatha Award winner: Ilene Dietlein

Ilene Dietlein, a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Bay City, Mich., received the 1995 Ephphatha Award. Roger DeMeyere, Executive Director of Lutheran Special Education Ministries, made the presentation at her home congregation on Oct. 15, 1995.

Special education Bible classes began at Zion about 30 years ago with three students. Over the years, the number of students increased to a high of 150, and included students from ages 5 to 26 and all denominations.

Mrs. Dietlein has taught special education Bible classes at Zion Lutheran Church for about 25 years. An exceptional teacher, she is loving and compassionate. She presents her lessons to the students at their level of understanding—with storytelling, flannelgraph and songs. She also provides confirmation instruction on a one-to-one basis for mentally impaired children.

"We are blessed by God for giving us such a dedicated, joyous, congenial, caring lady. We feel she has given over and above anyone's expectations," says Arlene Krantz, coordinator of the special education program at Zion, who submitted the letter of nomination for Ilene.

The Ephphatha Award was established in 1984 at a time when dramatic changes had taken place in the mission of Lutheran Special Education Ministries, moving from a residential school for deaf children to a more inclusive

special education ministry. The changes in the ministry during the past



Mrs. Ilene Dietlein

two decades led to the development of the current mission. Simply stated, Lutheran Special Education Ministries serves to enable children with special learning needs to receive a Christian education. This mission is carried out within the context of a national vision to reach out to Lutheran and other Christian denominations to open the doors of schools and congregations for handicapped children with various disabilities.

Consistent with this, the annual Ephphatha Award is presented to recognize and encourage Christian education for these special needs children. The award is presented to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the Christian education of handicapped children in the congregation, community or the church at large. Nominations are received annually from all across the nation.

In his address to the members and guests at Zion Lutheran Church during the presentation, Roger DeMeyere stated, "Ilene has been blessed by God with unique gifts, blessed in order to be a blessing to others. It is my prayer that by turning the spotlight on Ilene, others will be moved to follow her example and share a vision to open the doors of Christian education wider in ministry to children with special learning needs."

We are thankful for Ilene and her family, and for all those at Zion who have worked so hard to respond to Christ's admonishment, "Let the little children come to Me; do not hinder them."

God bless you!

## 1996 nominations are sought

The Ephphatha Award was established to recognize the many dedicated people throughout The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who have made outstanding contributions to the Christian education of special needs children in his or her congregation, community or the church at large.

Lutheran Special Education Ministries is committed to opening the doors of Christian education to all children:

*"With the knowledge of  
God's love and the desire  
that God's love be revealed  
through our ministry, Lutheran  
Special Education Ministries  
serves to enable children with  
special learning needs to receive  
a Christian education."*

We want to acknowledge the time and talents of individuals who are also committed to working with handicapped children. Please send your nomination (accompanied by a record of service) by April 15, 1996, to: **Roger DeMeyere, Executive Director, Lutheran Special Education Ministries, 6861 E. Nevada Ave., Detroit, MI 48234.**

### *Labels+Labels= Education*

Campbell's Labels for Education Program will continue again this year. The labels you save from your cans of Campbell's soups earn learning aids for our students. Educational equipment, like Franklin Word Masters, typewriters, Language Masters and office supplies are very valuable resources in our classrooms. Please save your labels and send them to us at 6861 E. Nevada Ave., Detroit, MI 48234, by March 1, 1996.

*May the joy of this  
Christmas season  
fill your  
hearts  
with love  
and peace!*



The **ADVOCATE** for Students with  
Special Learning Needs  
—USPS 150-480

Published quarterly by Lutheran Special  
Education Ministries (formerly Lutheran  
School for the Deaf), 6861 E. Nevada,  
Detroit, MI 48234, (313) 368-1220.

Fax Number: (313) 368-0159

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editing, and ALL ADDRESS CHANGES  
to the address above.



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NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
DETROIT, MI  
PERMIT NO. 3699

Lutheran Special Education Ministries  
6861 E. Nevada  
Detroit, MI 48234

Address corrections requested

## A message from the Executive Director

*"Lutheran Special Education Ministries is considering the sale of its Detroit campus located at 6861 E. Nevada Ave. Although the campus served children wonderfully for over a century, it has become increasingly evident during the past decade that this beautiful resource is no longer needed to fulfill our mission. We are well aware of the historical and emotional significance of this campus; as thankful stewards, we celebrate the blessings of the past and look forward to God's direction and blessings in the future."*

As many people may know, I've been wrestling with the issue of selling the campus for several years. When I finally came to the conclusion selling was appropriate, I was ready to take action. I wrote the quote above as part of a press release more than a year ago. According to my plan, that was the right time to publicly raise the issue. But our Board asked me to wait. Move slowly. Be patient. It is said "timing is everything." I agree. So why wait? Why move so slowly? Seems like we've lost a year of valuable time. It's frustrating being the Executive Director.

I've been worrying about all the questions still left unanswered. Who will buy the campus? How much? What will people think? Less donations? What kind of space do we really need? Do we lease? Build? Will space be donated? Will a move be temporary or for another 100 years? What does wise

stewardship really mean? When will we sell? Where will we go? Near the freeway; which one? How will the needs of staff and students best be met? Stay in Detroit? Move to the suburbs? Perhaps two locations would be best? One for the service center? One for corporate offices? So many questions. Very few answers so far. It sure would be nice to have closure. I want everything wrapped up in a nice, neat package. Now!

As I thought about writing this article, I discovered the reason for my frustration. The truth is I'm impatient with God's timing. Perhaps I'm not really looking forward to God's direction after all? He must have a different calendar. It certainly isn't Julian. Must be the Infinity calendar. What's a month or a year from God's perspective?

Sensing my frustration, a wise friend reminded me of these words: "Everything has its own time and there is a specific time for every activity under heaven . . . a time to plant and a time to pull out what was planted. . . ." The words of Solomon. Ecclesiastes. After reading, thinking and praying, I've come to the conclusion that worrying about my time schedule and all the unanswered questions seems rather pointless.

The campus in Detroit has served our mission well. First as a Christian residential school. For over a century, deaf children came to Detroit from

across the nation. The children were nurtured for a while and returned home. More recently, the campus was the site of a Christian day school for children with special learning needs. These children were also nurtured for a while and returned home. Both schools were needed in their time. Both were "planted" to fulfill a mission. And both were "pulled out" when they were no longer needed. The process was gradual. It took a lot of Julian's time.

The transformation in our national mission to reach out to handicapped children in their home communities no longer requires a school on the campus. It no longer requires a campus at all. This is God's plan, done in God's time. Yes, "timing is everything." God's timing! It's that simple! This applies to the questions still left unanswered. No amount of impatience or worry will provide a single answer before its time. The answers are in God's hands. We are merely the instruments by which His plan is carried out in His time.

Impatience is pointless. Worry is so pointless. I'm so thankful to be part of a ministry of faith, working with people of faith. Even Executive Directors need to have "faith" reminders from time-to-time. Who's the real boss anyway? As Solomon wisely said, "It is beautiful how God has done everything at the right time." That's comforting to know. That's all I need to know. I believe we're in good hands. Don't you agree?

—Roger DeMeyere