

# The Advocate

*for Students with Special Learning Needs*

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## Servanthood

### *A Profile of Dennis Senne, Director of Minnesota Programs*

by Dennis Archambault

Dennis Senne had just retired after more than 30 years as a public school principal and was considering a new career in business when he was called to lead the Lutheran Special Education Ministries in Minnesota.

"I wanted to go into business - not that I didn't enjoy education. I loved what I was doing." He may have wanted to be in business, but he needed to be with special education.

By accepting the challenge of establishing the new ministry is a theme that runs through his entire professional career.

"I never intended to go into education," says Senne, a native of Welcome, Minnesota. Initially, he wanted to join the U.S. Army, then return to family farming. He never joined the army, but went to Mankato State University where his Lutheran classmate majored in education. It was contagious.

Senne found working with students "energizing."

"I get energized being around people," he says. "I feed off that. I have trouble staying at a desk."

He received his undergraduate degree in elementary education and his graduate degree in educational administration from Mankato State. Senne worked as an elementary

school teacher for nearly four years before becoming a principal.

A humble man, Senne says he originally didn't want the responsibility of administering a school. He loved engaging students. There were times, early on, when he thought of returning to the classroom. But something kept him going.

"The people around me felt I did a good job," he says. "They didn't want me to leave." In fact, one of his teachers nominated him for a community service award sponsored by a local television station, which he won. He also earned a "Good Neighbor" award from a radio station.

But there was something more than his teaching staff motivating him, he recalls. "I do believe God's hand was in it."

His grandmother may have envisioned his leadership capabilities when, as a child, she told him he would make a good pastor, not a minister, but a pastor, a leader.

Although he hesitates when comparing his role as director for the Minnesota Region to that of a pastor, he's willing to consider it.

"I never saw myself in that role," he says, then adds, "I didn't get the message until I was 58."

Senne felt strongly about applying Christian principals to his work as principal. For example, he seldom sent

misbehaving students home on suspension. Rather, he had students spend a day with him to mend their ways. Positive reinforcement was his corrective measure: 'slow to judge, accepting them where they're at.'

As an educator, Senne thinks as a farmer: "Plant the seeds, challenge them, and let them grow."

Senne served as principal at Sky Oaks Elementary School, a special education site-based school, for five years. There he gained an appreciation for the unique qualities of these students. "I think there is something they can teach us," he explains. "They don't have filters (on their feelings). They share with you. They would be so honest with me."

"It's exciting. When you see yourself working with these kids, it's fun. It really is."

At his retirement, 10 autistic children gave Senne a reception. These students usually demonstrated impulsive behavior, but at the reception, they were focused and attentive, communicating their appreciation for his time with them. A photograph in his office documents that moment as a lasting memento, and motivator.

"It is a special picture," he says, "(representing) positive memories of over 30 years of work, a reminder

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that we must always meet the needs of the kids - the main thing.

"I would tell my staff: The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

Shortly after accepting the position with Lutheran Special Education Ministries, Senne toured three schools: one in a suburban community, one in an urban setting, and one in a rural area. "I was emotional during that time," he

recalls. "I think I felt their presence I was being led into something."

At a National Science Foundation "Pri-math" educational program for gifted and talented students, a colleague of Senne's observed that his administrative style is "servanthood."

"You see yourself as serving people," she told him.

As he imagines his little flock — the special education students of Minnesota — Senne concurs: "I am here to serve the people."

## Have You Considered a Gift Annuity?

By Gregg Braun  
Director of Development

A gift annuity can be used to make a future gift that will help spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, allow you to receive a regular fixed income during your lifetime and allow you to save on taxes.

Generally, the ministry chosen to receive the remainder of the gift annuity (known as the "remainder beneficiary") receives about half of the original amount of the gift.

The rest of the gift helps to provide the income to you for your lifetime. You will receive the same amount each quarter. You can choose to add a second person to receive the payments after your death. The minimum to begin a gift annuity and designate the charity is \$5,000 in cash or securities. The payments from the gift annuity are based on the original amount of the contribution, your age, and the age of a second person, if one is named.

With the gift annuity, a portion of your payout will be tax-free and you may claim a charitable contribution in the year the contract is established.

If you transfer appreciated securities to the gift annuity, you will pay less capital gains than if you sold your stock.

The ideal candidate for a gift annuity is a person over age 70. At this age the payout rates are very attractive in comparison to other income-producing assets. Recently a 95-year-old man wanted to provide an annual gift to his niece and nephew at Christmas time. He also wanted to remember his favorite charity. Following the advice of a gift planning counselor, he started a testamentary gift annuity for the niece and the nephew with the remainder going to the charity after their deaths. The niece and nephew received their gifts on Christmas day each year and he left a lasting legacy for the charity that he supported for years.

This example shows the flexibility of planning options that could fit your situation. If you would like to receive rate information or more details, please check the box on the envelope "Receive information on gift annuities" and mail it in. I'll be glad to help you.

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# Around the Ministry



## Illinois

By Jim Krone, Director  
Illinois Programs

LSEM continues to go through many changes as we meet the growing demand to serve children who learn differently. Although some changes are challenging — finding more teachers, more support staff and more money to support new programs — I can't wait for everything to be in place so together we can make a difference and keep Christ in children's lives.

As of January 1, 2000 the Illinois programs are serving 37 partnership Lutheran schools in the Northern and Central Illinois Districts. Our 20 dedicated teachers have already worked with over 950 children this year.

The need for this ministry remains strong. Already nearly 50% of our partnership schools will be continuing their service agreements with us next year. Of this group, there has been a 20% increase in program services requested. To God alone be the glory.

## Indiana

By Valerie Hughes, Director  
Indiana Programs

In 1999 there were 51 students enrolled in LSEM programs and 122 additional students helped by LSEM programs (either consulted or tested).

## Michigan

By Kathy A. Krause, Director  
Michigan Programs

God's mysteries abound in this world of ours. For instance, as we in the Midwest experience winter, I am always amazed at the uniqueness of every snowflake! Created by God that no two are alike. How does He do that? I don't understand!

Many children in our resource rooms have the same difficulty. Some concepts just don't make sense. However, our resource room teachers are very clever people, they find ways to make complicated ideas more understandable.

Science has an abundance of difficult theories, but what if your teacher explained friction by using sandpaper or a toy car? Or density by equating it to the slang term for someone who is "thick-headed" ("he's very dense") as opposed to someone who is an "airhead"? Or jumping off a chair to demonstrate gravity? Fun, interesting and very "hands-on"!

As you marvel at the many mysteries of our Lord, remember our teachers as they open the doors of understanding to children with special learning needs.

## Minnesota

By Dennis Senne, Director  
Minnesota Programs

It is a blessing to be a part of the Lord's work with special education in Minnesota. The members of the LSEM consortium have given me much support and have shown such enthusiasm. Lord willing, we have the energy we need to implement a program of high standards for young learners.

During my recent visit to suburban, inner city and rural Christian schools, the students, parents and staff members showed their dedication to using the many gifts God provided to them. Observing the students' rich diversity was impressive.

Assisting children, forming school/partnerships and employing teachers excites me more and more each passing day!

## New York

By Paula Rosen, Director  
New York Programs

October was a busy month at the New York office of LSEM. I enjoyed

sharing a workshop with St. John's Lutheran School in College Point, New York. A week later I attended the New York State Non-public School Administrators Conference in Albany, New York. And, finally, Lois Geary and I attended the Wagner College Job Fair where we talked to many students and some of the staff.

In November Deana Salmonese rejoined our staff as the resource room teacher at Holy Trinity Community School. We are happy to have her back as a part of our faculty.

The LSEM teachers participated in the East Coast Lutheran Educators Conference on November 5th. Many teachers and administrators from Maine to Florida stopped by to say how we are needed in their schools.

## Ephphatha Center

By Kathy A. Krause, Director  
Ephphatha Center

Here we are in the year 2000! The world did not come to an end and, as of yet, Christ has not returned. But what preparations did you make . . . just in case?

Did you buy gallons of water . . . extra food . . . have extra cash on hand? Many people did not believe that there would be a major problem but they prepared anyway. "Better to be safe than sorry!"

How is our church preparing for the future? My information from the seminaries is that the number of men studying for the ministry is slowly increasing. Wonderful!

Our ministry is helping in this task. Each year we present, as a gift, a specialty Bible to each graduating seminarian. This Bible is a translation that uses a lowered vocabulary level. It is a tool for those who have difficulty reading to still be able to understand the Word of God. It is also a wonderful Bible for those who are new to the Christian faith.

Pray with me that we continue to place pastors in ministry and that LSEM is part of that preparation.



# The Advocate

for Students with Special Learning Needs

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## We're Growing

God has indeed blessed this ministry with growth, both in numbers of children and in new geographic areas served.

Although we rejoice in this, let us always remember that within each of these numbers lies a child, a unique and precious creation of God. Through Lutheran Special Education Ministries' (LSEM's) work, a little more of this child's potential is tapped and a little more of God's plan unfolds. This is the true story behind the numbers.

### Ministry-wide Growth: Schools

Since serving 44 deaf students in 1975, Lutheran Special Education Ministries (LSEM) has touched the lives of 12,692 parochial school students with special learning needs by the end of 1999. That's an increase of 28.745%.

During 1999 alone, 3,187 students with special learning needs were helped. This is more than 27 times of one of the highest annual enrollments of deaf students when LSEM was known as "Lutheran School for the Deaf." The school year was 1969-70 and the number of deaf students enrolled was 114.

### Ministry-wide Growth: Congregations

Through the resources of the Ephphatha Center, LSEM also provides help to congregations who have students with special learning needs enrolled in Bible or Confirmation classes or Vacation Bible School. In 1999, some 338 families in the United States and abroad requested and received such help.

### Growth Beyond

This past spring and summer, LSEM joined in agreements to provide special education services to Lutheran day schools in the Minnesota South and Pacific Southwest Districts. We hope to begin serving these areas in the 2000-2001 school year.

### What's Next?

God-willing, we would like to continue to grow, spreading out across the United States and beyond, anywhere and everywhere a child with a special learning need desires a Christian education.

So that we can continue doing God's will through this ministry, please pray for us. Pray for wisdom, pray for vision, pray for a servant's heart for all of us in this ministry.

And, if you feel moved, please support us with your financial gifts. Of our entire income, 65% comes from the support of friends like you. Please enclose your gift within the envelope provided with this *Advocate*.

### WE VALUE YOUR IDEAS

Now that our ministry is growing and changing, does *The Advocate* need to change? We need your help to decide.

Some of you have received a questionnaire in this issue. (You

were randomly selected from all the names on our data base.) Please take time to fill it out. Then mail it back to us by March 10, 2000.

Thank you. We're looking forward to hearing from you.