



# The Advocate

Summer 2005 "Enabling children with special learning needs to receive a Christian education since 1873." Volume 74, No. 2

## A Day in the Life of the Ministry

Reach. Serve. Enable.

Three short words that carry significant meaning and much responsibility. This is the vision of Lutheran Special Education Ministries.

God has sent many talented Christians to our ministry so that His work can be accomplished. Among them are five dedicated educators – the Lutheran Special Education Ministries regional directors.

Spend a day with these five special Christian educators and you will see the heart of Lutheran Special Education Ministries.

### **Detroit, Mich., 8 a.m. (EDT)**

Great Lakes Region Director Kathleen Hodges is at daily devotions. Her region shares space – and devotion time – with the National Office in Detroit. "Our ministry is based on Christ. Praying for staff, students and schools as well as others in need is the best way to begin the day," Hodges says.

Back in her office, Hodges returns phone calls and e-mails from parents seeking a Christian education for their children who have special learning needs; from principals looking for guidance about how to meet the needs of all children in their schools; and from teachers in both Michigan and Indiana seeking advice about students or procedures.

Next is a meeting with her office staff. "My work takes me out of the office for days at a time observing teachers, meeting with principals and visiting ministry supporters. These meetings are instrumental to the functioning of our region," she says.

During these meetings the staff discusses students who have been evaluated and appropriate services for their needs. They also have the



Great Lakes Region Director Kathleen Hodges (standing) meets with staff members (from left) psychologist Jim Pagels, secretary Beth Hamada and coordinator Johanna Hilpert.

opportunity to share any up-coming cases they are working on and receive feedback for answering teacher concerns.

Next on the agenda is a 40-mile drive to an area principals' meeting. "This is a wonderful way to network with other Christian school administrators. It gives me time to exchange ideas and information about their schools and Lutheran Special Education Ministries programs."

As she drives to the meeting, Hodges returns a phone call from a principal regarding students that are transferring into his school next year and may need assistance from the Lutheran Special Education Ministries teacher in his building.

After the principals' meeting Hodges stops on the way home to visit a longtime Lutheran Special Education Ministries supporter. "This is a very important part of my work," she says. "I am able to talk to donors about the ministry and the work we are doing in the Great Lakes Region. It is enjoyable to meet one-on-one with friends of our ministry and tell them how their aid helps children learn about God's love along with reading and math.. Their assistance allows us to carry out our vision to reach, serve and enable."

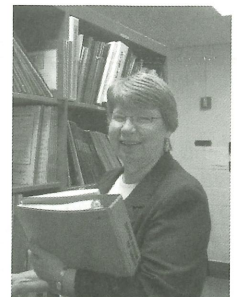
At 6 p.m., Hodges is on the road for the 50-mile trip home.

### **River Forest, Ill., 8 a.m. (CDT)**

Midwest Region Director Susan Lewis is searching through e-mails, articles and journals gleaning special education information. "Keeping up-to-date on special education trends is important so that I can distribute it to my teachers and others," Lewis says. "I'm also looking for information on grants and other ways we can find to deliver our special education services economically."

Her morning also is filled with answering phone calls and e-mails relating to teachers, students, principals and parents.

Lewis, a strong proponent of early intervention for children who have special learning needs, is committed to sharing her expertise and information with others. Having her office on the campus of Concordia University in River Forest, Ill., gives Lewis a chance to work with future Christian educators and their professors. This morning she visits the kindergarten



Midwest Region Director Susan Lewis gathers research materials.

## A Day in the life of the Ministry *continued*

classroom at the early childhood center on Concordia's campus.

"I've also been a presenter at early childhood conferences on campus. This allows me to talk to many Christian educators about Lutheran Special Education Ministries and early childhood intervention, which is a key to preventing failure and helping children develop self-esteem," she says.

It's early afternoon and Lewis is on her way to visit a classroom at a Chicago-area partnership school. A train delays her trip, but that doesn't stop her workday. "I always carry a 'to be read' file in my car," she quips. "We have lots of trains in Chicago. I don't like to waste the time."

Her last appointment of the day is a meeting with Lutheran Special Education Ministries supporters. "Special education is an expensive endeavor, and we need to find ways to deliver it economically," Lewis explains. "I enjoy sharing our ministry's story and how an individual donor's gift has made a difference in a child's life. We're blessed with people in this area who are committed to providing a Christian education for children who, without our services, would have to attend public schools."

As Lewis drives home, her reading file is propped on the seat beside her – just in case a train crosses her path.

### **St. Paul, Minn., 8 a.m. (CDT)**

On the St. Paul, Minn., Concordia University campus, Northcentral Region Director Dennis Senne makes his way to his office. Today, as all others, begins with devotion and prayer.

The workday starts with answering phone messages. "Responding immediately is very important," Senne explains. "When I look at our vision to reach, serve and enable, I see the servant role as my role. In serving, we reach and enable. My role model is Jesus Christ. He served, and that is my goal through this ministry."

Also this morning, Senne is preparing a newsletter for his teaching staff. Communication with the teachers and schools is imperative, he says.

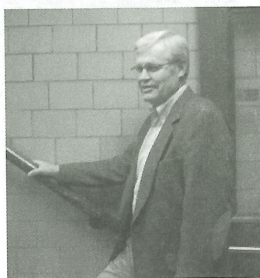
"The staff members are in the classrooms sharing God's love with the students every day," Senne says. "They are the strength of the program and

determine the quality of the special education services we are providing."

Next on Senne's agenda is a regional principals' meeting – one of 16 he will attend throughout the school year. "I am not a principal of a school, I am there to serve the schools in the region," he explains. "I have a slot on the agenda and use it to tell them about Lutheran Special Education Ministries with a reminder that we are here to help them serve their students. If my attendance at these meetings helps even one more child, it is well worth the time and effort."

Before his day ends, Senne has one more meeting scheduled. "The Lutheran

Education Foundation of Minnesota is a new organization started by three people who have a heart for children," he says. "To work with this group is an honor. Their goal is to provide funds for special education services, scholarships and capital projects at Lutheran schools in the Minneapolis and St. Paul areas. This is a very exciting prospect. As they are able, they will plant the financial seeds for programs in this area."



Northcentral Region Director Dennis Senne heads to a meeting.

### **Houston, Texas, 6:30 a.m. (CDT)**

Southcentral Region Director Gayle Grotjan's journey actually began yesterday when she drove four and one-half hours from her home base in Dallas to Houston. "With a region the size of Texas and three adjoining states, it takes careful planning," she says. "I try to make the most of my time in the area."

Because of Houston traffic, Grotjan is on the road by 6:30 a.m. to be at a 7:30 a.m. Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. Also in attendance to discuss a student's progress will be a parent, a diagnostician, the regular classroom teacher and the school principal. After tracking the student's progress Grotjan meets one-on-one with the principal to discuss the ministry's services at the school.

"One of the things that impresses me so much about our Lutheran Special

Education Ministries partners is that these schools offer special education by choice," Grotjan adds. "Our services are in the schools because the administrators see the need and they go the extra step to finance the partnership. They provide special education because it's the right thing to do."

Next on Grotjan's schedule is an hour-long drive to another Lutheran school in the Houston area and a half-day in-service for regular classroom teachers about appropriate grading practices for special needs students.

"These in-services are one of the most important services we can provide," she explains. "It's not always possible for Lutheran Special Education Ministries to be in a school. By giving the regular classroom teachers information about how to minister to students with special learning needs, we have an opportunity to reach out to more students."

Grotjan, who holds a doctorate in education, is qualified to present programs on many different aspects of learning. Other popular in-service topics are explanations of various learning disabilities, meeting the needs of all students and behavior management.

Reaching the end of the school day, Grotjan finds time to visit two more principals. But her time away from home base is not over. Tomorrow and the days after will bring more meetings with parents, teachers, principals and donors across Texas. After her fifth day on the road, she'll arrive home in Dallas at the end of another 12-hour workday.

### **Los Angeles, Calif., 8 a.m. (PDT)**

Today is a classroom day for Southwest Region Director Laura Sauer. She'll spend several morning hours teaching in a special education classroom.

"I work one-on-one with students for two and one-half hours," Sauer explains, "and spend another hour talking to teachers about the students' progress and



Southcentral Region Director Gayle Grotjan is on the road and on the phone.

## A Day in the Life of the Ministry continued

needs. We may work with multi-sensory learning such as using foam letters to spell, and through our lessons we work on social skills. Many children with special learning needs have difficulty with self-esteem, so this is an important part of classroom time as well.”

Sauer considers curriculum development very important. “First and foremost, the Christian aspect sets our program apart from others,” she explains. “The goal is to offer not only a Christian learning experience, but also a special education curriculum that’s top-notch.

“Education is a process rather than teaching students content and facts. There is so much information today and it changes constantly. Rather than teaching students endless facts, it is more important to teach them the process of learning – how to find the information they need. Learning the process of education serves students throughout their education and beyond.”



Southwest Region Director Laura Sauer spends office time answering e-mails from teachers, principals and parents.

After class, Sauer drives to a Lutheran school that does not have a Lutheran Special Education Ministries program to present a chapel program. This, she says, allows her to inform students, teachers and administrators about the ministry and about children with special learning needs.

Sauer talks about being chosen by God to be His people. To illustrate her sermonette she shows them a tennis shoe,

a dressy woman’s shoe and a child’s slipper. “All of them are shoes. All of them are made to be worn on feet. Yet each one is made for a specific purpose. So it is with God’s children. All of us are created for the same purpose, yet each person is different.” It is a message, she says, that students remember.

After chapel and the opportunity to tell the Lutheran Special Education Ministries story, it’s time for Sauer to put in office time answering telephone messages and e-mails before ending her day.

Just hours after Sauer heads home for the evening, another day dawns in Detroit and so begins another day for the Lutheran Special Education Ministries staff. It’s another day of tackling the many tasks needed to provide a Christ-centered education for children with special learning needs. It’s another day of reaching, serving and enabling.

## **luthsped.org Relaunches**

The Lutheran Special Education Ministries Web site has a new face. It recently was refurbished thanks, in part, to a generous grant from the Church Extension Fund of the Michigan District. The site is an important tool in the ministry’s effort to serve children who have special learning needs.

Visitors will find user-friendly pages that are easy to navigate and a bright new look. Among the new features are news stories from both the national office as well as the Lutheran Special Education Ministries regions. There is more information about ministering to children with special learning needs as well as more links to Web sites and organizations that may be of further assistance to parents, pastors, principals and teachers.

Individuals, schools and churches will find information about new brochures designed to assist pastors and lay teachers who minister to children who have special learning needs. The brochures, funded by a grant from the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, may be ordered on the Web site.

Visit us at [www.luthsped.org](http://www.luthsped.org). We think you’ll like our newly remodeled home on the Web.

## **Special Notes from the desk of Roger DeMeyere**

### **Looking Back: Moving Forward**

Often I have found that going back and revisiting past articles and publications can be a very useful exercise. Aside from how my writing style may have changed from year to year or article to article, looking at content at a different time can be very telling.

I just finished reading *The Advocates* published during recent years. Each and every one of them is very positive. There’s not one word about all of the challenges faced by Lutheran Special Education Ministries – most specifically deficits.

The reality is that Lutheran Special Education Ministries is no different than any other nonprofit organization. Our ministry is confronted with challenges each and every day.

Sometimes we’re so focused on sharing the good news that we neglect to tell the whole story – the ups as well as the downs of ministry.

We have had our share of struggles in recent years. The following is from a report I shared with the Lutheran Special Education Ministries board members a

couple of years ago.

“Due to current budget restrictions the light at the end of the tunnel has been turned off.”

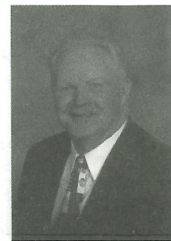
Sometimes humor is used to mask feelings. The truth is, during the tough financial times we have been experiencing it often seemed quite dark. And it would be darker now had we not made significant changes over the past several years. It’s as if we were forced to

prune our branches before we could bear more fruit. Different fruit. Perhaps even better fruit?

We reduced our costs by nearly 20 percent and changed the way we provide services, yet we still remain focused on the future, confident in God’s leading.

Although the 2005-06 budget still requires sacrifice, I clearly see a new light now. It’s still in the distance, yet brighter than before. The vision remains clear, too. Reach – Serve – Enable.

I am energized by the God who has sustained us for 132 years and by our challenges. Proof once again that through Christ all things are possible.



# A Note of Thanks

Dear Lutheran Special Education Ministries Friends:

Thank you.

Another school year has come to completion, and on behalf of the

many children we serve and the entire staff of Lutheran Special Education Ministries, I sincerely thank you for your prayers and financial



support. This year

marks a first year anniversary of serving Lutheran Special Education Ministries for both Debbi Torbet and me. While we may not have had the opportunity to meet all of you this past year, Debbi and I will continue to do our best to meet as many of you, our ministry friends, as we are able - to personally shake your hand for your ongoing support of Lutheran Special Education Ministries.

Your current and ongoing contributions enable us to continue to provide quality programs and services. Our services enable the children we serve to develop the skills they need to lead productive lives throughout their academic careers and beyond. Even more important, they have the opportunity to develop a life-long relationship with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

Gene Kuebler  
Vice President, Development

## An Invitation

## Learn More about Our Ministry

If your congregation or group would like to learn more about Lutheran Special Education Ministries, please consider hosting an awareness presentation. To learn more about our work with children who have special learning needs, simply invite us to come and share an informative presentation about our

ministry.

Openings are available for this coming fall, so please contact us at 313-368-1220, Ext. 117, to arrange for a Lutheran Special Education Ministries representative to come and share information about our mission and our ministry in more detail.

## “Share the Blessings” Helps Michigan Congregations

Lutheran Special Education Ministries is pleased to announce that it is a cooperative partner in Faithful Sowers, which is participating in a statewide project called “Share the Blessings.” This project is made possible by a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans for the years 2005 and 2006.

The purposes of “Share the Blessings” are to:

- ✚ Educate people on charitable gifting ideas and strategies.
- ✚ Motivate individuals through seminars and from personal

visits have them respond through current and deferred gifts.

- ✚ Generate immediate and deferred gifts from individuals for congregations and ministries of their choice.

To host a congregational planned giving seminar call Faithful Sowers at 800-698-1688 for information.

To learn about or receive e-mails on planned giving ideas visit the Web site at [www.faithfulsowers.net](http://www.faithfulsowers.net) or contact Debbi Torbet at 313-368-1220, Ext. 117.



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Please send all communications regarding this publication to the above address.

## “Children & Charity” Teleconference

On Oct. 27, 2005, a “Children & Charity” teleconference will be held at two sites in Michigan.

For more information, please contact Faithful Sowers, 800-698-1688.