

## “Teacher”

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11).

Some of us grew up in an era when “Teacher” was a title of respect connected to a name: Teacher Schmidt or Teacher Jones. This is a story about Teacher Sprengeler. As I was privileged to worship at his funeral last October, I couldn’t help but celebrate his ministry and that of his peers. Elton Sprengeler served forty years in the teaching ministry. He taught at St. John, Alta from 1964 to 1970 and at St. Paul, Fort Dodge from 1970 to 1990. After his retirement he continued to serve as an organist at many Fort Dodge area congregations.



*Elton Sprengeler*

The faith journey began at Cologne, Minnesota and was nurtured in a Lutheran school. The sainted Dr. Walter Meier, original Lutheran Hour speaker, was one of the voices calling Elton to the teaching ministry.

Elton’s father introduced him to Dr. Meier at a Lutheran Hour rally, and the conversation encouraged service in the church. Years later as he met Dr. Meier again, the speaker remembered Elton and commented “You did it!” (referring to becoming a Lutheran teacher).

God shaped Elton as a teacher at Concordia, River Forest. It was in this setting that his love for music blossomed. Rooming with celebrated hymn writer Carl Schalk was part of God’s plan. After only three years of college, Elton served in Maple Lakes, Minnesota. After several years he returned to River Forest to complete his education and was placed in Elk River. It was in Elk River that he would meet his wife Lillian. Love for music was lived out in the home. Widow Lillian notes, “there was always music in the house.”

Early years in the ministry included teaching all eight grades, directing the choir, playing the organ, organizing Sunday school and VBS, and serving as youth leader. In addition to those duties he became a mission planter, teaming with Pastor Erhart Bauer at Elk River, Minnesota in starting a mission congregation in a neighboring community. Key to beginning the new ministry was a vacation Bible school program that brought many children from the community to the church. The connections with the children and families grew

into a worshipping community and another Lutheran school.

Calls from Missouri, Illinois, and Alta, Iowa were all received in 1964. The call to Alta was accepted and service in Iowa District West began. The ministry transitioned to Fort Dodge in 1970. One of the blessings of the Fort Dodge setting was teaching only one grade and coordinating the music ministry of the school and church. Elton’s approach to classroom education was summarized in his belief that every child is gifted! “A good teacher challenges every student.”

Recently Lillian and the family finished the details on the family tombstone. Above Elton’s name, date of birth and date of death is one word, “Teacher.”

The teaching ministry continues to be important in the church and in Iowa District West. Lutheran school teachers not only challenge students in the classroom, they are servants in other ministry areas and missionaries in their communities. The nine Lutheran elementary schools and fifty preschools are served by those who take their calling very seriously. Almost seventy percent of those serving in District Lutheran elementary schools are rostered as “commissioned ministers” of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Colloquy programs through the Concordia universities continue to enrich the faith life and professional life of these workers.



*Teacher anniversaries were recognized at the fall Iowa Lutheran Teachers’ Conference.*

Concordia universities continue to offer the Lutheran Teacher diploma which is supplemental to teacher accreditation credentials. Several of the District students presently enrolled in church work programs are seeking to serve the church as a Lutheran school teacher. The District supports these students through the student financial aid program. Individuals wanting to support students preparing to be pastors, directors of Christian education, or teachers are invited to send gifts to “Joy in Ministry” at the District office or to contact District staff for more information.

What titles might be connected to your name or etched on your tombstone? Praise God for those He calls to be “Teacher.”



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