One of the significant challenges that we need to address as spiritual leaders in Lutheran schools is to build a healthy and positive image of God. We need to breakdown and correct an unhealthy image of God that seems to be prevalent in society, where God is perceived as being remote, isolated, judgmental and intent on punishment. That needs to be replaced by an image of a God of unconditional love.

Recently I have been challenged by the work of the French Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. His ideas have been put into perspective in a recent publication “The Divine milieu explained” subtitled “A spirituality for the 21st Century.”

His work was originally inspired by his struggle with the tension between religion and science. “First of all we need to recognize and acknowledge that most of our traditional spiritualities are based on this image of a flat earth, the centre of God’s creation, covered by a dome-shaped sky, above which is heaven where God lives” says Teilhard. “Most contemporary spiritualities, following tradition, usually put scientific facts aside, assuming they have little to do with our spiritual lives. But in fact they permeate our very existence … everything we learn about creation is something we are learning about the Body of Christ.”

Some further quotes:

What is paradoxical about Teilhard’s approach and turns traditional Christian spirituality topsy-turvy is that he believes that the best way to open your eyes to this divine milieu is to put all your effort and strength into loving and serving this evolving world … in fact his first principle of spirituality would probably be ‘to love the world with all your mind, heart, soul and strength’

Traditional spiritual writers saw a conflict between loving and serving God and loving and serving the world. We were told to love God and hate the world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son… Most people who quote that scripture passage (John 3:16) emphasize the last half of the sentence. Teilhard wants to emphasize also the first half … God so loved the world. Traditional spirituality he says has falsely forced us into an either/or choice. ‘It’s either Christ or the world! Take your pick! Teilhard wants to show that a true Christian spirituality can be both/and. He says that you can love both Christ and the world with all your heart. There is no real confusion or contradiction.

After setting the scene in the introductory chapter, the concept of the divine milieu is unfolded. There are two traditional perspectives which see God as either transcendent or immanent.

The transcendent tells us that God is separate from us – above and beyond us – and dwells far away in heaven. From this perspective we raise our voices
in prayer to God who is “out there” or “up there”. Many liturgical prayers take this form by starting out with phrases like Lord God Heavenly Father. Even The Lord’s prayer emphasises God in a heavenly dwelling.

The immanent perspective in contrast, stresses that God lives privately within each one of us and is someone we can talk to intimately as one might talk to a beloved spouse or close friend. While both these traditional perspectives are valid, Teilhard suggests a better way, as he described God’s presence as the milieu. The French word milieu has no exact English equivalent, so the translators have simply kept the French word in the text wherever it occurs. Milieu encompasses our English words atmosphere and environment or our surroundings.

“A milieu is as penetrating and omnipresent as the air we breathe; yet we mostly take it for granted. We simply forget about the atmosphere even though we are dependent on it at every moment… Fish live in a milieu of water yet are unaware of its importance until they are taken out of it.”

For Teilhard the most important spiritual fact of our existence is that at every moment you and I are swimming in a divine sea. Fortunately we can’t be taken out of it. At every moment we are inhaling and exhaling the divine life. In the divine milieu we live and move and have our being.

While it is true that God is always “in heaven” (transcendent) and also always “within us” (immanent) the more important fact is that we are always living and moving within the divine milieu. If we humans are living in the divine milieu, so must everything else be swimming in that same sea of divine love - every tree, plant, animal, mineral, metal, rock, as well as every one of those hundred trillion active microorganisms in your body."

Our God of unconditional love is present in every situation that we enter, long before we arrive on the scene. He also paradoxically walks in with us as we enter!

What an amazing God!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A LUTHERAN SCHOOL IN THE DIGITAL WORLD OF THE 21ST CENTURY?

The debate continues. A proactive initiative from our office is the production of a small book called “Seeking authenticity”, which is in the final stages of proofing. Our aim is to make available a complimentary copy to all schools by mid-year.

This initiative is a follow up to the not-unrelated Authentic Lutheran Schools document from last year. The Spiritual Development Facilitator is available to speak to school councils and leadership teams about the elements of being an authentic Lutheran school, which in a sense addresses the question “What does it mean to be a Lutheran school in the 21st Century?”

LEXICON DATABASE

The recently upgraded National Database, LExICON is now fully operational. It is expected that all LSA schools would put in place a process for keeping local school data completely up to date. Schools are able to enter their own completion details for both Pathways Spiritual and Pathways Theological.

Phyllis in our office is willing to assist anyone who needs help in getting started. In particular we encourage schools to check that the accreditation records for teaching staff are accurately represented.
UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES TO PATHWAYS REQUIREMENTS

We again want to remind school leaders that there were some significant changes to the requirements for teacher accreditation that were introduced by LEA last year. It seems that not everyone has been aware of these changes. Click on this link to view the graphic summary.

PATHWAYS The key changes are as follows:

- Any teacher required to undertake EQUIP (with a required accreditation status of A) is no longer required to complete Pathways Theological OR Pathways Vocational.
- There has been a reduction in the required number of session from 12 to 8 for Pathways Spiritual. My understanding is that LEA will still encourage everyone to cover the same content of the 12 units, but in a reduced total time frame.

Schools that are involved with the delivery of Pathways Theological should now be using the revised material which is fully accessible on-line. The complete set of facilitator and participant resources is available via the following link: PATHWAYS THEOREOICAL. Note that you MUST be logged in as an LEA member for this link to be valid. The former T.O.P.S of course is now officially dead! The old Pathways Theological material has been superseded. It should only be used for additional reference if required, but should not be used as core resources. (Note: LEA produced an initial hard-copy Pathways Theological folder, a copy of which was delivered to every LSA school by the end of term 1 last year.)

@NEVLSA ON TWITTER

For those who have a twitter account (or maybe here is an opportunity to open one) – you are invited to follow @NevLSA. While I don’t consider myself to be particularly TWITTER literate, I do see possibilities with it and invite you to be part of the journey as we all strive to keep up and in tune with the technology merry-go-round. My aim is to restrict tweeting to purely spiritual insights and perspectives, with at least a weekly quote or comment posted.

LSASDF BLOGSPOT

- the site for all information relating to the work of the Spiritual Development Facilitator

RETREATS PROGRAMME 2012

We encourage all of our LSA schools to support these retreat opportunities. We especially ask that school leaders identify and encourage at least one member of staff to register for a retreat.

Calrsruhe retreats:
Vacancies only for July 9-11 and August 29-31 groups (all others full).

Sevenhill:
Still vacancies for both the June and November retreats.

Note: * All retreats commence at 5pm on the first day and conclude by 2pm on the 3rd day.

Further details can be downloaded from the internet: Click here
PRIMARY SCHOOLS WORSHIP GROUP

We had a magnificent turn-out for our term 1 meeting at Aberfoyle Park. The next meeting is scheduled for FRIDAY August 3rd and is going to be held at St Jakobi, Lyndoch.

ADDITIONAL PATHWAYS VOCATIONAL SESSIONS FOR 2012

I am conducting extra Pathways Vocational sessions as follows:
   Para Vista, Friday June 1st
   Navigator Port Lincoln, Monday June 25th
   Yirara Alice Springs, Friday June 29th
   Good Shepherd, Howard Springs, NT, Monday 8th October

If it is logistically convenient for anyone to participate in one of those sessions, please let me know.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS CHAPLAINCY GROUP

Our next meeting is only a week away Wednesday 30th May from 10.30 am (at the LSA Office).

Please register here for the day.