



Excellence in Christ-Centered Education

School has started, and our minds have again turned to *education*, that is, to learning, growing, and gaining knowledge. With that in mind, let me teach you a new word. It's actually a Latin word: **ecce!** It means "look, behold, pay attention!" For an ancient Roman the word "ecce" was like a tap on the shoulder to get his attention. When he heard "ecce," he would sit up and think, "Okay, something important and interesting is happening!"

This Latin word shows up at important times in the life of Jesus. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive and bear Jesus, the Son of God, he said, "*Behold [ecce!] you will conceive...*" (Luke 1:31). When an angel announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in the field, he said, "*Behold [ecce!] I bring you good tidings of great joy...*" (Luke 2:10). And when Pontius Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified—to make us right with God—he told the riotous crowd, "*Ecce, homo!*" that is, "*Behold, the Man!*"

Well, I want to use this great Latin word to get your attention about our school here at Hope Lutheran Church. Let this little Latin word—*ecce!*—tap you on the shoulder and make you pay attention.

As we begin a new school year, we have several new faculty members: a new principal, Mrs. Deborah Dikeman, and four new teachers: Ms. Kara Dufelmeier (Preschool); Ms. Angela Leible (2nd grade, and a graduate of Hope!); Mrs. Katie Lehenbauer (5th grade); and Mrs. Amber Bahr (7th grade). In addition, God continues to bless us with several excellent and experienced teachers: Mrs. Cheryl O'Neill (Kindergarten), Mrs. Kay Shoemaker (1st grade), Mrs. Nel Zickler (3rd grade), Mrs. Jeanine Consolino (4th grade), Mr. Warren Hunt (6th grade), Mrs. Judy Holschen (8th grade), and Kantor Stephen Rosebrock (music & religion).

As I look at our very fine faculty, I ask myself: "How can we gel together and work as a team to provide a Christian education for our

children and children in the community?" Here's where the Latin word *ecce* comes in. Let's look at and behold:

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Excellence means being superior or first class. We know that parents want only the best for their children, and we want to give only the best education. The author and educator Mortimer Alder (1902-2001) said, "The quality of schooling to which [students] are entitled is what the wisest parents would wish for their own children, the best education for the best being the best education for all." Here at Hope we want the best, first class education for all of our students. Our dedicated and experienced teachers seek to teach the best material, put their best effort into their teaching, and motivate students to do their best.

Christ-centered means that all of our education is focused on Christ. Of course, we expect the religion classes to teach Jesus and Him crucified, but what about English, history, science and spelling? Yes, these subjects help us focus on Christ too. After all, He is Lord of history and works through all of history. English and spelling help us to read the Bible and learn of Him and then communicate His deeds of salvation. And science helps us get to know His marvelous creation. At Hope Lutheran School we are much more than a school with some religion sprinkled on for flavor! We are a *religious school*, and we teach children to look at all of life with Christ at the center.

And **Education** means that we bring up, raise, rear, and train our children. Some people expect that children learn all by themselves, with very little help from parents or teachers. At Hope we disagree with such a "hands-off," inactive approach. We want our children to grow up into God-fearing, Christ-confessing adults. We want our students to be life-long

learners who are not hoodwinked by every cultural fad or marketing manipulation that comes along. That's why we want to push them and challenge them. We want to train them to think well and to live as Christians—trusting Christ and serving their neighbor.

The reason I want to use this Latin word, **ecce**, to draw attention to our church's school is this: We are offering something very unique! We want everyone here at Hope to stand up and say, "*Ecce!* Look at our excellent school! It teaches our children to fix their eyes on Christ as the center of all of life." We want people in the community to say, "Look, they have something excellent and promising over there at Hope."

You see, when we trumpet **excellence in Christ-centered education**, we are being very radical; we are going against the grain of our society, especially the government-run schools around us. American schools succeed not at being excellent, but at dumbing children down!

William Torrey Harris was U.S. Commissioner of Education at the turn of the 20th century. He was very influential in standardizing American schools. He said this about students: "Ninety-nine out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom." Harris explained that this was not an accident, but the "result of substantial education, which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual."

Wow! This influential American education guru actually wanted individual children to become more like robots and not think too much about life around them. Now you have an idea of what government ("public") schools are all about!

John Taylor Gatto is a former New York State and New York City Teacher of the Year. In his book *The Underground History of American Education* Gatto gives some interesting statistics about education and literacy in America. Through the 20th century, government schools were becoming more widespread, but literacy rates were dropping!

Gatto illustrates this by looking at results from low-level academic tests that the U.S. military gives to people who registered to serve in the Army. In the 1930s, when compulsory public education was just taking off, the literacy rate was at 98%. In the early 1940s (World War II), the literacy rate dropped slightly to 96%. By

1952 (Korean War) the literacy rate of soldiers fell dramatically to 81%. This was the first group of people to receive most of their education in public schools! Eighteen years later, in 1970 (Vietnam War), the literacy rate of soldier hopefuls was a mere 73%. The literacy rate has actually decreased as the influence of public (that is, government-run) schools has increased!

John Gatto gives yet another look at the state of schooling and literacy in our country:

*By 1940, the literacy figure for all states stood at 96 percent for whites, 80 percent for blacks. Notice that for all the disadvantages blacks labored under, four of five were nevertheless literate. Six decades later, at the end of the twentieth century, the National Adult Literacy Survey and the National Assessment of Educational Progress say 40 percent of blacks and 17 percent of whites can't read at all. Put another way, black illiteracy doubled, white illiteracy quadrupled. Before you think of anything else in regard to these numbers, think of this: we spend three to four times as much real money on schooling as we did sixty years ago, but sixty years ago virtually everyone, black or white, could read (Gatto, *Underground History*, chap. 3, page 4)*

Why do I write of these sad facts in American schools? It's simple: so that we can see the great need for excellent education in our community. We Christians have something excellent to offer! We get to offer *Christ-centered education*. Jesus said that He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Our Lord Jesus is the embodiment of truth and wisdom—God's truth and wisdom, that is. And we are privileged to pursue excellence in education as we proclaim Christ crucified for our forgiveness.

The best way to bring glory to God and serve our community is to pursue excellence in everything we do, including how and what we teach in our school. St. Paul said it this way: "...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is **any excellence**, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Ecce! Behold, our Excellence in Christ-Centered Education!

Pastor Randy Asbury

