

The Calling of A Kindergarten Teacher

by Gail Linville

My “calling” to teach kindergarten began the summer of 1993 when I received not one, but three phone calls from Chris Acton, the headmaster of Regents School of Austin. Regents, a classical and Christian school in Austin, Texas, was just taking off, offering classes for first through fourth grades and planning to add a kindergarten. Chris asked me to consider applying for the job of kindergarten teacher, which included setting up a classroom and developing most of the curriculum. Not only did the assignment sound daunting, but the school was inconveniently located seventeen miles from my home. I declined his offer. Twice.

When the third call came, I was in the midst of searching for a new private school for our daughter. I was also in the middle of reading *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* by Doug Wilson, a book which had come highly recommended by a friend and strongly extolled the value of a classical Christian education. I wondered, “Could God possibly be trying to get my attention? Is this where He is leading me?” Merriam-Webster defines calling as “a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action, especially when accompanied by divine influence.” Perhaps my calling was coming in the form of phone calls from the Regents’ headmaster, but I needed to investigate further.

After the long trek to the school, I toured the campus with its student gardens and outdoor

theater in the woods for class plays and reading times. I then visited with a board member, my daughter’s future teacher, and the headmaster about the Christ-centered vision and philosophy of the school which employed a historical time line to illuminate history in all the disciplines and

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arts. I was intrigued. The school’s mission statement reads: “The purpose of Regents School of Austin is to provide a classical and Christian education founded upon and informed by a biblical worldview that equips students to know, love, and practice that which is true, good, and beautiful, and which challenges them to strive for excellence as they live purposefully and intelligently in the service of God and man.” Regents’ philosophy matched my own—that all truth is God’s truth and all subjects, science, music, art, literature, and history should be taught in view of God’s sovereignty.

In *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, a book which largely influenced the founders of Regents, Doug Wilson states, “In 1947, Dorothy Sayers, a clear-thinking classicist, lamented lack of true thought: . . . ‘although we often succeed in teaching our pupils “subjects,” we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think They learn everything except the art of

learning.’ Her suggested solution to this problem was a return to an older educational method—the *Trivium* of the Middle Ages. This *Trivium* consisted of three parts: grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. The three-part program prepared students for the *Quadrivium*—the study of various subjects. The

Trivium equipped students with the tools of learning in order to undertake the discipline and specialization of the *Quadrivium*.”¹

This was the education I desired for my own daughter. The Trivium method of “teaching with the grain,” along with hands-on learning experiences and much time spent in nature was the way that I wanted to teach young children. I felt strongly that God was calling me to an opportunity to teach His truth vigorously and to build a kindergarten program that would glorify Him and make learning an adventure for my students.

Further, I felt confirmed in my calling to teach kindergarten because of my understanding of young children and the ways that they learn and grow (academically, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually). A degree in child development and family relations along with seven years teaching experience helped equip me for this calling. God has given me an ability and desire to nurture, encourage, and gently direct young children’s growth so that goals, such as those set forth in the school’s mission statement, continue to be realized in their lives.

An essential part of my calling and one of the greatest joys of being a kindergarten teacher is understanding the

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kindergartners themselves. To know kindergartners is to know that they are seeking to make sense of the big, complicated world around them, gain understanding of its language and systems, and navigate human relationships. Young children are innately equipped by God to desire the richness and fullness that life has to offer and to yearn for knowledge and stretch for growth in all areas of their being. They must learn to share, communicate, negotiate, empathize, cooperate, and develop good habits and self control. One of the great benefits of teaching young children is that they are tender, eager to learn, and trusting, and are often quick to recognize and appreciate truth, beauty, and goodness.

Teaching young children provides the opportunity to witness their delight and joy in the works of God as they watch a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis, pick and eat carrots fresh from our garden, smell flowers and herbs, listen to a cardinal's call while searching for his bright plumage in the tree tops, or gently hold a fuzzy baby chick or a tickly, crawling caterpillar. I share in their delight as they develop the gifts God has given them and discover the joy of reading, sing songs louder and sweeter, run faster and climb higher. They are busy developing their cognitive abilities, learning about others, and coming to know God better through hearing, reading and memorizing His Word, prayer, repentance and obedience. Clearly, the list is endless.

In *Orthodoxy*, G.K. Chesterton writes, "Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, 'do it again' . . . It

is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore."² Participating in a child's sense of wonder and discovery always refreshes my appreciation of life.

To my surprise, my calling to Regents was not just for me to serve my students and their families but to be the recipient of God's grace and comfort at the hands of that very community. As my daughter and I thrived in this new school, God was not only showing us new ways to learn and teach but was also joining our family with other like-minded families at Regents. Little did we know that our bond with these families would help sustain us through difficult times ahead. Everyone has heard the expression "life doesn't turn out the way you plan." Our common response is "I just didn't know that meant my life." We never know what the future holds; my family's held cancer.

As I completed my third year of teaching and our daughter her sixth grade at Regents, my husband, Marlin, was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. The school family I felt called to serve graciously served *our* family through the five years of his illness and through his death and our grief. Gene Edward Veith in an article on vocation writes " . . . God has called each of us to specific tasks, relationships,

and types of work in which we are to love and serve Him and our neighbors."³ God continues to confirm my calling through the fulfillment I find in teaching kindergarten and the relationships with students, families, and staff with which He has blessed me.

ENDNOTES

1. Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 91.
2. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Doubleday, 1908), 58.
3. Gene Edward Veith, "Called Out," *World Magazine*, Vol. 19, No. 33, August 28, 2004.