

When Words Don't Work

by Laura Goerz

HE WAS ONLY SIX. Almost every day he walked into my classroom late without his homework or agenda. Often he was the object of teasing as he was the youngest and smallest of my grade two class and his late arrivals made him an easy target. Early in the school year I found myself being quite annoyed with him. He lived only a few blocks from school but could rarely manage to make it on time and I would get after him to be more punctual.

As I prayed over my students, God opened my eyes to this young man, to recognize there was more going on than I could see on the outside. Each day I tried to make him feel valued for who he was. He had great intelligence when he chose to display it and gradually I saw more and more of his natural ability shine through. His eyes lit up and his big dimples were prominent when I praised him for a job well done. Eventually he began to trust me more and more and, as many young children will do, he became brutally honest with me.

One day he told me the truth about his home life. His dad was often away in his occupation of truck driver. His mother preferred to spend her evenings in the local bar rather than stay home and take care of her two children. Many evenings these children were left to their own devices while she followed her desires.

This particular teaching job was in a public school and verbally sharing God's love with my students was not possible. I found this challenging, especially after having taught in a Christian school where I could tell my students that God watched over them and cared about their well-being. What

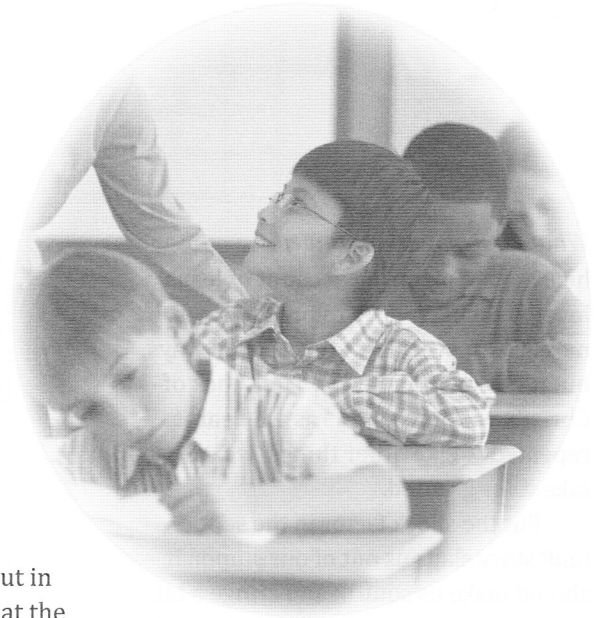
was I to do with this young man and others like him when I couldn't say those things?

All I could do was be God's hands and feet to him and to the many students God has put in my care over the years. I find that the first needful thing is to build a trust relationship with my students. When they believe that I care about them as individuals then they are much more willing to open up to me about what is going on in their lives. With this information I can then find ways to show care that meets their needs.

Often children want to be listened to. And they want to be seen as having value in someone's eyes. Even amidst a hectic school day, I find time to spend with my students on a one-on-one basis. Sometimes it can only be a fleeting positive comment; other times it can be a heart to heart talk. When I walk beside them on the playground it gives me an opportunity to let them know I am interested in what is happening in their lives. When I tell them they are special, no matter what the mark on the paper, they feel cared about.

It is really no different with adults. Many crave personal contact. Even with many Facebook friends or a large number of coworkers, people can feel lonely and unloved. For many people, what we see on the outside is not really what is going on in the inside. People often mask great hurts or difficulties.

God puts many people in my path each day. For some of them, I verbally share God's love and mercy. Sometimes, either the situation or the person doesn't make it conducive to talking about Christian love. How do I



show God's care to someone when the circumstances don't allow for Gospel-centred language?

Like children, adults want to know that I am interested in them and what matters to them. I take the time to find out what really matters to people. Often that means listening and observing carefully to see beyond the façade that people present on the outside.

As I build a relationship with someone, the same trust factor kicks in that does with children. When they see me worthy of trust, the doors of communication open widely. If people find me faithful, considerate, honest, peaceful, kind, and polite, it goes a long way to ministering to them and them seeing Christ in me.

I used to be concerned about the challenges in evangelizing people with my quiet demeanour. What I have learned is that, with God working through me, I can share His love in many different ways. I can never know the impact my kind words or caring actions may have on another. God can work many miracles using me as His instrument. It is just a matter of being open to the possibilities; whether it is in the classroom or with someone I meet in the grocery store.

Laura Goerz, Onoway, Alta.
St. Matthew's LWMLC, Stony Plain, Alta.

www.lutheranwomen.ca