

10 Minutes

with a

DCE



A candid interview reveals the struggles, the joys, and the opportunities for service that are part of the job description of a Director of Christian Education

What does a DCE do?

We spoke to Angie, a DCE at a Lutheran congregation in Texas about what it's like to be a Director of Christian Education.

Here's what she shared:

1 What are your primary tasks as a DCE?

My primary tasks as one of the two DCEs at my congregation are the development and direction of both the youth program and family and young adult ministries. This includes the planning, publicity, and execution of these programs as well as the training of volunteer leaders for each area.

Other DCEs concentrate on different areas, all revolving around education, including working with Sunday school, adult Bible study, singles ministry, or Vacation Bible School.

2 Describe your typical work day.

One of the things I love most about DCE ministry is that the typical day is not really typical! Each day of my ministry has been different, and that is something I really cherish and enjoy. It makes each day an adventure!

On a "typical" weekday, I always try to start my day with time in the Word. I find that it's a lot easier to get everything else done when God is kept as the first priority.

Then I work off of a "to do" list in order of priority. Many days this includes working on newsletters and publicity pieces for any of a number of activities, phone calls confirming and setting up events, or writing/preparing for a Bible study or devotion that I will be leading.

Then there are always those things that come up at the last minute: a youth or parent who drops by to talk, an emergency in the school or with a youth or church family, last minute errand running or set-ups for a big event, and so on.

My weekend schedule is as varied as the activities on the calendar. I may spend a lot of time confirming plans, setting up, tearing down, leading an event, or leading Bible studies/youth group time. Each day seems to bring new

challenges, and often the days that I feel like the most ministry has been done, NOTHING gets checked off the "to do" list!

3 What is the greatest challenge of your profession?

The greatest challenge for me is keeping my ministry focused on serving GOD by serving His people, not on trying to fill every member's every need. In this "business," there are LOTS of people that ask LOTS of things from you all the time. It has been a challenge to learn when and where to draw ministry lines and say "no" or "I think my time in ministry could be better spent on ____."

"DCE ministry is definitely not a 9-5 job . . ."

Another challenge has been keeping Sunday my Sabbath day. Because Sunday is very much a work day for me, it is a struggle to get into "worship mode" during Sunday services. That's another reason that personal and group Bible study are so important for me!

4 What is the greatest reward of your profession?

By far, the greatest reward is watching the youth I serve "walk the walk" and live out their faith in very tangible and awesome ways. This past Christmas, for instance, our Senior High youth group undertook a project to create and deliver a "secret stocking" at the home of a person we had been praying for all year. The stocking was to be filled with little, inexpensive items to fit a theme.

As the date for the stocking assembly got closer, I watched as an amazing thing happened among the group. The love and charity in those kids' hearts expanded and took over, and what was to be one small stocking became six huge baskets full of thoughtful and love-filled gifts, which truly shared God's love with six recipients!

Watching those youth take ownership of the project and grow in their faith as they shared God's gift of love with others was one of the most rewarding moments of my ministry so far.

5 What kind of training does it take to become a DCE?

I attended the 5-year DCE/Lutheran teaching dual certification program at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois. But DCE programs are available at five of the Concordias around the country, and while each program is different, they all contain similar elements. For me, the DCE program meant four years of study of core courses in general studies, a major in education and a large concentration in theology courses.

For the fifth year of my program I was sent to Dallas, Texas for my internship, a year of hands-on practice as a DCE under another professional church worker's supervision. After my internship year, I graduated from Concordia with a bachelor's degree in education and certification as a DCE, and also a Lutheran teacher's diploma. My years at (and away from) Concordia prepared me to be a "teacher of the faith" in an LCMS congregation.

6 What is the average starting salary for a DCE?

Salaries for DCEs are as varied as the jobs they do! Much depends on years of experience, standard of living in the area, responsibilities, etc. Average starting salary in my area of work is approximately \$25,000, plus complete medical coverage.

7 How many hours do you work during a typical week?

The key to this one is flexibility! Some weeks I feel like I never stop, and other weeks my time is more flexible.

Generally, my office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Then, 2-3 nights a week I have evening activities/meetings at church which I lead or attend. I try to take Friday as my day off, and depending on the week that usually works well.

On the weekends, I usually have youth or church activities on Saturday and Sunday as well. If a big event is coming up, hours are longer or varied. DCE ministry is definitely not a 9-5 job, and flexibility really is the key. I am finding that taking at least one day off per week for myself really is important and my congregation is very supportive of that.

8 How does your job affect your family life?

Mostly, the biggest effect is in the times and hours that I work. I am blessed to be married to another church worker who understands crazy hours, but our times "off" are not usually the same. I work weekends, when he is generally off, so we have to make it a special point to schedule time together. This works well for us but takes some extra effort.

Our "personal time" is also affected. Neither of our jobs get left at the office. We are both "on call" 24 hours a day, and the phone may ring at any time of the day or night regarding family emergencies, questions from parents, or kids that just need to talk. It definitely adds some challenges to the family experience, but I can also say that it has some great blessings as well.

9 In what ways are you able to help others as a DCE?

First and foremost, it is my goal to help youth and their families to grow in their relationships with God and with each other. One of the main ways this happens is that I strive to develop and foster trusting, loving relationships with them. I pray that my youth trust and confide in me with regard to issues ranging from faith to friendships.

Another important part of my ministry is that I serve as an resource for the families of our congregation. This happens through one-on-one counseling, providing parenting and family Bible study opportunities, as well as the development of programs to strengthen and edify family units.

10 And now a question for you...

Have you considered that God might be calling you to serve the church as a DCE?

Here are some steps you might take to help you answer that question.

- Talk to your congregation's pastor. He's there to give you the guidance and support that you need.
- Call the admissions offices at one of the colleges or universities of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for more information about the training it takes to be a DCE.
- Contact a DCE directly with your questions or thoughts by sending an e-mail to Angie at <dcenitz@kltymail.com>.
- Ask God to grant you guidance as you consider ways in which you can serve His church.

"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

~ 1 Corinthians 15:58