



ELCA Schools and Learning Centers

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For Immediate Release

**Gayle Denny Named Recipient of ELEA's
Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award**

CARBONDALE, ILLINOIS —September 9th, 2021 — ELEA is pleased to announce Gayle Denny as the 2021 recipient of the Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award. The Donald A. Vetter Award is a lifetime achievement award given to an individual who has exemplified the ideals of ELEA and of Lutheran education over a long period of time. The award is named after ELEA's founder and first Executive Director.

Ms. Denny retired as Executive Director of ELEA in 2019 following 20 years of dedicated leadership. Throughout those years she developed and sustained relationships vital to the success of the organization. One of these relationships was with Nancy Bond, founder and president of Nancy Bond Insurance Services and long-time supporter of the ELEA. According to Ms. Bond, "Gayle demonstrates "... a great love for the Lord, and family; and a personal warmth and spirit easily overlooked in humble supportiveness of others." When Ms. Bond learned about Donald A. Vetter award qualifications, she instantly saw how well this describes Gayle Denny.

Prior to her call to the leadership of the ELEA, Ms. Denny served at nearly every level in the field of education from in-home child care to a public school teacher, in addition to an early childhood center director and adjunct college faculty. Now retired, she continues to support and advocate for quality education programs at all levels.

The Rev. Dr. Mark Wilhelm of the ELCA Churchwide organization remarks that "Gayle has significantly influenced the affairs of both the ELCA and the nation, all for the benefit of children". Her work to strengthen, guide, enhance and develop the ELEA organization has been remarkable and put the association on a course for sustainability long after her retirement. As Rev. Dr. Wilhelm so eloquently says, "her reputation, a love of educating children, and a commitment to serve both Church and community [have earned her great] distinction"

"From the first ELEA board meeting Gayle attended when she was hired as Executive Director until the day she retired, 20 years later, Gayle LIVED ELEA with a servant's heart", writes Nancy Bond. We can all strive for that legacy.

Ms. Denny will be recognized at the Lutheran Education Convocation in October 2022 and presented formally with this award in Seattle, WA, in March of 2023.

Since 1988, the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association has served as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's professional educational association and now represents 1380+ early childhood programs throughout the nation, along with approximately 100 elementary and secondary schools. ELEA is also an active member of CAPE – the Council for American Private Education.