

“Lessons About Life” is a spiritual self-help book of modern-day parables. Through classroom vignettes, the author shines a spiritual light on everyday experiences and draws spiritual lessons from the mundane events of life. Put it beside your bed for a 5-minute inspiration before you drop off to sleep—a little boost along your spiritual journey!

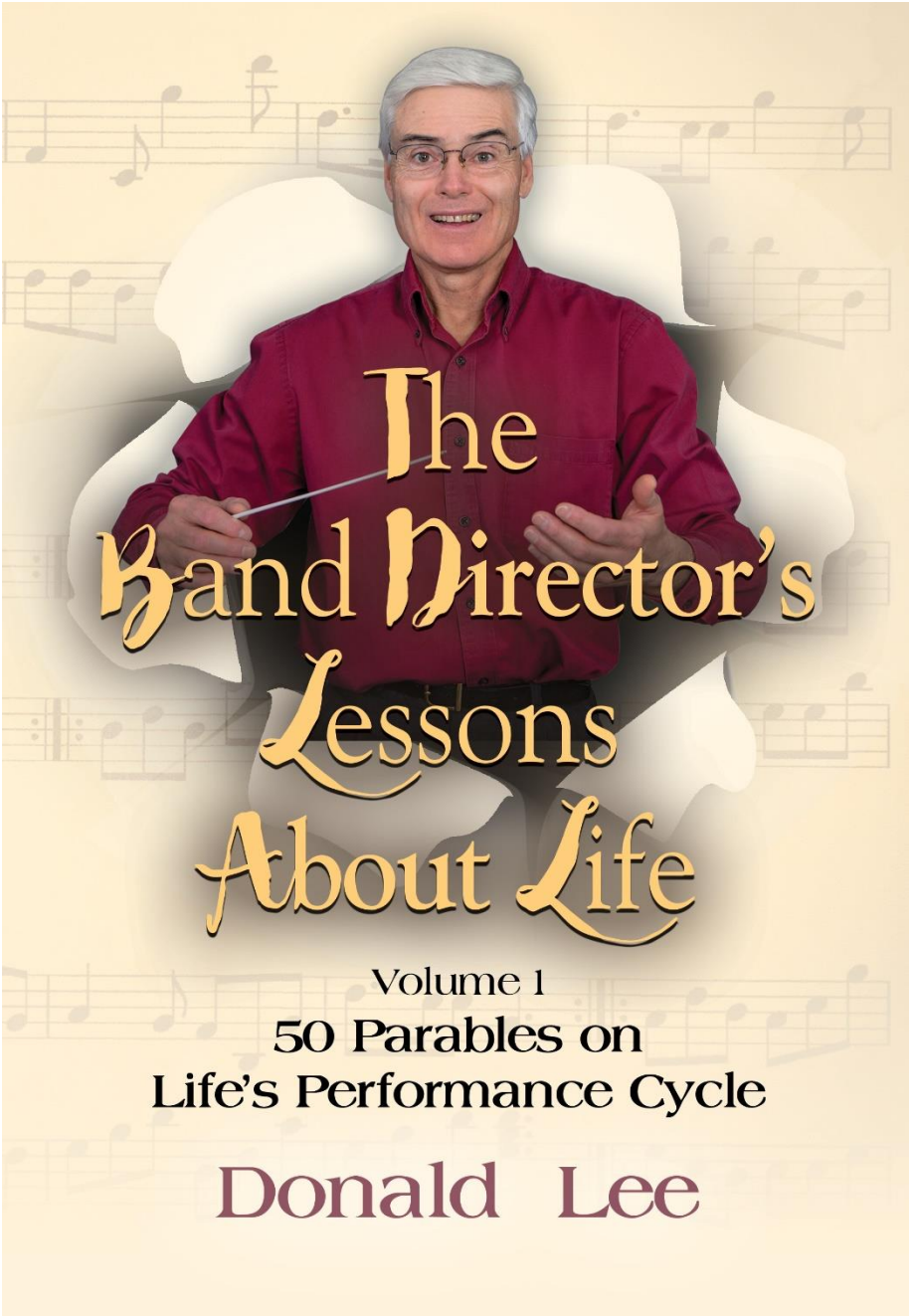
**The Band Director's
Lessons About Life Volume
Volume 1: 50
Parables on Life's Performance Cycle
by Donald Lee**

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Free Sample of "The Band Director's Lessons About Life"



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"Every chapter is a gem that helps one become a better person, a better student, and a better teacher. This was a thoroughly enjoyable read from cover to cover. I will recommend this work to all my music education students. Bravo Donald!"

Dr. Tom Dust
Professor - Secondary Music Education
University of Alberta

"'Every life has a story.' That was the byline for the A&E Series, *Biography*. Not only one story, but many. And skilled is the craftsman who knows how to tell a story well. Jesus had many of them. In this collection, we have a delightful trove of stories gathered by band teacher Donald Lee. In reading through these, I felt I was reading short stories by another favorite storyteller, Garrison Keillor. The way Donald weaves his stories, you feel like you've sat in his classes. The stories are about ordinary life situations, and each event concludes with a reflection—a moral. Everyday life events should all have morals, after all. As my own wise father often said, 'The day you don't learn something is a wasted day.'

If you pick up this collection, consider that you found a treasure. I do. It both entertains me and inspires me."

Archbishop Gerard Pettipas, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Grouard-McLennan

"I wish my kids had Donald Lee as a teacher. Someone who can incorporate life lessons into band classes really does impart 'life-long learning'. The stories made me laugh. The reflections

made me think. Reading his parables is like watching a musical – songs suddenly spring from nowhere. In this case, it's spiritual lessons that spring unexpectedly from mundane encounters. These lessons are for everyone."

Joanne Byfield,
Journalist, Radio Host, TV Producer

"What a wonderful experience this has been, editing Donald's book. He's the kind of author who makes me *LOVE* what I do. *Lessons About Life* is a well-written, insightful, inspiring work of art presented in a thoughtful, thoroughly enjoyable way. It's timely and highly applicable in today's world. I love his voice and feel I've gotten to know him as well as his message. What a privilege. Donald's students were blessed to have a teacher who genuinely cared about them and where they were headed, and now readers will reap the same benefit."

Michele Preisendorf, Editor with Eschler Editing

I've only read two books this year and I'm glad Donald's *Lessons About Life* was one them! I was truly moved by its powerful message. If you need a little boost in your life, this is the book for you.

Neil Wilkinson
Past President, Toastmasters International

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The Band Director's Lessons About Life

**Volume 1: 50 Parables on Life's
Performance Cycle**

Donald Lee

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ISBN paperback: 978-9992109-3-9

ISBN eBook: 978-1-9992109-4-6

ISBN AudioBook: 978-1-9992109-5-3

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lee, Donald

The Band Director's Lessons About Life - Volume 1: 50 Parables on Life's Performance Cycle by Donald Lee

SELF HELP: Spiritual | MIND, BODY, SPIRIT: Inspiration & Personal Growth | RELIGION: Inspirational

Library of Congress Control Number: to be inserted by BookLocker

Bible passages are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday, 1985.

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Peace,

Donald Lee

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Dedication

To Jesus,

My brother and yours – may each of us become more aware of
His presence among us until we meet again, face-to-face.

Free Sample

Introduction

Music is the language of the spirits.

KHALIL GIBRAN

(Early twentieth-century Lebanese-American writer, poet, artist)

"He hit me first, Mr. Lee!"

"I'm sure he did, Bradley. I believe you. But what did Jesus say about that?"

He didn't know. No one in the class seemed to know – or wouldn't admit it if they did. I gave them a hint.

"Remember the part where Jesus says, 'If someone hits you on one cheek'? Then what do you do?"

Some awkward squirming in desks but no response.

~

Welcome to my world—the world of a school band director. You might imagine that every moment of my life is just like the year-end concert, with all the lights and makeup and the students behaving their best and performing flawlessly. That would be as realistic as imagining that the airbrushed model in the magazine really looks like that when her husband arrives home from a business trip and she's been looking after the four kids by herself for a week. Life's not like that.

But the life of a schoolteacher *is* filled with teachable moments. Moments when the antics and drama of kids present a glimpse into eternity – when you realize the lesson isn't just about learning the alternate F-sharp fingering on

clarinet but about something eternal, something transcendent, something spiritual.

I started writing some of these moments down on paper. That's how it began. How did it end? Well, you're holding it in your hands. It gradually became a project, then a mission, then a book.

This is a spiritual book—a book of modern-day parables. It's filled with metaphors. In fact, the whole book is one big metaphor because music is a metaphor for life. As Khalil Gibran says in the opening quote, music really is the language of the spirits—our spirits. And how can we possibly understand spiritual things *except* through metaphor? The Master Teacher is famous for his metaphors—his parables. But nowadays it's a little hard for most of us to relate to searching for lost sheep in the hills or sowing wheat seeds by hand. This book has parables about kids in school. Everyone's been a kid. Everyone's been in a school of some sort. Everyone knows what music is. Everyone can relate to these stories. You might even see yourself in these parables. They are inspired by real events, as the Hollywood movies say, but the characters are essentially fictional. Names, dialogue, and events have been changed or created to suit the needs of the spiritual lessons. The characters might be your kids, or you as a kid. My wish for you is that you'll be drawn into these stories and, through them, see your own spiritual journey in a new light.

~

"You turn your head this way and let him hit you on the other cheek as well." I turned my head and pointed to my cheek.

"I'm not gonna do that!" Bradley declared defiantly.

The boy seemed emphatic and, to be honest, I quite agreed with him. But I had to play the teacher. He was doing a perfectly capable job of playing the child.

"The point is that beating somebody up or having them beat you up is not a very desirable way to solve a problem. So, what *is* the problem? What started this fight?"

"I just borrowed Kenny's pen, and he had a hissy-fit and hit me," Bradley said flippantly and, no doubt, one-sidedly.

"He took my pencil case. He's always taking my pencil case. He takes all my pens, and then I get in trouble for not having a pen in class!" Kenny gave an uncharacteristically concise description of the problem. It was almost a good enough reason for hitting Bradley.



I have organized this book to reflect the typical performance cycle of a band program. It's a metaphor for our cycle of spiritual growth in life. At the start of the school year, there's lots of *preparation* to be done: getting class lists, checking instruments, picking music, and setting goals for the various levels of bands. Then we get down to *practicing*: learning the skills, new notes, and all the things the kids will need to master before our first concert. All too soon the *performance* comes. It's a mixture of success and failure. Some things go well, some poorly. Afterward, we *reflect* on the performance and *redirect* our efforts to prepare better for the next concert. This is the performance cycle in band—preparation, practice, performance, followed by reflection and redirection.

It's a metaphor for all forms of growth in our life. I look at spiritual growth, which is the biggest reason we are here on this earth. Some people have no idea they are spiritual beings, some have an inkling about it, and some realize it completely. Wherever you fit in—this book is for you.

Spiritual development is an iterative process, just like the performance cycle in band. The more we make this process a

conscious one, the more we can control and direct our own spiritual growth and not just bounce reactively from one life crisis to another. This book uses the performance cycle in band as an analogy for life's performance cycle. Lessons from the classroom become lessons in the school of life.

~

"I see," I replied slowly, trying to buy time while I thought of an appropriate solution. Repeat and clarify – always a great tactic.

"So, Bradley, you needed a pen, and you took Kenny's pencil case without asking him. Then you took Kenny's pen, which Kenny needs for himself. It seems this is a recurrent pattern of behavior, as if you are taking advantage of Kenny or maybe even bullying him. And this behavior stems from your own lack of responsibility, because it is your responsibility to provide your own pens and pencils.

"Let me see . . . we have 'coveting our neighbor's pen.' That's what the tenth commandment talks about. We have 'you shall not steal' – that's the seventh commandment. We have 'you shall not kill' which, in its more general application, is an injunction against excessive violence toward our neighbor. And I'm sure there's something in the Bible about behaving responsibly. Have I understood the situation correctly, boys?"

Having thus flabbergasted them, neither was able to mount a coherent defense.

"Off the top of my head, I think there is ample material in this little encounter for both of you to write a wonderful reflective essay on the moral weaknesses both of you are demonstrating. Would that be a good resolution to this problem?"

Since the introduction of essay writing was still several years in these boys' futures, they naturally agreed, in more twelve-

year-old language, that such a punishment was excessive for their crime.

"I wonder if we can come up with a simpler solution to your problem. Can you boys think of anything?"



In the pages that follow, we might not actually be breaking up fights. But I hope you gain some insight into your own spiritual growth—how you can live your life more successfully, happily, and bring peace to those around you. At the very least, I think you'll enjoy the stories.

Parable 9

Blow Your Own Horn

Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.

(attribution unknown, often misattributed to Oscar Wilde)

"Alisha always gets to play the first-clarinet parts. It's not fair."

I was a bit taken aback. But I've noticed that teenagers tend to have a very personal, even selfish, sense of fairness.

"What do you think would be fair, Brenda?" I asked.

"Well . . . I think everyone should get a chance to play first clarinet," she stumbled out, not so defiantly this time.

"In this piece, the first clarinet part goes up to a high G. Can you reliably play a high G?" I challenged her, already knowing the answer.

"Uh, well . . ." She shuffled her feet and looked at them. "Not really."

"You see, Brenda, your skills are not yet up to the task. When they are up to the task, you will get a chance to do the task. That's how band works. That's how life works."

I addressed the whole class. "A musical ensemble, like a concert band, is a cooperative effort. Each of us adds our musical voice to create something beautiful that no one could create by themselves. Every part is needed, every part important. It's like the famous analogy St. Paul gave about the parts of the body (1 Co 12). All of your body parts are important. Your feet are essential, otherwise you couldn't walk. They are not less worthy because they are trod upon. It would be silly for your spleen to

say, 'I want to be a liver,' or for your adrenal gland to say, 'I want to be a thyroid gland.'

"Similarly in the band, every part is essential. It's natural and good to want to play first clarinet or first trumpet – they get the melody more often. Also, their role in the band carries some leadership responsibility. You should aspire to that. But all parts are needed. The third clarinet part completes the chords. Without them, there would be no harmony. Yes, the melody needs to dominate somewhat, but without harmony, most of the music is missing. And what is leadership if there is no one to lead? Only when there are second and third clarinet parts is there an opportunity for musical leadership in the first clarinet. Otherwise, all are equal, in unison.

"Some instruments get short shrift, like the bass drum. But the bass drum is not for dummies, and playing it does not imply 'dummyhood'. Sometimes we fall into the error of thinking it is, but it is a musical instrument that requires skill to play well, and it has an incredible effect on the sound of the band. The bass drum can easily make or break a performance.

"Whatever part you play, it is crucial to the whole band. Play your part with skill, with beauty, with pride, and with love. We need you.

"Also, each part, each instrument, and each player has its own timbre or tone – its own unique style of expression.

"I remember my own high school jazz band when I was a student. I played lead alto sax, and our tenor sax player wasn't all that great. Francine had a quirky personality, and most of us made fun of her behind her back (kids are like that). She wasn't a confident player and seemed to constantly have, not a vibrato but, a sort of a nervous waver in her tone. She had a big solo in one of our pop tunes, and I was always bothered by that nervous waver. But at the same time, it gave the performance an

unmistakable innocence, a vulnerability, like the uncertain delicateness of a first kiss."

There was lots of giggling and snickering. It's hard to imagine your sixty-year-old band director's first kiss.

"I've heard professional recordings of that song, but none could capture that innocent quivering of Francine's unsteady amateurness. We don't have to be great. We don't have to be like everybody else. Not only is it okay to be ourselves, it's perfect to be ourselves. We just have to be the

Not only is it okay to be ourselves, it's perfect to be ourselves.

best us we can be."

That was enough for my mini homily. The students were fidgeting, and I was out of ideas, so I raised my baton and said, "Let's play!"

Reflection

Life's like that. Every one of us is important. No one is redundant. Every single person is here for a reason, even if we don't yet know what that reason is. You have a part to play that no one else in the world can play—not the way you play it, nervous quivering and all. You're it, baby. Don't quit. Without you, the music just isn't right.

Whoever you are, however insignificant you think you are, you are a unique manifestation of the Divine in this material world—an individualized piece of God. You are here for an important purpose. No one else has your tone. Only you can complete the "chords" to make the right harmony with those around you. "You are the light of the world," (Mt 5:14). Only you can bring the Light into this world the way you do.

You are a unique manifestation of the Divine in this material world.

Free Sample of "The Band Director's Lessons About Life"

So hang in there, baby, and blow your own horn, because nobody else can play it quite the way you do!

You are a unique manifestation of the Divine. Let your unique sound resonate.

Parable 19

Have Fun!

The most wasted of all days is one without laughter.

NICOLAS CHAMFORT

(Eighteenth-century French writer)

"Mr. Lee, you're not really going to dress up, are you?" Sharon sounded terrified.

"Of course! It'll be great fun," I confirmed.

"I'll be so embarrassed I won't be able to play," she said.

The senior band was working on a medley of tunes from *Star Wars* for an upcoming performance at an elementary school. With my plastic Walmart lightsaber and my "costume," I was supposed to look like a Jedi Knight, but I really looked more like an Ewok. It was an old shepherd's costume from the nativity pageants my wife used to stage on our front lawn. We had a bunch of them that came from the church—old altar-server outfits the parish was throwing out. My wife wouldn't let them be thrown away—she invented recycling. She was into "re-use" when we still called it "refuse."

So, looking like a recycled Ewok and brandishing a plastic lightsaber as a conducting baton, I was all set to motivate the elementary school kids to join band. Conducting with a lightsaber is a bit like doing open-heart surgery with a splitting ax—some of the finesse is lost. But my silly antics would take the little kids' minds off their task of being critical listeners.

My band students realized they couldn't make me "normal," but they tried to gently bring me around to their way of thinking.

"Mr. Lee, I think the music would sound just as good without the costume," Alfie offered.

"Yeah, it's really about the music. Isn't that what you always tell us?" chimed in Wendy.

"Nice try, guys. Our goal is to inspire the younger kids to join band when they come to Glenmary School. We want them to know how much fun it is! It's fun, right?"

Cue the muffled sounds of forced consent. For a hard-nosed, "take the music seriously" band director like me, it's hard to find the right work/play balance. When I want to work, the students think I'm too hard. When I want to play, they think I'm ridiculous. But I boldly forged ahead with that old "damn the torpedoes" attitude.

Our concert for the elementary school went well. I had the elementary music teacher introduce the *Star Wars* piece while I ducked into a closet to transform myself into a Jedi/Ewok. Then I burst forth into the gym with my lightsaber buzzing, *whooaaum, whooaauum*, and waved it threateningly at the startled kindergarteners in the front row. They were properly awed. The older kids at the back of the gym stood up to get a better view.

After building the "shock and awe" a bit too long, I turned to the band and started them on the unmistakable "Dah daaah, da-da-da dah daaah." Once the band got started, I left them to demonstrate their musical independence while I wandered around the gym some more – trying to act cool and menacing in my Jedi Knight "I've got the lightsaber and you don't" costume.

Sometimes you just need to have a little fun – and bring joy to those around you. Many of those kids remembered it. Even years later, kids would occasionally come up to me at odd places around town and say, "You're the music teacher. You came to our

Sometimes you just need to have a little fun – and bring joy to those around you.

school and played *Star Wars*." Naturally, the band students themselves had good memories of it all. It's the same way we nostalgically look back and laugh at things that infuriated us, even hurt us, years ago. It really *was* fun at the time—we just needed the distance of years to appreciate the humor of it.

Reflection

Most kids are too cool to be joyful, and most adults are too serious. A few old people become frivolous again because, what the heck, at our age we can get away with it. But most have forgotten how to be joyful—or think it's undignified. In truth, joy is the sign of God's presence. When you are filled with Love—immersed in the Consciousness of Love—you are just so happy you can't contain it. It overflows from you and touches all you

We are joyful not because our lives are perfect but because it is a state of consciousness we choose to cultivate.

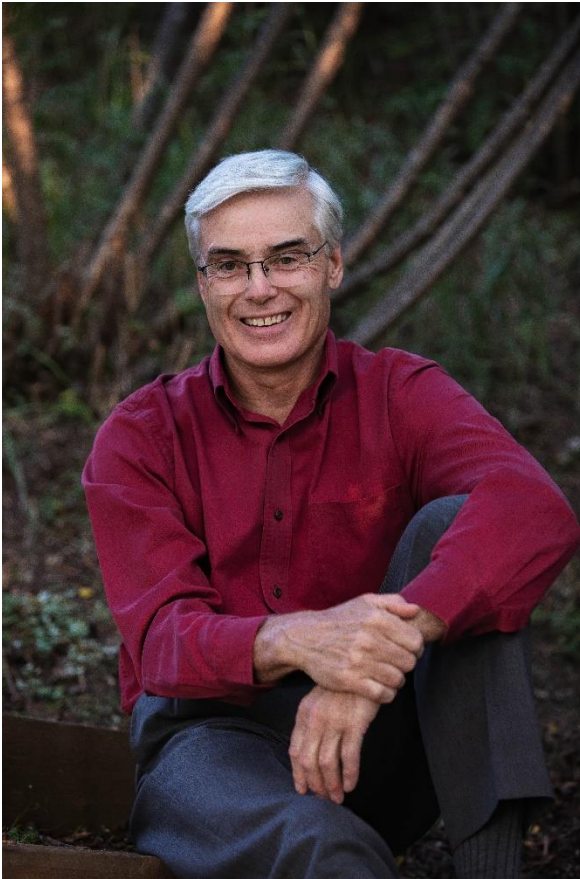
meet. Complete joy. That's what Jesus wants for us. He said, "I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete" (Jn 15:11).

When we are joyful, everything in our spirit, mind, and body works better. Research tells us that when we are joyful, we are relaxed, our minds learn better, we perform tasks better, we are more creative, we are more connected to others, and our bodies function better. The list goes on and on. Joy should be our natural state.

We are joyful regardless of the constant tragedies in our lives and in the world. We are joyful not because our lives are perfect but because it is a state of consciousness we choose to cultivate. You don't need a lightsaber and a silly costume, but then again, it might not hurt.

Joy is a sign of God's presence. Allow joy to fill your life.

About the Author



The eclectic Donald is a true Lee Renaissance man: musician, teacher, band director, economist, power engineer, marketer, businessman, athlete, public speaker, and author. He holds degrees in economics and education, has performed professionally as a musician, was a finalist in the 1995 World Championship of Public Speaking, was a member of the 2013 Canadian Triathlon Team, and has taught band in several Alberta

communities as well as in international schools in Kuwait and Pakistan.

Donald Lee is an Albertan, growing in Fort Saskatchewan and raising his family there – four children, seven grandchildren. He has always been active in his community. Donald was one of the founders of the Fort Saskatchewan Community Band, played whatever instrument was most needed, and also served as conductor for a time. He formed the Fort Saskatchewan Christian Children's Choir, has directed church choirs, and has performed as a soloist and in many area bands, orchestras and choirs.

Donald spent two decades in the fertilizer business, working his way up with a local manufacturer as: labourer, chemical process operator, marketer, and in product and market development with the research group.

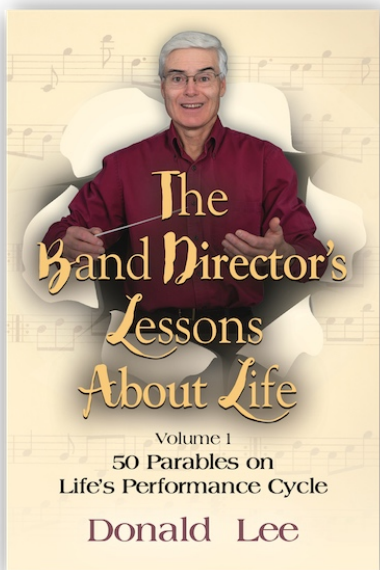
He made a mid-life career change to return to his first love – music. He finished a second degree in Education and has now spent almost two decades in that business, teaching in various Alberta schools and also overseas. Mostly, Donald is a band director, but he's also taught choir, musical theatre, jazz band, English, Math, Drama, Social Studies, even Art and Carpentry!

Donald has continually been active his church and in the of the Knights of Columbus. He has taken an active part in the political process, in coaching various sports, and in many community organizations such as Toastmasters. Donald has always been an avid sportsman and athlete: skiing, swimming, running, hiking, canoeing, fishing, and hunting in the great Alberta outdoors.

As a band director and a religion teacher, Donald Lee melds the two teaching genres to bring the "life of the spirit" truly to life in stories. Inspired by his teaching experience, Donald turns classroom episodes into modern-day parables that teach eternal truths.

Added to his own convoluted, life-long spiritual quest, Donald draws on his many years of teaching religion classes in Catholic schools - everything from A to Z - the Apostle's Creed to Zen Buddhism. Following humbly in the steps of Jesus, Donald picks up the pedagogy of the parable to instruct through story.

Donald recently retired from teaching to work full-time on his new career as a writer and speaker. He currently makes his home in Peace River, Alberta, Canada. You can visit his website at www.ComingHomeSpirit.com.



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