

Friendship Ablaze!

Section 6

Children's Ministries
and
Lutheran Schools

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Children's Ministry *Ablaze!*

Many congregations successfully engage unchurched families through ministries that reach out first to children and then, through the children, to the adults. These suggestions can enhance your ministry to families with small children.

DO

1. Pray that the lost in your community might visit your congregation.
2. Make sure your nursery has visible signage and is available during events that attract visitors. Publicize Nursery availability when inviting the community to functions.
3. Develop a Nursery policy book. Are there always two adults present? Do you do background checks? Do you have a sign-in routine? Are pagers available to notify parents of a crying child?
4. Talk with parents who are visiting. Have a colorful brochure available to show them the ministries available to their children and to them.
5. Have a resource section for parents with resources that are accessible, current and easy to use.
6. Consider ways children can be active participants in worship. Children's bulletins, children's messages and children singing in church are a few common methods.
7. Recruit workers who like to be around children. Train them to understand the importance of their role. Remind Sunday School teachers, VBS workers and the like that they aren't just teaching for a week, but could be God's tool for bringing the Gospel to a family.
8. Prepare book bags with soft toys and books related to a Bible Story to help children sit quietly through worship. Put them near the church entrance and make sure the ushers know what the resource is and the purpose behind it. Children can take a packet at the beginning and return it at the conclusion of worship. Assign a volunteer to repair and replace materials as needed.
9. When developing an Early Childhood Center, know and follow state guidelines. Hire a competent teacher and director who understands the ministry implications of Early Childhood education.

10. Have an Early Childhood facility known for excellence. Safety is an issue for today's parents, so use technology to show you care. (i.e. punch pads for building entrance, computer program to track fees and pickup, etc.) Consider having a child-friendly building with lower counters and facilities and one-way glass in the hallway so parents can observe unnoticed by their child. Determine developmentally-appropriate activities for each age group.
11. Publicize church activities in community places where children gather.
12. Be friendly and talk with visitors. Arrange for children to help visiting children find their room and introduce them to their class.
13. Have a program aimed at young mothers. Programs such as MOPS, in which babysitting is provided and mothers can relax and develop relationships with other mothers, provide great support.

DON'T

1. Don't assume visitors with children know what is available and where it is located. Accompany them to their destination and describe opportunities that might interest them.
2. Don't rush families into a commitment to your church. Pray for and with them, talk with them and develop an ongoing relationship so that they see Jesus in you and know Him by getting to know you.
3. Don't force parents to attend an event with no option if their child should act age-appropriately and cry. Staff a nursery or provide childcare if you wish to develop relationships with visitors with small children.
4. Don't give the impression children are not wanted. Consider your wording about your nursery's availability and remind congregation members it is okay to have some noise from children in church.
5. Don't stop inviting non-member families to appropriate church events. Develop a database that can record contact and follow-up with visiting families.
6. Don't forget to introduce them to the pastor, principal or Early Childhood Director. These people can expand their awareness of ministry opportunities that could meet the needs of their families.



7. Don't underestimate the power of older members to encourage young parents and remind them that they can survive the stresses of parenting young children. Invite non-members to work on events with your older members where they can develop this relationship. Many young parents feel all alone even in the most crowded situation.

8. Don't be afraid of those who have different skin color, clothing or religious background. Instead, try to learn something about them and relate your faith in a culturally-sensitive manner.

Why a Lutheran School?

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has a strong tradition of excellence in education. We have operated schools for over 140 years and we continue to be known for our excellent academic and spiritual opportunities for students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which measures a variety of school systems in a variety of subjects, shared these 2004 results:

- Lutheran Schools were ranked first in Science in 4th, 8th and 12th grade.
- Lutheran Schools were first in Reading in 4th and 8th grade. (No data collected for 12th grade.)
- Lutheran Schools were second in math at the 4th, 8th and 12th grade level.

According to statistics provided by the LCMS Office of School Ministry, 16% of the children in our schools are unchurched. We have a wonderful opportunity, through the working of the Holy Spirit, to see faith grow and develop in children. The time spent in a Lutheran classroom by the average student who attends a Lutheran School from preschool through eighth grade is the equivalent of 265 years of Sunday worship.

Our excellence in education may allow us the opportunity to share Christ with a family in an environment that is prolonged and allows for relational interaction over the course of several years. Lutheran Schools thus are already at the forefront of mission outreach and need to be continually encouraged to carry out the Great Commission. A passport is not needed to reach the people you witness to at a Lutheran School. They come to you asking that you share that message as part of a quality academic experience.

Outreach is an attitude; an attitude that reflects a message so important we have to share it with you; a message so important that it has changed how we live; a message so important that you should be able to see it in our actions.

Characteristics of a mission-minded congregation and school:

- Compassion for the lost!
- People, not programs
- Common vision
- Team ministry
- Involved faith community

We are called to “sow seeds.” Often, what we teach about Jesus is revisited when children reach adulthood and have their own children. We don’t know the impact of our words and deeds but know that we must give a constant witness. We are invited to bring the church to people, not people to the church. Our churches and schools should be welcoming, invitational and exceptional.

Lutheran Schools Sharing Jesus

Lutheran Schools face many challenges today. Funding, enrollment, safety and parental expectations are only a few of the challenges principals, teachers and Boards of Education must address. However, we often don't spend a comparable amount of time discussing our primary mission, which is "How do we share Christ with those who don't yet know Him?" The following ideas seek to address that question and challenge today's Lutheran school to better address ways of carrying out their primary mission.

- How prepared are you? We spend much of August preparing rooms, grade books and bulletin boards but how much time do we spend in preparation for witnessing and caring for unchurched families? Consider training staff and faculty in effective witnessing techniques. Discuss what impact God has, through a Lutheran teacher, on families who don't yet know Him. Do your pastors or other leaders train both experienced and inexperienced teachers in reaching out to hurting families? Do your teachers know what resources are available in both the geographic community and congregational community to assist families in a variety of issues? Are we encouraged to pray for the hurting? Does each teacher get a list of students to pray for every day? Does the church pray for school families on Sunday? Do school classrooms pray for church families every day?
- Discuss the importance of custodians, cooks, secretaries and aides greeting visitors with a smile. The Lutheran school that is visitor friendly intentionally plans to be that way by training people to share a smile and spend time with visitors. People always come before tasks, so therefore the investment of time in walking with a first-time visitor to the office should be encouraged as a better alternative than pointing them in the right direction.
- Lutheran Schools that effectively welcome visitors have well marked entrances and signage that welcomes and encourages a visit to the office rather than threatening visitors to come there. Compare "Stop! All visitors must report to the office before proceeding further!" to "Welcome to our school! We are so glad that you are here! We do ask that all visitors please sign in at the office upon entering so we may properly greet you!" Easy access to parking can be possible if staff and faculty park in the far corners of the lot and leave spots up front open for visitors. This is especially appreciated by those with small children.
- The principal and teachers share their personal faith. "Our Father" does not reflect an impersonal God but instead one who knows us as His children. Is there an opportunity in chapel, devotions, church or Bible Class to share with others my spiritual relationship and journey? When God delivered the covenant to Moses, He said "I am the Lord *your* God." (Ex. 20:2)

- Do our congregations know and understand that the mission of the school is indeed the mission of the church? When discussing this mission, is it a “given” that they are united? The church and the school are not divided; instead, the school is a subset of the larger group, the church.
- Do we invite and welcome the community into our facilities and make sure it is accessible to them? Can the community use our fellowship hall for Rotary or Civic meetings? Is our gym available to the YMCA basketball league? Can baby showers or birthday parties take place in the basement? Consider inviting the local music teacher to use your gym for a recital or the local Jaycees to meet in your cafeteria. Does the senior group have access to your fellowship hall?
- Does our Lutheran School get out into the community? Do students and families have service opportunities that take them into places where Jesus is always found but not always visible? Help others see the visible Jesus by visiting and serving in senior citizen’s homes, homeless shelters, Habitat for Humanity projects, or caroling in malls and shopping centers.
- Celebrate faith milestones! Use weekly chapel services to commemorate baptismal birthdays. Send a wedding anniversary card from the teacher and principal to parents. On a baby’s baptism, give the family a T-shirt marking their child’s entry into the faith family at your school in the class of 2019. If possible, video tape baptisms and present the tape as a gift to families from your congregation. (from Our Savior, Lansing, Michigan)
- View your school as a mission outpost. Constantly discuss the needs of the community that surrounds you. Encourage prayer that those involved in your school might have missionary eyes and hearts to see opportunities to share Jesus. Publicize the impact God has had on those in your ministry by having them tell their story. Share those stories with those who provide financial support so they see the impact and power of the Word. Be sensitive to cultural issues that can be included in educational experiences and provide a bridge for ministry rather than a barrier for understanding. Invite community leaders into your building to see the great things occurring and to make you aware of other opportunities you might use to impact the neighborhood you share.
- Identify 3-5 talking points that everyone from principal to parent can share with visitors. This common language helps your school community make the best use of “word of mouth” marketing and allows the same message to consistently flow to all who interact with those in your school. Develop a flow chart (see page 6-11) for handling school admissions. The chart contains, when, who, how and what will be shared at regular intervals. This follow-up should be personalized to each specific family and reflect a Christ-centered caring for their educational choices.

- Involve children in the worship life of the congregation but also invite congregation members to share in the school life of families. Imagine the impact a congregation member with no children in the school can have when they sit next to a visiting family at a basketball game or band concert. Imagine the impact of hearing about the congregation from a member who attends their child's function. Invite intermingling of school and church families.
- Tell your community you appreciate the noise and traffic they endure because of your Lutheran School. Guardian Lutheran Church in Dearborn, Michigan, offers free strawberry shortcakes and a concert to their neighborhood on a summer weekend. This nice gesture says thank you in a way they can see and taste.
- Instead of hosting an open house by itself, tie an open house into a school event. Invite your community to your band concert, play, talent show or other event to help them see what is happening in your school. After the event, have a separate time with visitors where more information can be shared. Everyday at a Lutheran School is really an "open house." Therefore strive for excellence in all aspects but especially be aware of the impact your normal day can have on those who know little, if anything, about your school.

How to be Visitor Friendly

1. Teach staff the importance of being friendly. Many people need to be trained on why this is important. The importance to visitors of a smile, eye contact and a warm greeting is often overlooked. Discuss with your staff both the “why” and the “how” of being friendly.
2. The principal greets students and parents in the morning. Role modeling for staff begins with the most visible leader. A climate of friendliness grows when followers see the leader demonstrating the behavior.
3. Staff greet families. As students arrive, teachers need to be accessible for greeting families. If teachers are absorbed in the details of the day, little greeting can occur. Train students to follow a routine of “board work” so the teacher has a few minutes to greet families and become aware of opportunities for ministry.
4. Review the message your signage gives visitors. Strive to make it open and friendly instead of threatening or challenging. We often have good-intentioned signage that is practical but not friendly. Many adults start with a negative view of school that is only reinforced by our wording. Decide what message you hope to convey and evaluate whether or not it is successful.
5. Have brightly colored hallways with either Christian murals or student work visible. Your first impression matters. Can visitors see your Christian message or is it hidden away? Do your hallways let them know joy is found here or do they convey another message?
6. Leave the closest parking accessible to families with small children. Remind staff and regular volunteers that walking is healthy and encourage them to park a little further away, thereby benefiting those with the least knowledge of your faith family. Once again, train your staff and member parents as to the why and how of helping visitors with young children. Close, accessible parking is appreciated when bringing in students, diaper bags and younger siblings.
7. Have colorful brochures available for those seeking information. The print message you send is a reminder of what they experienced. A Christian message that speaks of quality education is best enhanced by a quality Christian brochure.
8. Plan and utilize a coordinated follow-up contact for visitors. Place a responsible person in charge of visitor follow-up. Have them follow a written plan that includes both the type

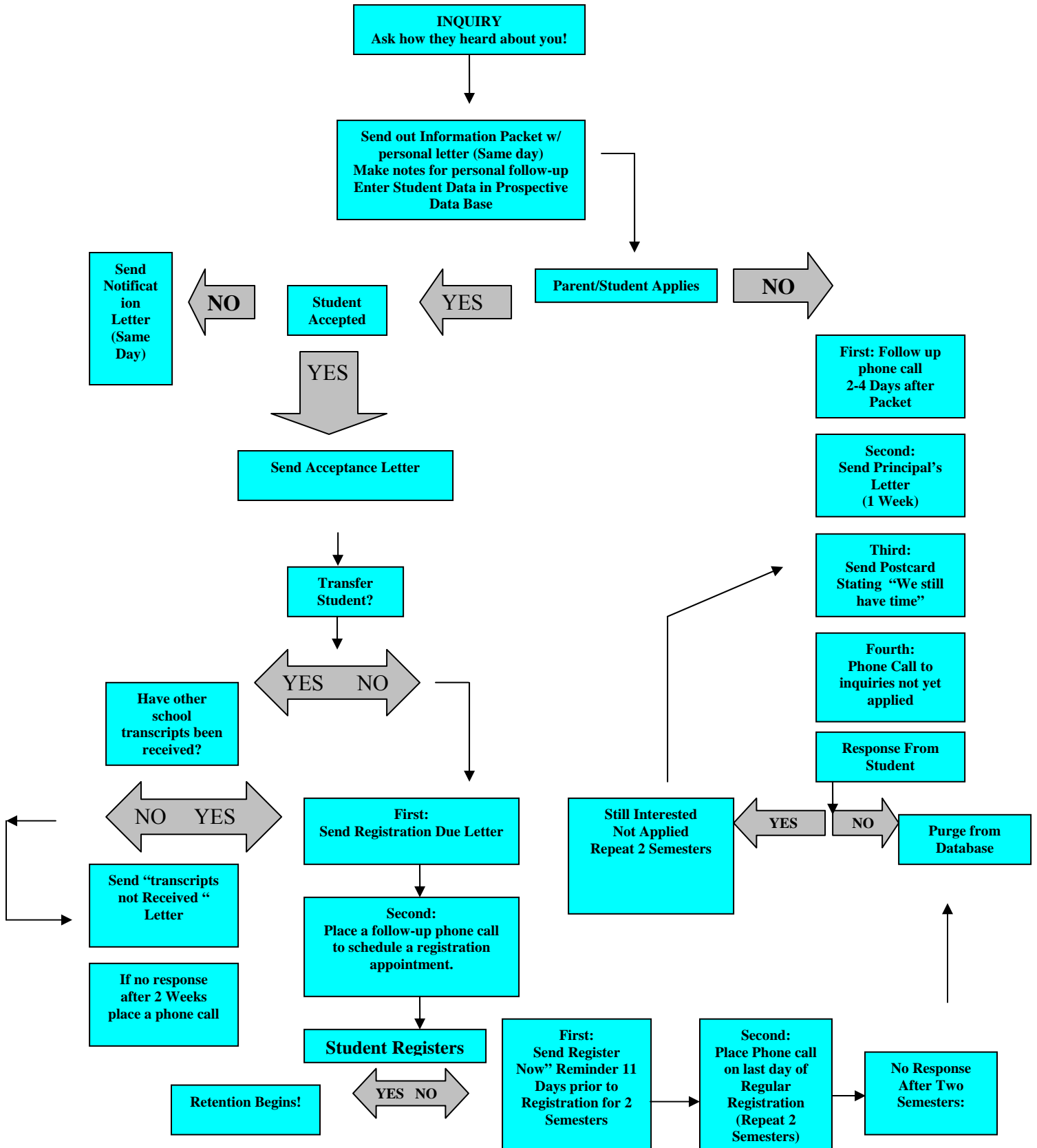
of follow-up (letter, call, visit) and the intended purpose of the follow-up. Some schools are designating this to an Admissions Officer or Registrar who works with the principal to enhance the enrollment process for new families.

9. Prominently post your mission statement. If you want people to know what you stand for, in addition to demonstrating it, allow them to see it and determine if it is effectively lived out through their experience. “Accountability” looms large if it is a visible promise.
10. Post pictures of students serving others and the community. Service is a major part of our Christian life. Help visitors see this by what we place in our hallways. Remind parents we are striving not only for academically trained students, but also for young people who will provide Christian leadership through service to their community. We educate the whole child!
11. Recognize positive features of your school in the hallway; for example, student behavior, academic achievement, service, church and Sunday School attendance, academic honor roll, athletics, music, and alumni. Lutherans are often humble people. But it is okay to state that we seek excellence and then recognize those whom God has blessed with the ability to achieve that excellence. Nothing tells a visiting parent more about your school than what the past and current students have accomplished there.
12. Post staff pictures and names in a prominent place. Help new families or visitors identify the most important part of your school, the people God has placed there. Encourage communication with staff and interaction with visitors. Introduce visitors to the teacher who will teach their child even if they are not certain about enrollment.
13. Have a clean building. Excellence and healthy conditions go hand in hand.
14. Make repairs in a timely manner. Develop a procedure for eliminating building problems quickly. You can apologize only so often for a building issue that should be addressed. Invite visitors back to see that maintenance and repairs do occur.
15. Encourage students or families to take visitors on tours. Train them to do this properly. Let your families describe the wonderful things God is doing at your school. You **have** to say good things, but they don’t. This becomes a wonderful opportunity to mentor your new families with a family that understands and appreciates your mission.
16. Pastor is visible and knows children by name. Nothing speaks a caring spiritual atmosphere like a pastor who greets and is greeted by children and families as they walk around your school.

Visitor Flow Chart

The flow chart on the following page suggests a method of insuring that all inquires and contacts are followed through.

Visitor Flow Chart



How Schools Impact Non-members

Lutheran Early Childhood Centers and schools have a two-fold mission: to make new disciples and to equip existing disciples. In 1993, Dr. Peter Becker of Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois, studied the different rationales given by non-member parents for joining a congregation. His study had the following conclusions:

Negative Impact on Non-Members

Parents were not likely to join a church where a philosophical debate was simmering about the school ministry. Terms of division like us vs. them or church vs. school did not promote or teach the “unity” of spirit mentioned in scripture and often left non-members confused about our message.

Parents were less likely to join a conflicted church. Conflicts between leaders (pastor/principal), workers or parents were often noticed and sadly stood out as contrary to the message of forgiveness and reconciliation we teach.

Membership is a gradual process that should not be rushed. Parents felt they should be invited to learn more rather than being mandated to join something they do not totally understand.

Positive Impact on Non-Members

Parents were more likely to join a church when they felt that the Principal or Director of Early Childhood was competent and when they had a positive impression of the teacher’s personality and the classroom climate.

Parents were more likely to join a church with a visible and friendly pastoral staff. Pastors or other staff who could provide spiritual assistance in family times of crisis made a big difference.

High expectations for academic and developmental excellence were necessary. Non-members did not want to pay for a mediocre program.

The congregation provided programs for other family members, such as activities for teenagers and parenting classes.

Parents were more likely to join if their involvement was encouraged and they were able to meet congregation members through this involvement. Non-members appreciate communication about church events and opportunities available to them.

Warm interpersonal relationships are the best way to encourage church membership. Sometimes, we are the first and only Bible some people will read. Care for them, pray with them and discuss with them your personal faith and Savior.

Lutheran Teachers Ministering to Muslims/Hindus/Sikhs

As American culture has become more diverse, so have our Lutheran Schools. When we have opportunity to minister to families from a different religious or geographic background, we often are uncertain how to proceed. The following suggestions may help Christians witness their faith to these diverse groups. Another resource is POBLO, People of the Book Lutheran Outreach, www.poblo.org, an LCMS mission society focused on “Sharing Jesus” with Muslims, Hindus and other ethnic groups.

DO

1. A warm, sincere greeting by a teacher is very important. Parents regard a personal greeting from the principal as an honor at school functions. A handshake means a lot.
2. Always be respectful in personal interactions.
3. Learn about their religion. It helps to know the basic tenets of Islam. Some Sikhs are vegetarians, while others are not. Pork is forbidden by some religions, while others prefer lamb or pork instead of beef. Understanding the dietary concerns in advance can help you address them positively and plan for them. Muslims are forbidden to eat pork and drink alcohol. Refrain from even talking about drinking alcohol.
4. Explain that American culture and Christian culture are not identical. Many people hear that America is a Christian country and they wonder why things their religion prohibits (pornography, abortion) exist in our Christian society. We need to explain that many of those things are counter to our religion and also cause us offense.
5. Avoid discussing politics.
6. Offer personal invitations to your home or church events.
7. Share your personal testimony of faith.
8. Use the Word of God as much as possible. Talk about Jesus.
9. Offer them literature to read about our beliefs.

10. Use common English language terms.
11. Discuss original sin as the reason why God had to send His Son to save us by grace. (Otherwise, they cannot understand why God would sacrifice His Son for us.)
12. Encourage them to ask questions and then attempt to answer them honestly. Know what you believe! Have some print resources available to share.

DON'T

1. Don't treat the Bible (God's Holy Word) disrespectfully.
2. Don't denounce other religions.
3. Don't speak negatively of Muhammad.
4. Don't use the term Son of God for Jesus unless you explain it first.
5. Don't bring your dog into the place where you are inviting a Muslim.
6. Don't forget that family is very important.

Sharing the Faith as a Lutheran Public School Teacher

Lutheran public school teachers suggest the following ways to share faith while teaching in our public school system:

- † Always pray for students and families, especially when they are in crisis.
- † Habitually use God-related speech; for example, say “God Bless You” when a student sneezes.
- † When teaching history, note people and events that relate to Christian teachings, such as Abraham Lincoln’s view on post Civil War reconciliation, the Constitution’s references to God, etc.
- † Wear seasonal accessories that accent the church calendar. During Lent wear a nail on a cord, during Advent wear an angel, etc.
- † When discussing classroom policies early in the year, set high standards and explain your philosophy as to why these rules exist. (i.e. language in the room)
- † Encourage and promote kindness, compassion, and sharing by establishing a way to recognize and reward those behaviors.
- † Look at current topics in your school district, (i.e. Gay-Straight club) and discuss your view on schools not promoting any sexual activity instead of a particular form of activity.
- † Invite congregation members with interesting careers to speak to your students about their career and how their faith plays into it. Vocational education is encouraged, so invite a Christian to participate. Pray that as students ask questions, God would provide opportunities for the speakers to share their faith.
- † Post pictures on your walls from congregation mission trips. If you go on trips, put pictures into classroom presentations, thus opening the door to discuss where you went and what you did. (i.e. geography class)

Directory of Welcoming Schools

These Lutheran Schools are known for welcoming their community into their school. They can share with you how they developed this welcoming attitude. The table is arranged alphabetically by state, then city.

School Name	Location	Administrator	Phone Contact
Shepherd of the Desert	Arizona, Scottsdale	Paul Brandt	480.585.8007
Mt. Zion	Colorado, Boulder	Cheryl Crabbs	303.433.4151
St. John's	Colorado, Denver	Ken Palmreuter	303.733.3777
St. John's	Delaware, Dover	Dina Vendetti	www.stjohnsdover.com
Zion	Illinois, Marengo	William Steltenpohl	615.568.5156
Trinity Lutheran	Indiana, Crown Point	Carol Hubacek	219.663.1586
Bethlehem Christian	Maryland, Baltimore	Alice Moore	410.488.8963
St. Paul's	Maryland, Glen Burnie	Ruth Colross	www.stpaulsgb.org
Ascension	Maryland, Landover Hills	Jack Bartels	www.ascensionschool.org
St. Paul's	Maryland, Kingsville	Tom Kolb	www.stpaulskingsville.org
Our World for Children	Michigan, Battle Creek	Lindsey Schuemann	269.964.0401
Trinity Lutheran Early Childhood Center	Michigan, Clinton Twnshp	Judy Williams	586.463.8803
Lutheran North H.S.	Michigan, Macomb	Steve Buuck	586.781.9151
Peace	Michigan, Saginaw	Gary Campbell	989.792.2581
St. Matthew	Michigan, Walled Lake	Susan Palka	248.624.7677
Mission	New Mexico, Las Cruces	Jeni Raess	505.532.5489
St. Stephens	North Carolina, Hickory	Jonathan Guetzow	www.sslwarriors.org
Hope Preschool	North Carolina, Wake Forest	Regina Fisher	www.hopelutheranwf.org
Sioux Falls Association	South Dakota, Sioux Falls	Rodney Lenz	605.335.1923
Shepherd of the Hills	Texas, San Antonio	Susan Gary	210.614.3741
Open Arms Christian Child Dev. Center	Virginia, Ashburn	Lori Snyder	www.oswlc.org
Prince of Peace	Virginia, Springfield	Cina Deaton	www.poplc.org

PowerPoint Presentation

Evangelism in Lutheran Schools

The following pages show the slides in this presentation. The actual presentation is available for free download at www.friendshipablaze.org.



EVANGELISM IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

'Lutheran schools share Christ'

Issues:

- Some congregations appear to operate with the idea that Lutheran schools are primarily for Lutherans.
- Lutheran schools that enroll nonmember children frequently do so to increase tuition income.
- Although approximately 50 percent of the enrollment in Lutheran schools is from nonmember families, few congregations have programs to assimilate students and their parents into the life of the school and congregation.
- Further study reveals that Lutheran schools with ineffective evangelism programs are often operated by congregations that also lack strong, outreach-focused mission statements.

Conclusion

- We have moved away from being a school of the parish to being a school of parents. This is based on the national average that over 50% of students in our schools are from non member parents.

Philosophy Statement

- Evangelism is a corporate responsibility of the whole congregation, not just full-time church workers or evangelism committees. Reaching out with the Gospel of Christ through the Lutheran school can be a vital strategy for achieving this part of the whole congregation's mission.

COMMUNITY LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

In addition to the elementary and secondary schools that remain the heart of Lutheran education, two relatively new agencies are providing great opportunities for sharing Christ by congregations.



Early Childhood Centers

- Early Childhood centers have grown at the rate of approximately 10 percent per year. Early childhood centers enroll a high percentage of nonmember children. There are more early childhood centers not affiliated with elementary schools than there are elementary schools. Approximately 85 percent of the children come from nonmember homes. Children from unchurched homes account for 19 percent of the enrollment in a typical early childhood center.



Day Care Programs

- Day care is in great demand. They either provide care of young children all day long or supervision and programs for school-age children before and after school. These programs answer a great need in a society in which both parents frequently are employed outside the home.



Your Challenge!!

- Effective Lutheran schools of the 21st century will reach out to all segments of the community for school membership.



Ideas that Work (Marketing)

1. Maintaining an attractive school building and grounds is a key factor in the recruitment of students and parents.
2. Placing an attractive sign on your school grounds. Also, the use of a "message" sign.
3. Develop several attractive brochures, fliers, door hangers, etc.

Marketing continued

- 4. Develop a plan for using community publications to tell the story of your school and express your interest in the community.
- 5. Develop a mailing list of people in your community and particularly in your target groups.
- 6. Advertising via billboards, placing ads in local publications, and posters in conspicuous places.

Marketing Continued

- 7. Identify the many ways in which your congregation and its school can express its interest in the community.
- 8. How your school facilities can serve the community or groups in it.
- 9. Invite parents in your target groups to special events and activities. Recognize and welcome them.

Marketing Continued

- 10. Participate in parades, holiday events, or other special community events.
- 11. Tell good news stories about students and their achievements.
- 12. Help students and parents of community feel that your school is their school.
- 13. Assimilate parents of the community with members of the school family and congregation.

YOUR CHALLENGE!!

- Lutheran schools of the 21st century will have and use an effective marketing plan.

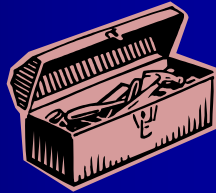


EVANGELISM APPROACHES

- Conversational evangelism: Asking questions that lead to conversations in which you share your faith rather than telling people what they should do.
- Friendship evangelism: Becoming friends with individuals and sharing personal faith with them. Includes invitations to church and school activities, willingness to transport, and informal invitations to the home.

EQUIPPING TEACHERS

- Based on research, 10 specific skills have been developed for teachers to learn and use in their work as evangelists. These skills are to be used for incidental or intentional contacts, inside and outside school.



SKILLS

- One minute witness
- Active listening
- School purpose witness
- Jesus Talk
- Bible Talk
- Communicate care
- Witness planning
- Prayer witnessing
- Prayer requests
- Prayers of praise

The Final Challenge!!

Lutheran schools of the 21st century will aggressively seek out the lost to enroll them in a Lutheran school, where they daily can hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ through which the Holy Spirit has promised to work.



Notes

to accompany the PowerPoint Presentation

“Evangelism in Lutheran Schools”

The following text describes the 10 witnessing skills for teachers listed in slide 18.

1. The One-Minute Witness

Since contacts with parents are usually brief, it is vital that a teacher is able to express his or her Christian faith succinctly. The “Three Owl” approach is suggested. Three questions beginning with “who” are to be answered in witness: Who is God? Who am I? Who is Christ? For example, a teacher talking with a troubled parent might say, “When I am in trouble, I remember that God, my Father who is in heaven, is always with me. Even though I don’t do all things right, He still loves me. He loves me so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for me. I know I am saved.”

Teachers are urged to practice this skill working with one another. As they practice, they should envision a variety of situations and then develop brief witnessing responses.

2. Active Listening

Nearly every day teachers have opportunities for chatting with parents, either in person or by phone. Often, parents have something to ask or to say to the teacher. Teachers need to know how to listen actively. When listening actively to a parent or student, the teacher will let that person know they are listening carefully by maintaining eye contact, not allowing attention to be diverted, and reflecting what the speaker says by brief comments or empathetic reactions. Basically, active listening is just good listening, with an emphasis on letting the speaker know that you are hearing what is being said. Active listening is evidence that you care. After listening actively, the teacher’s response will show care, interest, and empathy. Usually as the teacher responds, he or she will have an opportunity for a one-minute witness.

Working together, teachers might identify a variety of conversations they frequently have with parents or students. Teachers might then identify and rehearse ways to be active listeners and respond with empathy including a one-minute witness.

3. School Purpose Witness

Teachers have frequent opportunities to tell the purpose of their school to friends, congregation members, and prospective parents and students. Generally, there is not sufficient time to give a comprehensive answer. Working together, teachers might want to prepare a variety of brief statements that can be rehearsed and used in various situations. For example, “Our school helps children know Jesus Christ and live in His love.” “Our school is a place where God is at work.” “Children know that God made them and gave them a purpose in life. They know Jesus Christ, God’s Son, who loves them and forgives them every day.” Usually, conversations like this open up opportunities for further discussion and witness.

4. Jesus Talk

“Jesus talk” is using natural opportunities to mention Jesus and your faith. For example, if a person sneezes we often say “Gesundheit” or “Bless you.” Jesus talk suggests saying “God bless you” or “God give you good health.” Instead of saying “I was lucky,” say “God blessed me.” To develop this skill, teachers need to list situations where they can naturally refer to God or Jesus as they express their faith.

5. Bible Talk

This skill involves memorizing 10 key Bible passages and their references so they can be used when witnessing to parents. These key passages relate directly to concerns that parents most frequently share with teachers.

Matt. 11:28. “Come to Me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
(When someone is concerned, worried, or ready to give up.)

Matt. 19:26. “With God all things are possible.”
(To encourage someone lacking in confidence.)

Matt. 28:20. “I am with you always.”
(Good news for someone who feels lonely.)

John 3:16. “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.”
(For those who feel unloved.)

John 6:37. “Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.”
(For someone experiencing desperation.)

John 14:1. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God.”
(For someone who is worried.)

John 14:6. “I am the way... No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
(For someone experiencing doubt.)

Rom. 8:28. “In all things God works for the good of those who love Him.”
(For someone struggling with sickness, injury, or other problems.)

Rom. 8:39. “[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Good news for someone who is overburdened and struggling.)

Eph. 2:8. “By grace you have been saved through faith...not by works.”
(For someone feeling hopeless or worried about their “goodness.”)

1 John 4:19. “We love because He first loved us.”
(A word of comfort for someone who feels unloved.)

First memorize these passages and the references, then determine how they can be applied to specific questions or concerns expressed by parents.

6. Communicate Care

In the classroom, Lutheran School teachers have many opportunities for communicating care to their students as they wink, smile, touch, express their concern, and help. However, these expressions of care are not communicated to the families directly. Thus, Lutheran school teachers need to develop specific ways to communicate care to the families. Here are some examples:

- a. Listen actively whenever a parent speaks.
- b. Take time to listen and to talk to a parent with needs.
- c. Visit ill students and family members.
- d. Express a willingness to help parents and ask how you can help, so they accept your willingness.
- e. Express your love for all your students.
- f. Send Christian greeting cards for family anniversaries or celebrations such as baptism, birthday, wedding, graduation, and confirmation.
- g. Inquire about previous students who have gone on to other schools.

7. Witness Planning

Most often witnessing occurs by chance as we meet people or encounter situations. Beyond that, teachers have many opportunities for witnessing in special ways. Teachers individually, or as a faculty, are encouraged to list persons (students, parents, prospective parents and students, members, individuals, and families in the community) that present witnessing opportunities. Remember the variety of circumstances, both negative and positive, encountered by these people. In some cases your witness can introduce or point them to Jesus Christ. To those already in the faith, your witness can edify, “build up,” and give comfort and hope. Church workers need also to witness to each other.

With your list complete, note potential times and places that present good witnessing opportunities. For each person or family on your list, develop a brief strategy for your witnessing. Review your list frequently to keep you alert to your witnessing opportunities.

Be sure to keep your witnessing prospects on your prayer list, seeking God’s direction and blessings as you witness to these prospects.

8. Prayer Witnessing

Teachers encounter frequent opportunities in the classroom, in home visits, and in parent/teacher consultations for praying with another person or persons. These prayer opportunities are often overlooked. Prayer opportunities are also opportunities for witnessing. For example, at the conclusion of a teacher consultation, a parent might say, “I’m really delighted that Rona is doing so well in school.” To open the door for prayer, the teacher might respond, “I am, too. Let’s say a brief prayer of thanks to God for His blessings.” Or, parents may say, “We really don’t know why Danny is so shy, but we’ll try to get him involved with other kids more.” A Lutheran teacher might respond, “When I have a special need that I am trying to work on, I find it very helpful to ask the Lord for help. Would you join me in a prayer for Danny?” Prayer witnessing can frequently be used with any of the above witnessing skills.

9. Prayer Requests

This skill can often be used in connection with the previous skill, prayer witnessing. After praying with a parent, a student, or any other person you may have on your witnessing list, ask if there are other matters he or she or they would like to present to the Lord in prayer. You may offer a prayer at that time. Or you may give assurance that you will pray for them and their concern at another time. Children can be invited to share their prayer requests with you. So can parents.

In some instances, the entire class can join in prayer. An example: Stephanie, a fifth-grader, asked the teacher and the class to pray for her mother, who was seriously ill. On three

consecutive days, the teacher led the children in prayer for Stephanie's mother. On the first day, the teacher wrote a note to Stephanie's mother wishing her God's blessing and informing her that Stephanie's classmates were praying for her. Following the third day, the teacher visited Stephanie's mother, who was on her way to good health again. The mother expressed her gratitude to the teacher and to the class and invited the teacher to say a prayer of thanks. This prayer request concept can be extended to encompass many people and many concerns.

10. Prayers of Praise

Prayers can easily digress into mere "gimmies," where we address the Lord and then ask for something immediately. "Gimmy" prayers seldom hold opportunities for witness. More mature prayers praise God our Father in heaven, indicate our own sin and need for forgiveness and direction, and praise God that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us. Prayers that give praise to God are witnessing prayers. Teachers and other Christians who would be evangelists and witnesses need to learn the skill of praising God whenever they pray. Often, prayers of praise need to be practiced and rehearsed; however, they must always retain the quality of sincerity.

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Resources for Lutheran Schools

Making Disciples: Nurturing the Development of Faith by Carl Moser, Department of School Ministry pamphlet # S08453. Concordia Publishing House, 800.325.3040.

Why Non-member Parents (of Lutheran Parochial School and Day Care Children) Do or Do Not Join Lutheran Churches by Dr. Peter Becker of Concordia University, River Forest June 1993.

“Lutheran Missionary Schools . . . Is It Possible?” by Rev. Dr. Paul Mueller and “Connecting with School Families” by David Black; articles in *Shaping the Future*, Spring 2005, by Lutheran Education Association, 708.209.3343 or www.lea.org

People who are Resources

Terry Schmidt – Assistant Director of LCMS School Ministry. Terry is a passionate speaker on Lutheran Schools reaching the lost. 800.248.1930 x1294.

Rev. Michael Meissner, Family of Christ in Colorado Springs, CO. Michael was the pastor to school families at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran School and Childcare in San Antonio, Texas, and an advocate for sharing Christ with the unchurched who attend a Lutheran School. 719.481.2255.

Martha Windelborn, consultant in northern Illinois. Martha is a speaker and consultant on assisting Lutheran teachers in witnessing. Martha97@aol.com

Rev. Roger Kilponen, St. Paul Lutheran Church in Flint, Michigan
Roger is an excellent resource on developing the unity of mission between church and school. 810.239.6200.

Resources for School Outreach

(There are numerous examples. Those listed are well known to the author.)

Shepherd of the Hills in San Antonio, Texas. www.shlutheran.org

POBLO (People of the Book Lutheran Outreach) offers assistance with families of different cultures or religions (Muslim, Hindu) www.poblo.org

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