

Partners



Partners is published quarterly by the WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship to assist those in Sunday school ministry.

Will You Raise the Bar?

by Dr. Joel Nelson, Administrator – WELS Youth Discipleship

Summer is just around the corner and that should mean you are beginning the next stages of Sunday school planning for the upcoming season. As a staff pondering your Sunday school ministry for 2009-10, are you reflecting on what worked and didn't in 2008-09? Can you identify key areas to improve? Will you strategize on how to make Sunday school (or related) ministry in your setting better? Are you planning to raise the bar?



No matter the condition of your Sunday school ministry, there is always room for improvement. Do whatever you can during the summer to make the fall launch and the 2009-10 year the best it can be and better than last year. While called and appointed Sunday school leaders should have this on their agenda already, if you, as an individual "teammate" have doubts, become a loving, respectful "squeaky wheel" NOW! Your congregation's dear children and families and the Sunday school ministry that serves them are too important to let things slide into August and beyond.

Consider:

1. What will we do to make the staff stronger and better equipped teachers before we start the 2009-10 year, and then during the year as well?

2. How will we improve the communication of/to all stakeholders: pastors, teachers, parents, students, elected Christian education leaders, congregation members, community?
3. What will we do to develop a more supportive and accountable Sunday school team?
4. How can we excite more individuals, representing more age groups, to become our partners and

join the Sunday school ministry?

5. How can we create a more welcoming, friendly, fun Sunday school culture for students, families, and staff?
6. What could we do to get parents more engaged in Sunday school and their children's Christian education?
7. How will we maintain staff energy and commitment as the year goes on?
8. How will we maintain student/family commitment as the year goes on?
9. What should we do in spiritual ways to improve ourselves and our Sunday school ministry?

Pondering these questions now, will get the "Sunday school improvement ball" rolling faster and farther. It will also raise the bar of on-going, faith-filled, gospel-motivated ministry to Jesus' dear children. Enjoy your summer. Enjoy more, your planning for the 2009-10 Sunday school year.

Let the Children Come!

by Gerald Kastens

“Jesus loves the little children—all the little children of the world. Red or yellow, black or white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

Doesn't that song, made popular several years ago, wonderfully capture our Savior's love for little children? The picture of Jesus taking time from his busy ministry and ignoring the pressing details of an adult world to bless children is one of the most touching pictures recorded in the gospels (Matthew 19:13-15).

What makes this picture even more meaningful is that Jesus is talking not only about the value of children, but also about children's value to adults and the church. Parents, Jesus' own select group of disciples, and a throng of followers watched and listened as Jesus expressed his dismay over attempts to keep children from him. Down through the ages this image of Jesus' love for children continues to motivate and inspire modern-day disciples.

Think about it for a moment—if ever there was a need for strong and active Sunday school programs for children, it's now. Backdoor losses after baptism, lack of parental commitment, post-confirmation dropout, the decay of the very fabric of our society, aging members who don't want to be bothered with responsibility, and vast numbers of unchurched all point to the need for strong Christian education programs which nurture and reach out to children and families with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christian education comes in many forms in our churches. Whether a congregation supports and maintains a Lutheran elementary school or chooses to educate youth through a Sunday school or midweek program is not the point. What counts is that parish leaders recognize the need and make provision for the strongest possible approach to the nurture of children with the gospel. Teachers must constantly seek to improve their teaching skills, and congregations must provide materials, facilities, and the funds necessary to accomplish the task. Settle for poor quality or a weak approach to training, and that's exactly what you'll get. Pastors, teachers, superintendents, facilities, and curriculum in one way or another serve as Christ's ambassadors.

Sunday schools are not just for nurture. In order to preach the gospel to children, it is important that children are present to hear. Leaders must keep talking about their commitment to the Savior's command “to go” as a primary purpose for their Sunday school. Contact of active and delinquent members as well as the unchurched is an on-going “go” strategy which deserves everyone's attention. When outreach is intentional and organized it is effective—intentionally organized to identify prospects, reach prospects, relate to prospects, and involve prospects. One sure-fire way to sabotage outreach is to view it as optional. The

Sunday school has the potential to be an effective, dynamic agency of the congregation for sharing Christ with the community.

Sunday schools are also for families. The Sunday school offers an avenue for frequent contacts with parents through home visits, telephone conversations, orientation meetings, church and Sunday school letters, open house opportunities, activities aimed at parenting and family needs, and study groups. Unchurched parents are interested in their children and are frequently open to allowing them to attend church activities. Whenever a Christian teacher ministers to a child, that teacher is also ministering to the whole family. A child excited about the Savior will eventually

affect a parent. Get a child enthusiastic about telling others about the Savior and that child will get his parents involved and excited about sharing.

Jesus continues to exhort his disciples to “let the children come” to him. Ministry to and through children in the Sunday school has an eternal purpose and is significant to the welfare of his kingdom. Let's get behind those who work hard to provide for the spiritual nurture of youth. Pray for them and support them with your time, treasure, and spiritual gifts. The potential for God's blessings is present if we first look to God and acknowledge that we need the power and wisdom that he alone can give. All of our effort starts and ends with God, his Word, and the Holy Spirit's power. “Let the children come.”

The late Gerald F. Kastens, served as Administrator to WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship from 1991-2000.



Teach As Jesus Taught

by Pastor Edward Schuppe — WELS Regional Mission Counselor
for the South Atlantic, South Central, and Southeastern Wisconsin Districts

Roy B. Zuck in his book: *Teaching As Jesus Taught* (2002), raises the question: “Is it possible to teach as Jesus taught?” In a rather crass sense I remember a teacher who once said to me after my barrage of questions concerning a particular Bible story, “Who do you think I am, Jesus Christ? I don’t know everything!” After all, Jesus is the eternal Son of God, *eternally begotten of the Father; God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father, through him all things were made* (Nicene Creed). He is omniscient; he knows everything. He can read hearts and look into people’s minds. He knows what they are thinking. Wouldn’t that be neat? Maybe not!

He is also true Man, sinless of course. Nonetheless, he grew, became tired, hungry and thirsty, was tempted, he grieved, and he experienced anger, sorrow, pain, joy, and death.

It is true that his teaching situations differed from ours. He had no formal classroom or no set curriculum or class schedules. He had no modern devices such as overhead projectors, VCR’s, flannel boards, or puppets. He often taught outdoors or as he was walking along.

Why, then, are we pursuing this discussion? What practicality is there in studying the teaching methods of the Son of God as if we could teach as he did? There is much we can learn from studying the Master Teacher. This presentation is intended to challenge each of us to teach as Jesus taught. To quote Roy Zuck:

“Dedicated Christian teachers who have followed his teaching style have seen the Holy Spirit work through them to foster spiritual growth in students of all ages.”

Let us begin with an example of Jesus teaching his disciples in Matthew 18:21-35.

Just a little background. The chapter begins with Jesus’ disciples asking him, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” They certainly were hung up on greatness. Jesus uses a very modern teaching tool: an object lesson, in fact a live one, a little child. Jesus then proceeds to his favorite teaching tool: story telling or parables. He uses the parable of the lost sheep to reinforce the preciousness of little ones in the kingdom of God.

He then proceeds to instruct them on how to deal with a particular situation that is bound to occur in their lives: when a brother, a fellow Christian sins against you. After outlining the principle for them, Peter asks a very practical question: “How many times do I have to forgive my brother?” I have often wondered what Andrew thought when Peter asked this question. Was he thinking, “Come on, Peter, that happened when we were kids. After all, I was the older brother, I should have gotten that red fire truck. I had every right to take it from you.”

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Peter wants to know specifics. He was keeping track of Andrew’s sins. When can I pull the plug and let him have it? Jesus gives him a very specific answer. Not seven times, maybe seventy-seven times or four hundred and ninety times, depending on the reading. To demonstrate to Peter that it is not a matter of keeping track with some ultimate number in mind, Jesus again uses a parable, a short story by way of comparison to teach a very important lesson on forgiveness, not in the world view, but in the kingdom of heaven.

There was a king who decided it was time to determine just what his servants owed him and then collect it in full. One man owed him millions of dollars and he was not able to pay. As was the custom in his day, the master said, “I am going to sell you, your wife, and your children into slavery and everything you own to recoup my losses.” The servant got down on his knees and begged for his masters mercy, “Please just give me some more time and I will pay off my entire debt.” What do you think the master is going to say? “Sure. OK. No problem. Take as long as you like. I really don’t need the money right away.” Hardly. “Ya, right. Do you know what would happen if I did this for everyone? I would be out of business. This is simply the cost of doing business. Sell him, his family, and everything he has.”

How surprising to hear what the master did! He did not give him more time. He totally and completely canceled the whole debt. Can’t you just see that servant jumping up and down for joy? Hugging his master, kissing his ring or his feet, exclaiming: “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you . . .”

Now that servant is on his way home to tell his wife and family the good news. “We are not going to be sold into slavery. We can keep the minivan and all the Barbie dolls and video games.” On his way home he runs into one of his fellow servants who owes him five dollars from last Friday night’s ball game. He tells him to pay up. He falls down on his knees and begs his friend, “Please have mercy. Give me a little more time. I do not have the five dollars right now. At the end of the week when I get paid, I will bring the five dollars right over to you.”

How do you think the first servant will react? Do you remember how big his debt was? Surely, he will forgive a measly five bucks. We can hardly believe what his answer is to his fellow servant’s plea for mercy. He has the man thrown into prison. Can you believe that? For five dollars, when he was forgiven millions.

The other servants who were watching all of this can’t believe it either. They knew what their master had done for him. They go to their master and tell him all that has happened. (By the way, this is not tattling. This was sin and needed to be reported.)

The master can hardly believe the report. He calls in the servant. “Tell me this is not true. You threw a man in prison for five bucks after I had forgiven you millions. How could you? Out of my sight. Take him away and extract every last cent he owes me out of his hide.”

What is Jesus’ point in telling this parable? What was the original question Peter asked? Jesus gives Peter the application. “Do not be concerned about how many times Andrew or anyone sins against you. I want your forgiveness to be like my Father’s forgiveness, unlimited. How can you compare what Andrew has done to all the times you sin against God every single day? My Father freely forgives you every day without your even asking. Therefore, forgive Andrew every time he sins against you.”

Can we teach like Jesus taught? Not in every way, because he is God and we are sinful human beings with certain limitations. Yet there is no better Teacher and no better example for us to follow. We need to study the methods he used, which are as effective today as when he used them. The problems of life in this sinful world that he confronted are still similar to the ones we face today. Therefore, the challenge remains for us: TEACH AS JESUS TAUGHT.

(Find more from Pastor Schuppe under the title “Jesus: Master Teacher” at www.wels.net/jump.wnusstraining.)

Interesting Data

Studies conducted by Christian researcher, George Barna, concluded that churches experiencing great influence in children’s lives were motivated by the realization that children are of special significance to God. Consequently, those churches employed a long-term, multi-pronged strategy that they tirelessly executed to facilitate the spiritual growth of children. The research showed that at a typical Protestant church, more than four out of every ten people (40%) ministered to during the week are children, yet seven out of every eight ministry dollars (88%) are spent on adults. Barna was quick to point out, however, that simply spending money on children does not produce great results. . . . The most important resource is the commitment of adults to the spiritual wholeness of children—which means sacrificing some of the emphasis upon ministry to adults. (Spiritual Maturity Process Should Start at a Young Age, Barna Research Online, November 17, 2003).

Christ-Light 2: The Revision Goes On!

by Pastor Ray Schumacher — Christ-Light® Editor at Northwestern Publishing House

Imagine that you serve on the Christian education committee of a 30,600 member congregation. What an awesome opportunity you have--to lead this huge congregation to study at the feet of Jesus! What an important task—to help establish the best possible educational program, built solidly on the Bible, pointing to Jesus and his salvation as our highest treasure.

30,600 is approximately the number of students enrolled in Sunday schools in our WELS congregations. What an awesome opportunity God has placed before us, to lead this huge “congregation” of young people to study at the feet of Jesus. How important that we do the best we can to provide an education focused on the truths of God’s Word.

The importance of this task is reflected in the Christ-Light® curriculum revision which is underway. A small but dedicated army of workers is diligently toiling to improve the popular Christ-Light® curriculum, with an eye especially on the Sunday schools of our congregations.

The revised curriculum, due out in 2012, will feature a special Sunday school module. **Characteristics specific to the Sunday school include:**

- 3-year cycle covering 117 lessons
- Both Old and New Testament lessons each year
- Core lessons that repeat more than once in the 3-year cycle

(Creation, Fall into Sin, Birth of Jesus, Lord’s Supper, Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost).

- Simplified teacher’s guide format
- Podcasts of the Bible story background together with teaching hints for teacher preparation

Features of both the Lutheran elementary school and Sunday school modules include:

- Strengthened focus on the home
- Teaching strategies that address diverse learning styles
- Greater use of interactive elements
- Focus on worship words to help pre-kindergarten through second grade students become familiar with the worship service.
- Music CDs for use with memory treasure hymns and passages, and the copy master songs
- Electronic teaching pictures
- Multimedia DVD
- Eight new 7-8 grade topical studies

We call this a revision of the Christ-Light® curriculum because the basic structure of the curriculum remains. But it is an extensive revision--an ambitious project. It deserves our best efforts because, through the curriculum, God’s grace is proclaimed to a large congregation of young people.

Only At Sunday School!



I was working in my office recently and overheard one of our early childhood teachers teaching the story of Jesus healing the ten lepers. She was having them put primary-colored hole reinforcing stickers on their hands and faces to symbolize the skin disease. One child apparently wasn’t sitting still, so she said to him: “[So-and-so], get over here right now or you won’t get your leprosy stickers!” I never imagined that the desire to have “leprosy” could be such effective discipline!

Pastor Mike Gehl, Grace Lutheran Church-Charlotte, NC

The Sunday school classes had all been photographed, and the Superintendent was trying to persuade the students to buy their own copy of the group picture.

“Just think how nice it will be to look at it when you are all grown up and say, ‘There’s Jennifer, she’s a lawyer,’ or ‘There’s Monica, she became a teacher,’ or ‘That’s Michael. He’s a pastor.’”

A small voice at the back of the group matter-of-factly spoke out, “And there’s the teacher, she’s dead!”

Resource Recommendations

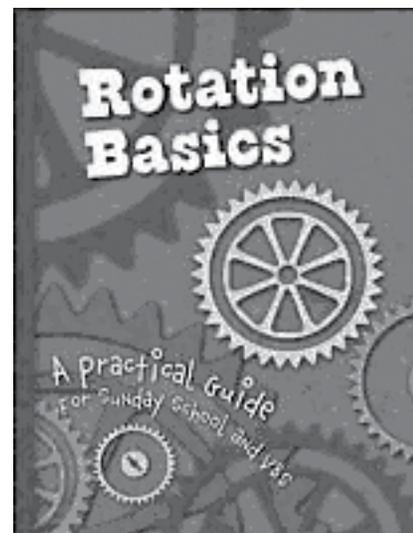
Rotation Basics: A Practical Guide for Sunday School and VBS

Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 79 pages \$16.99. (www.cph.org/cphstore)

Learn the basics of the rotation model, and add this newly recognized format to your Sunday School (or Vacation Bible School) with ease. Each of the six chapters is written by an expert offering various approaches to rotation learning. Discover what works best for your church. *Rotation Basics* seeks to help you answer questions about various rotation models and plan for effective use of these models.

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Recruiting Staff: I Thought You'd Never Ask!

As long as the earth stands, there will be Sunday school staff turnover. People move, life changes, and things happen. But isn't it sad when recruiting Sunday school staff becomes such a regular and stressful situation? Isn't it unfortunate that some Sunday school ministries seem to be recruiting teachers all the time, and it's not because the enrollment is busting through the belfry? Why is it that some Sunday schools have so much turnover? Most of the time it's not because of anything they do, but more so because of things they don't do.

Take the WELS.net University Sunday School Mini-Course, "Recruiting Staff: I Thought You'd Never Ask!" and learn the eight things that help staff members to remain positive and committed to Sunday school ministry and, interestingly enough, entice others to want to join the Sunday school team.

www.wels.net/jump/wnusstraining

Please contact us with any questions or for further information.

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