

# Partners



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

## If Not Moralizing, What?

by Rev. Wayne Mueller, First Vice President – WELS

(Adapted for *Partners* with permission.)

Christian parents and teachers are horrified by the increasing immorality all around us. We would like to build a fence around our children and lock out the world. We resent changes we cannot prevent. So we get this angry urge to present quick solutions: lectures, rules, limits of conduct, and warnings of fearful consequences.

But anger and fear are the world's way of getting results. The world offers quick, snappy slogans: "Just say no." "If you drink, don't drive." "No unsafe sex." "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." We must remember that this is not God's way to modify human behavior. "For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:20).

Christians understand that promoting good behavior is not the same as building faith in Jesus Christ. So we have a name for this legal, angry approach to behavior modification—we call it moralism. Moralism seeks to change human behavior with threats of punishment for wrong action and with promises of reward for right action. Moralism can sound deceptively Christian because it often uses wording straight from the Ten Commandments to accomplish its ungodly purposes. Yet, although it uses God's law, it does not use law the way God wants it used.

The main reason God gave his law was to point out our individual sins, not to improve society.



As Sunday school teachers, our chief aim is not to help our students avoid the social dangers posed by an immoral society.

Moralism, however, uses the law to motivate action and change behavior. The Bible brings us the story of Jesus Christ primarily to tell us how God commutes his Son's perfect life to us as righteousness. Yet moralism uses Jesus' life only as an ideal for us to try to live up to. Moralizing suggests, "Jesus wouldn't like that." Moralizing seeks to bring about good behavior by threatening punishment and offering reward. Its message is a combination of compliments and criticism, not repentance and forgiveness. Jesus is

changed from a Savior into a new lawgiver.

Sunday school teachers' need to be mindful, for their presentations to children can easily fall into the popular approach of moralizing if (1) we offer no gospel comfort of forgiveness in our devotions and lessons, (2) we use the Bible only as a book of do's and don'ts, (3) we speak of Jesus only as a good example of how we should live, (4) we try to get our students to change their behavior on the basis of our compliments or complaints, (5) we fail to point out the seriousness of our personal sins against God and urge the cross of Christ as our only hope.

Just like other ministers in the parish, Sunday school teachers must watch out for the dangers of moralizing that are inherent in their area of service. We must consciously monitor our Sunday school lessons to make sure that we are

(Continued on next page . . .)

# Ritalin Retraction

by Dr. Joel A. Nelson, Administrator –WELS Youth Discipleship

Last issue, the lead article shared actual student suggestions for improving Sunday school. The article was titled, *If You Could Design a Sunday School*, and contained this quote: “Before I go on, it is important to note that these are not the comments of a bunch of Mountain Dew drooling, Grand Theft Auto playing, Ritalin dosed demons.” I was evangelically taken to the woodshed for this comment, and rightly so.

One reader wrote, “*Please be careful what you write. I wasn’t aware ‘demons’ drank Mountain Dew, played Grand Theft Auto, and took Ritalin. Wasn’t that a harsh judgment, which the Bible tells us to avoid. I believe that description could fit ‘basically good kids from overall good homes’* [another quote from the article]. *Do you know what Ritalin is even for? You represent a large group of Lutherans that I belong to. Your statements should reflect our beliefs. I was raised in this faith and know better, but others may not. I was not impressed at all with your narrow, stereotype opinion.*”

Another reader said, “*As a parent of a child taking Ritalin please be aware of the sensitivity to your tongue-in-cheek comment on the second column. I know...the purpose of the comment, and still it feels a bit uncomfortable when I read it. I know how much time publications take, so I hope you receive this in the constructive manner I offer it.*”

First, I want to thank those who cared enough to contact me. I agree with their comments and appreciate their sincere effort to point out where I overstepped the line a bit. I had it coming. What I was trying to get across is the idea that making our classes more engaging and interactive is something all children want us to do. Too often I hear teachers rationalize that because some kids, “are the way they are today” i.e. hyper, hooked on video/computer games, caffeine overdosed,

etc. etc., that’s why we are now “supposed” to make our classes more “fun” – to accommodate kids who are the product of questionable things in our culture. “Good kids” don’t need all this fun classroom stuff, is how it sometimes goes.

The demons idea (and a bad word choice I see now) was to have applied to all three of the examples in the sentence, not just the kids on Ritalin. That does not make the word choice any better, but just helps to emphasize that I was not trying to single out kids on medication. Perhaps why I even mentioned Ritalin was because of some articles I read that noted Ritalin as one of the most over-prescribed medications for children perceived as difficult in classroom settings. My point again, was that all kids are asking for SS classes to be more engaging and enjoyable, and that improving our classes is not just to accommodate those we perceive as more difficult children. It must be done to bring the gospel to all children in the best possible ways.

I am not sure this explanation is any better. Someone told me once that the apology is sometimes worse than the sin. Anyway, I get what was upsetting some. I feel very badly about it. Certainly I was not meaning that children who drink Dew, play computer games, or need medication to help them function appropriately are some kind of evil sub-class. I was merely trying to emphasize a point, in a “more creative” way, and it did not come across well.

I truly appreciate our partnership in ministry and want to do nothing to hurt that relationship or confuse and upset God’s people. Thanks again to those of you who contacted me, for doing what Christian brothers and sisters do: help each other see where we are wrong, share ideas for improvement, and point people to the knowledge that in Jesus, we are forgiven.

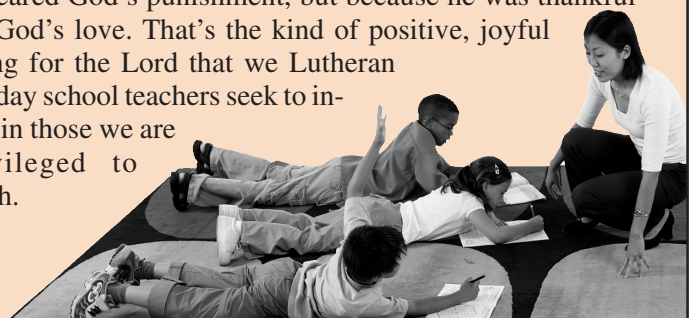
(If Not Moralizing, What? . . . continued from page 1)

presenting Jesus as the Savior from sin. We also have a responsibility to our help our students become discerning when they hear presentations on moral matters such as drugs, drunkenness, abortion, civic service and the environment. We will want to help our students put these moral matters into the perspective of Christian faith.

As Sunday school teachers, our chief aim is not to help our students avoid the social dangers posed by an immoral society. It is to help them know Jesus as their personal Savior from personal sin. Joy over that salvation—not the warnings or promises of moralists—will move our youth “to say ‘NO’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:12).

Joseph is a good example of how a young believer lives in an immoral society. He did not moralize when tempted to

sexual sin by Potiphar’s wife. He might have refused the temptation with the popular moralisms of our day: “I can’t risk getting you pregnant.” “I might get AIDS.” “We might get caught. I might lose my job.” Instead, Joseph choose to abstain, not to avoid trouble, but to please his friend—God. He was afraid, not of the consequences to himself, but of offending the God who saved him. He obeyed, not because he feared God’s punishment, but because he was thankful for God’s love. That’s the kind of positive, joyful living for the Lord that we Lutheran Sunday school teachers seek to instill in those we are privileged to teach.



# CYD News & Notes

## Let's Talk about Standards for Sunday School

What a blessing that every WELS Sunday school (or similar ministry) has the same gospel to preach and teach, the same gracious God to guide and direct them, and the same Holy Spirit working faith in the hearts of teachers, children, and parents alike. But while these things are the same, many differences also exist: different teachers, students, facilities, financial resources, locations, etc. How can Sunday schools (or similar ministries) effectively monitor and manage all these differences in the best possible way? The answer perhaps lies in developing a common "standard" that all WELS Sunday schools (or similar ministries) could look to and evaluate themselves against. The WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) thinks developing standards for Sunday schools (or similar ministries) is a good idea and is seeking your help.

As a first step, we have started a new discussion on the SST (Sunday School Talk) discussion board on the CYD Web site ([www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship](http://www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship)). The discussion is called "Sunday School (or similar ministry) Standards" and will have threads like: Atmosphere, Curriculum, Staff/Teachers, Staff Training/Development, Facilities, Pastoral Involvement, Congregational Support, Budget, Parental Involvement, Outreach, Publicity/Promotion, etc. Under each thread, share your opinion for what the "standards" should be or look like. Based on these comments, CYD will work toward further developing and finalizing a set of standards Sunday schools (or similar ministries) could use to make themselves better.

## How Many WELS Sunday Schools?

According to the 2004 WELS Statistical Report, 1,182 of WELS 1,261 congregations (93.7%) had Sunday schools. In 2003, 1,196 congregations had Sunday schools. See the table for 2004 breakdowns by district.

District	Sunday Schools	Congregations	% With SS
Arizona-California	104	110	94
Dakota-Montana	71	77	92
Michigan	143	148	96
Minnesota	158	164	96
Nebraska	79	87	90
North Atlantic	45	46	97
Northern Wisconsin	143	156	91
Pacific Northwest	42	47	89
South Atlantic	64	65	98
South Central	37	44	84
Southeastern Wisconsin	135	146	92
Western Wisconsin	161	173	93

## Two Timely Teaching Tips

### Play the Percentages

Do you want your students to remember more of what you are teaching them? Then think about Hoag's learning ladder as you prepare your lessons and incorporate student activities that hit the higher percentages:

#### We remember this much . . . of what we

5% .....	hear
10% .....	see
20% .....	echo
40% .....	answer
65% .....	discuss
75% .....	create
90% .....	teach

### Make Meaning with Metaphors

Did you ever think you could learn something from Forrest Gump and Shrek that would help you as a Sunday school teacher? Both used metaphors to help people understand what they were talking about. Remember Forrest's, "Life is like a box of chocolates?" or Shrek's "Ogres are like onions – they have layers?" Metaphors are an interesting way to help students understand and remember what you are teaching them. Jesus used many metaphors in his teaching: bread of life, good shepherd, groom and bride, etc.

Next time you talk about the Pharisees, for example, perhaps you'd say something like, "They were like pesky horseflies, always buzzing around Jesus and trying to bite him." Or when you retell the lesson about the lame man who was

healed, you might say something like, "It was as if huge, heavy, lead chains suddenly fell from his legs." These examples, because they tap into students' prior knowledge, can help them paint better pictures in their minds of the lesson details and thereby remember the lessons better.

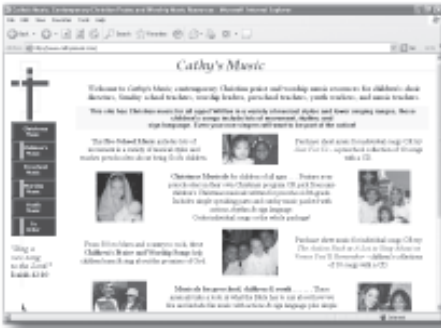
# Resource Recommendations

## The Savior Has Come

*The Savior Has Come* is a traditional children's Christmas service that helps us to see the Savior in the Old Testament prophecies, in his birth at Bethlehem, and in the visits by the shepherds and wise men. Through narration, recitation, and music, the children proclaim that the Savior has indeed come to fulfill God's promise of redeeming lost sinners. Learn more about *The Savior Has Come* at [www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net). Click on the special icon.



## [www.cathysmusic.com](http://www.cathysmusic.com)



Need additional and adaptable ideas for your Sunday school's Christmas service or other services in which the Sunday school students sing? Check out [www.cathysmusic.com](http://www.cathysmusic.com). Here you'll find contemporary Christian praise and worship music resources for children's choir directors, Sunday school teachers, worship leaders, preschool teachers, youth workers, and music teachers. This site has Christian music for all ages! Written in a variety of musical styles and lower singing ranges, these children's songs include lots of movement, rhythm, and sign language. Even your non-singers will want to be part of the action!

*Recommendation sent in by Sue Pederson,  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Howell, MI.*

## [www.kidology.org](http://www.kidology.org)

Kidology's mission is to equip and encourage those who minister to children. They do this 24/7 via this website, and through providing practical training, creative teaching resources, and personal consultation.



**Remember non-WELS resources may contain some content that is not consistent with what we believe and teach. Use discernment when considering any non-WELS resource. If in doubt, ask your pastor.**

## Only At Sunday School!



A pastor was giving a children's devotion to begin the Sunday school session. For this particular devotion, he used squirrels for an object lesson on industry and preparation. He started out by saying, "I'm going to describe something, and I want you to raise your hand if you know what it is." The children nodded eagerly.

"This thing lives in trees (pause) and eats nuts (pause)..." No hands went up. "And it is grey (pause) and has a long, bushy tail (pause)..." The children were looking at each other, but still no hands raised. "And it jumps from branch to branch (pause) and chatters and flips its tail when it's excited (pause)..."

Finally, one little boy tentatively raised his hand. The pastor breathed a sigh of relief and called on him. "Well..." said the boy, "I know the answer is Jesus...but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me!"

# Sunday School Has Great Potential!

Last issue, in an article titled, “Why Should We Care About Sunday School,” St. Paul’s Lutheran in Muskego, WI was noted as an example where Sunday school experienced some dramatic improvement, going from 50 children and 7 teachers to 215 children and 31 teachers over a nine year period. It should be noted that during those years St. Paul’s maintained a membership of about 2,400 souls with 500 of them being elementary school aged. 290 of these children were enrolled in St. Paul’s Lutheran School. So the situation had some unique opportunities as well as challenges. That said, what was done there has instructional value for all WELS congregations and Sunday schools. What follows are the “high points” that had a positive impact.

## Leadership at the highest levels committed to the Sunday school (SS) ministry.

- ◆ The Pastoral staff made SS improvement a top priority and committed themselves to the effort. They dedicated time to make it so, and assigned a called, staff level individual to spearhead and oversee the process.
- ◆ The board elected to oversee SS ministry was given regular and more detailed information about the ministry and was encouraged positively and repeatedly to become engaged in SS oversight and support.

## Financial support for SS ministry was solidified.

- ◆ A budget was approved and included funds for curriculum, staff development (subscriptions to children’s ministry magazines, conference and workshop expenses, etc.), teacher resources (Bible commentaries, visual aids, project supplies, etc.), staff meeting materials/supplies, and a per student allowance for special gifts (Christmas, end of year, etc.).
- ◆ The financial needs of the SS ministry were kept before the congregation.

## SS staff development was considered the linchpin to improvement.

- ◆ Regular, 90 minute, monthly meetings were held and were organized, upbeat, and meaningful. They included music, singing, and refreshments.
- ◆ Staff members were expected to attend and were given post card and/or telephone reminders before each

meeting. Attendance was taken. Missing staff had the materials mailed or hand-delivered to them.

- ◆ A printed agenda was always used with the following areas covered each time:
  - 1) Opening devotion/Bible study/prayer
  - 2) Teacher improvement/training/mentoring
  - 3) Review of student attendance from previous weeks/discussion of how to respond and improve
  - 4) Review of up-coming SS lessons
  - 5) Discussion of general SS business
  - 6) Closing song/prayer
- ◆ Team teaching, having teacher’s aides, and the involvement of high school students at all levels was emphasized.
- ◆ An end of the year staff appreciation party was held at one of the SS staff member’s homes.

## SS staff members partnered together to develop key components of the ministry.

- ◆ Mission statement
- ◆ Teacher and superintendent job descriptions
- ◆ Teacher/lesson presentation evaluation process
- ◆ Family events
- ◆ Staff recruitment

## Parents and family involvement were emphasized.

- ◆ Quarterly family events were held: game nights, movie nights, costume parties, field trips, picnics, etc.
- ◆ A variety of opportunities were created for parents to get involved: teachers’ aides, refreshment makers, play instruments, sit with children in church, help with SS picnic, etc.
- ◆ Bible classes for parents and about parenting/family issues were offered during the children’s Sunday school hour.

## Formal and informal evaluation of the entire ministry and its various parts was on-going and engaged all stake holders.



---

To learn more about St. Paul’s Sunday school ministry, contact  
Rev. Jeffrey Bonack:  
[jbonack@stpaulmuskego.org](mailto:jbonack@stpaulmuskego.org)  
or Dr. Joel Nelson:  
[joel.nelson@sab.wels.net](mailto:joel.nelson@sab.wels.net)

---

# Partners

## Thanks for Sharing!

I am teaching 4<sup>th</sup> graders. There was a part of the Christ-Light Sunday School lesson where the teacher was to ask the children true/false questions and the children were to put a thumbs up if it was true and thumbs down if it was false. [As a variation] I had them start by a wall and take a step forward if the question was true and take a step back if it was false...The students have energy and [this helped] to get some of it out. They took big steps forward and tiny steps back, and they liked lots of questions. It was fun!



Towards the end of another class time, I told the children we should put our lesson on the board so people could read

it. I said one third of the board would be a picture of the lesson, one third would be a couple of sentences about the story, and the last third would be what we learned from the lesson. The children had this look of fear on their faces so I gave them each a piece of paper and a pen and said maybe we should write out first what we would put on the board. The children worked on what they would write and I helped add a little to their sentences. Then I assigned them each to a part of the board...It came out okay!

*Martha Zeeb*  
*St. Johns Evangelical Lutheran Church*  
*Ann Arbor, Michigan*

*Please contact us with any questions or for further information.*

WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship  
2929 N. Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, WI 53222-4398  
E-mail: [cyd@sab.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sab.wels.net) Phone: 414-256-3274