




# Partners

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

## Revitalize Your Sunday School

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



In George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the professor helps a backward and slovenly Eliza Doolittle become an elegant lady. He does this by treating her like a lady at all times until she begins to live up to his expectations of her. Goethe, the German poet and novelist, commented on expectations when he said, "Treat a man as he appears to be and you have made him worse. But treat a man as if he already were what he potentially could be, and you have made him what he should be." Expectations play an important role in the revitalization of things.

If we want to *revitalize*, or as Webster says, "give new life to," our Sunday school programs, we have to raise our expectations. We have to think of our Sunday school programs, not as what they are, but as what they potentially, with God's blessings and direction, could be.

### What kind of commitment do you expect?

The Sunday school must never be looked upon as a stepchild. This is easy to do, especially if your congregation has a Lutheran elementary school. Rather, the Sunday school must be thought of as a twin, totally sharing with the church's elementary school or other youth-nurturing programs the attention, support, and prayers of the congregation and its leaders.

If the Sunday school program appears to be receiving less of these, is it the fault of the congregation? Hardly. It is the fault of the Sunday school leadership that has been unsuccessful at nurturing and strengthening whatever support is present.

Every Christian adult ought to recognize the importance of Christian training for children. And every Christian adult wants to be committed in his support of children. However, it may be

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that parishoners are not willing to support your existing program in the way you ask them to. So what do you need to do about this? You need to raise your expectations of how committed your congregation should be to the program.

### **Sunday school touches the lives and hearts of children.**

Stress to your congregation that Sunday school gives children a great opportunity to learn about Jesus their dear Savior and friend through quality, high-interest presentations of Bible lessons and truths. Through joyful, enthusiastic, and loving teachers, Sunday school gives children a wonderful chance to see firsthand what it means to live their lives for Christ. And most important of all, Sunday school provides children with the opportunity to grow in faith.

### **Sunday school also touches adult lives.**

There is a saying: "A believer's talents are not to be laid up for self but laid out in service." This saying can be applied to a Sunday school program, because this agency provides a number of members with opportunities to use their talents to serve God and others. Adults who recognize and appreciate what God has done for them through Christ will welcome these opportunities to serve the Lord. Serving the Lord through the Sunday school gives adults the opportunity to carry out the Savior's directive to go and tell. It also gives them a joyful opportunity to watch the faces and hear the voices of children speaking and singing praises to God for all that he has said and done.

### **Sunday school also touches the community.**

A well-run and inviting Sunday school program can be one of the most effective ways for you to reach out into your community with the gospel. People who study growing churches repeatedly cite effective Sunday school as being a major contributing factor in such growth. Your Sunday school is one evidence of how outreach minded your members are. A well-run, optimistic, Christ-centered Sunday school program speaks volumes to the community about the commitment and concern of a congregation to its mission.

### **Are you expecting enough?**

Is your Sunday school everything it could potentially be? Probably not. There is always room for improvement. Is your congregation's commitment to your Sunday school program what it potentially could be? Probably not. We can never be too committed to the cause of Christ.

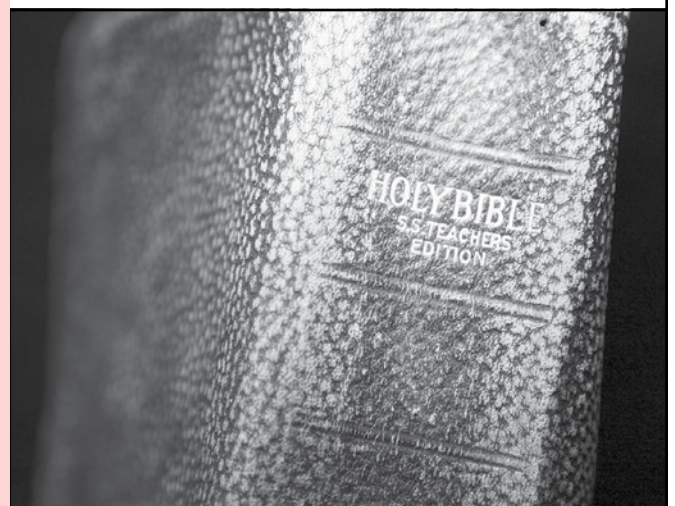
If you are a leader in your church or Sunday school program, begin to expect more from your congregation. In a loving way remind your members that your Sunday school touches the lives and souls of your children and adults, as well as those in the community. In as many ways and as many times as you can, communicate to your congregation, your staff, your students and your parents that the mission of Sunday school is the same mission Christ gave to the church and that your Sunday school program, under God, is going to be the best it can be. Then, as God blesses you to do so, make it happen.

# *As You Begin This Fall, Be Reminded of Your Call*

As teachers and staff members in your Sunday school, you have a serious responsibility toward God and toward the other members of the Sunday school. You are diligently and faithfully to instruct and train the children entrusted to you in the chief truths of the Word of God as they are revealed in the Scriptures and set forth particularly in the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.

You are to maintain Christian discipline in the Sunday school. You are to serve the congregation by your example of Christian conduct. You are to endeavor earnestly to live in Christian harmony with your students, their parents, your fellow teachers, the pastoral staff, and the elected leaders of your congregation. And you are to submit to the supervision of the pastor and others who are responsible for the conduct of the Sunday school, and with the help of God to do everything within the limits of your call for the general advancement of the kingdom of Christ.

You are assuming a serious responsibility, but the Lord of the Church has promised to be with you, to bless you, and to supply the gifts which are required for you to perform your duties faithfully. May God grant you his Holy Spirit and give you wisdom and strength to carry out your task, to his glory and for the spiritual and eternal welfare of souls.



# Make Teacher-Student Relationships Strong

by Debera Fellers — Grace Lutheran Church, Casa Grande, AZ

Here are a few of the practical ideas that might help strengthen the relationships between Sunday school teachers and their students:

- **VISIT** with the parents either at home or at church. Get to know them and let them get to know you, their child's teacher.
- Every Sunday **ARRIVE EARLY** in the classroom so you have time to chat with the children before class starts. Each child needs to feel welcome, especially if he doesn't attend regularly.
- **LISTEN** as they talk with you. As you converse, get to know them as individuals. What's important to them becomes important to you because **THEY** are important to you. Keep in mind though that they don't like to be lectured to or "talked down to."
- **ASK** about their school and after-school activities. **ATTEND** one such event if possible. Otherwise, inquire about the event the following Sunday.
- Let them know **YOU ARE LEARNING, TOO**. Sometimes children feel they have learned it all because they've heard the same lesson several times. But we know that this side of heaven we will never know all about God and His Word. Let them see that you are continuing to learn and grow, too.
- Make lesson **APPLICATIONS** meaningful. If a child learns a Bible lesson but fails to see how it applies to his life, he will regard it as useless.
- Carry on **CONVERSATIONS** with the children at church or if you encounter them out in the community. Greet them by name and speak with **THEM** first, then with their parents. Engage them in conversation by using open-ended questions.
- Plan a fun **ACTIVITY** together. Perhaps your class or the entire Sunday school can go on an outing or have a picnic.
- **PARTICIPATE** in other children's activities at church. Serving as a Lutheran elementary teacher's aid, a Pioneer/Kids' Group leader, or a vacation Bible school instructor helps Sunday school teachers build relationships with students outside the classroom.
- Send individual **POSTCARDS** to them when you are on vacation. Or send **BIRTHDAY/BAPTISMAL CARDS** to commemorate their special day.
- **A CLASS PROJECT** will help teach the class to work together to serve the Lord. This project might be filling Thanksgiving gift packages, singing at a nursing home, or making bookmarks for the church hymnals and pew Bibles.
- Keep the parents **INFORMED**. Some churches use a quarterly newsletter with synopsis of lessons, memory work, future events, and general information as a way of keeping parents in tune with their child's Sunday school class.
- Schedule an **OPEN HOUSE** or a **VISITOR SUNDAY** so family members can see the class in action.
- **EXPECT RESPECT**. Avoid becoming too "buddy-buddy" with students. Be friendly but also teach them respect (Fourth Commandment) and hold yourself worthy (as God's representative) of their respect.
- Regularly **EVALUATE** your teaching. Evaluate your use of the Law and Gospel in your lessons. Do the children understand the eternal consequences of their sins? Have they also been told the good news of the eternal salvation which is theirs because of what Christ has done?
- Carry children in your **HEART**, even as you do your own family members.
- **ENCOURAGE** children to use God's Word in daily devotions and personal applications in their lives.
- **PRAY** for them. **PRAY** for them. **PRAY** for them.

# Steps for Welcoming/Including a Child with Autism

by Alison Wolf — Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Grafton, WI

1. Determine first that children in the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be a part of your church's Sunday school program. A positive, pro-active approach will go far in making it a successful reality.
2. Familiarize yourself with the diagnosis of autism. Visit the Autism Society of America website [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org).
3. Order the video and accompanying booklet of "Planting the Seeds in Students with Special Needs" (available from Jesus Cares Ministry – telephone: 1-877-505-3675). Have your Sunday school staff view the video. Then, as a group, discuss how to reach out to children with special needs and how to make it work in their specific program and classroom.
4. Meet with the parents of the student. Ask the parents what behaviors are most common for their ASD child. Autistic students can exhibit various behaviors to varying degrees. There is no one specific teaching approach that works with all autistic children. The teacher needs to be aware of any sensory issues, special interests, how the child best learns and what the child's strengths are.
5. Help the parents make a list of characteristics and likes and dislikes of the child. Then keep the list handy for aides and substitutes.
4. The teacher(s) should meet the student and get to know him or her. Show interest in the student and show that you care. Show them the room where they will meet each week, explain the order of the Sunday school hour. Let the child "practice" Sunday school.
6. Consider the best placement for the child and ask the parents what they think. Lower functioning ASD children might enjoy being in a lower grade classroom, even though they are older.
7. If an aide or helper is needed consider asking older Sunday school students to take turns helping or asking for teen volunteers.
8. Don't explain too much to the Sunday school class and don't apologize for the ASD student. You might be surprised how accepting and welcoming the other students will be.
9. Be reassuring to the student with ASD. Be concrete and specific. Simple statements and few questions usually work best.
10. Rest assured that an ASD student is most likely learning even if they do not seem to be paying direct attention to you with eye contact and interested body language.
11. Place your confidence in Christ and his promises. You have something important to share (God's love) with all your students. You don't have to worry about receiving a positive response from the ASD child.
12. Pray. Be determined, persistent and loving. Enjoy the wonderful experience of having a child in the autism spectrum in your classroom!

*Alison Wolf is a member of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Grafton. She and her husband, Steve, have two children in the autism spectrum. Their son Ian, who has classic autism, attends Sunday School every week at Our Savior and is welcomed by his teachers and all the children. Alison has taught Sunday school in the past, helps families and teachers understand autism, and helps children and adults in the autism spectrum. You can reach her at [wolfdn@wi.rr.com](mailto:wolfdn@wi.rr.com).*

## Tell your friends to get Partners

- 1) Go to [www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship](http://www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship).
- 2) Click on the "Newsletters" image.
- 3) Click on the appropriate, blue "E-mail Notification" link.
- 4) Follow the steps in the "Delivery Methods" box at the very bottom of the page.
- 5) Watch for the e-mail about the new issue.



# Resources

## Video

Video clips are sometimes useful in setting the stage for discussion, visually making a point, or reiterating a Biblical truth. This list of sites has been compiled with input from other WELS pastors, teachers and lay people. The list is neither exhaustive, nor should it be assumed that all the content on these sites is 100% Biblically accurate. Use your discretion when selecting materials from these sites.

- www.sermonspice.com
- www.worshipfilms.com
- www.essentials.tv
- www.integritymusic.com
- www.jellybeansvideo.com
- www.thesource4ym.com
- www.imdb.com
- www.screenvue.com
- www.harbingeronline.com
- www.christianmedia.org
- www.fithvisuals.com
- www.bluefishtv.com
- www.pointofpower.com
- www.sermonade.com
- www.nooma.com
- www.youtube.com
- www.godtube.com
- www.engr.colostate.edu/~dga/high\_speed\_video
- www.biblemovies.com/oldtestament/moviebyperson.htm



## Music

Twenty-seven years ago, WELS member Mary Dorn Lippert began writing Christian songs for junior choirs. Soon, second-graders were singing them . . . then adult choirs. Who sings them varies; why they sing doesn't. Faith longs to express the joy and peace found in our Savior's redeeming love. And so, faith sings! Check out Mary's Web site: [www.faithsings.com](http://www.faithsings.com).

# Only At Sunday School!

A Sunday school teacher was telling her class the story of the Good Samaritan, in which a man was beaten, robbed and left for dead. She described the situation in vivid detail so her students would catch the drama. Then, she asked the class, "If you saw a person lying on the roadside, all wounded and bleeding, what would you do?" A thoughtful little girl broke the hushed silence, "I think I'd throw up."

A Sunday school teacher asked, "Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the Ark?" "No," replied Johnny. "How could he, with just two worms?"

# Partners

## Does Your Sunday School Measure Up?

That's a great question. How does your Sunday school measure up? To answer that question, however, you need to know what you are measuring up to? What is the "best practice" you are trying to achieve, what outcome is desired, what are the accepted and important "standards" you need to meet?

A new WELS.net University mini-course has been added to help you evaluate your Sunday school ministry and plan improvements. It's titled, "Sunday School Standards: How Do You Measure Up?" The course takes users through ten standards with several individual criterion under each standard. As each criterion is reviewed under each standard, users ask, "Does our Sunday school meet this criterion?" For criteria not met, discuss ways to fulfill what the criteria identify. For criteria that are met, celebrate and use these "successes" as a foundation for improvement.

Go to [www.wels.net/jump/wnusstraining](http://www.wels.net/jump/wnusstraining) and login or create an account. For new accounts, you will be prompted to complete your account profile and "enroll." Once enrolled, you are under no obligation to complete a course or to take any additional courses; you are free to explore and learn at your own pace.

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

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