



Partners

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

Sinners or Saints?

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

In a Bible study offered in my home congregation, the question was posed to participants: “Do you see yourself as a sinner or a saint?” Without a whole lot of hesitation, almost everyone in the group said, “Sinner.” The group discussed the reasons for this answer and basically concluded that this is how we have most often been taught, consciously and subconsciously, to view ourselves. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that, for truly we are all sinners. Then the study shared parts of a paper written by WELS Pastor Mark Cares (Messiah – Nampa, Idaho), and the entire Bible study group was encouraged to think of themselves quite differently – as saints! The study shared sections from Pastor Cares’s paper, and the information was truly interesting and incredible! Cares wrote,

Over the past few years, I have been paying careful attention to how the Bible, and especially the New Testament, speaks to and about believers. To put it mildly, I have been startled at how positively the Bible speaks to and about believers. Could the way we are addressing our members – the words we use, the emphases we make, the nature we address – could the way we speak to them be contributing to a stunting of their spiritual growth? But what is even more startling is how the biblical writers talk to and about believers. Here’s my unofficial and incomplete listing:

Righteous – approximately 180 times
 Brothers – 98 times just in Paul’s letters
 Saints – 67 times
 Holy – 36 times
 Friends – 24 times in the epistles

Chosen – 23 times
 Children of God – 13 times
 Elect – 10 times
 Heirs – 8 times
 Sanctified – 6 times
 God’s temple – 5 times
 Worldly or unspiritual – 4 times
 Wretched – 2 times (Romans 7:24, Rev. 3:17)
 Sinner – 2 times (1 Timothy 1:15, Psalm 25:8)
 Sinful – 1 time (Luke 5:8)

What are we to conclude from all this? Allow me to make a few observations. The first is that, by commonly referring to believers as sinners, we are speaking in a way that confuses believers’ dual nature with their single status. The Bible plainly states that believers have a dual nature - most often described as flesh and spirit. But the Bible also clearly emphasizes the believer’s one status before God. We are righteous; we are saints; we are God’s children; we are the heirs of heaven, and so forth. Do we speak as carefully as the Bible does? (*from “An Encouragement to Speak Positively to Believers”, North Atlantic District Missionaries’ Conference, June 14, 2004*)*



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Commission on Youth Discipleship:

Providing SS Resources

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22:6

One purpose of the Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) is to offer resources and consultation to WELS congregations for their various youth ministries. Go to www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship and click on "Consultation and Resources" for a list of resources and links to assist in your youth ministry activities.

One of the latest resources is for Sunday school ministry, titled "*Helpful Ideas for Teaching Sunday School.*" Claudia Kressin (Bloomer, WI) has corralled teaching ideas from more than a dozen WELS Sunday school teachers in the areas of: Preparing for the Lesson, Teaching the Lesson, Activities, Memory Work Methods, and Miscellaneous Tips and Ideas. Check out this and other resources on the CYD Web site.



Show Students You Care

Would you like your own Sunday school students or your entire Sunday school to connect with and encourage the children of WELS missionaries who are away from their families and studying in the United States? Several WELS missionaries have children who are enrolled in U.S. high schools or colleges. These students, far from their own homes, would appreciate letters, e-mails, care packages, etc. from you. To obtain a list of WELS missionary children studying in the U.S., contact Susan Hopkins: susan.hopkins@sab.wels.net, 414-256-3243.

"Sinners or Saints?" . . . continued from page 1.

My "take away" from this Bible study was that if God's people understood better and focused more on the fact that they are saints and heirs of heaven, their outlook, attitudes, demeanor, actions, and sense of purpose in life would be much more joy-filled, positive in direction, and inviting to others.

Sinner or a saint? What would your students answer? Do your students leave your class with head held high and total victory in their step? Do they understand that they are indeed saints because of what Jesus has done for them? Do they know, with all their hearts, that heaven is truly theirs? Do they go home to live with a positive and "heavenward" view? Is their joy in Jesus clearly and immediately evident to all? If not, you might want to remind them – and yourself – that, in Christ, you truly are saints!

* You can obtain Pastor Cares's paper from him directly: Mcares@cablone.net.



Cool Quote: Focus on Families

"As a leader in the Church, it only makes sense that I ally myself with the primary group who can do the job of disciple-making most naturally and efficiently, that is, the family. To spend my time otherwise, just doesn't make sense . . . But in reality, as leaders of the church, we spend a great deal of time trying to create new primary groups where there are none (such as in Sunday school classes, youth groups, small groups, etc.) while at the same time failing to nurture, stimulate and protect that primary group where the potential of disciple-making is going on every day and every night of the week. In truth, families make or break disciples, and in the process the task of the Church is made easier or more difficult."

Dennis Guernsey

A New design for Family Ministry, 1982, p. 11

Helping Hands When Problems Come

Adapted from “Rules of Thumb” by Pat Verbal, *Children’s Ministry.com*
(<http://www.childrensministry.com/article.asp?ID=1431>)

All ministries have issues, troubles, and problems arise that cannot and should not be ignored. When they come to your Sunday school ministry, use your hand and the following five simple rules to work toward resolution.

RULE #1: Know Yourself

Your thumb represents the first step in problem solving—taking a look at yourself. No matter the problem, first you must objectively examine your role in the issue. Ask yourself these questions:

- What’s my involvement in this issue? What should my involvement be?
- What do I need to do to effectively resolve this issue in a Christian manner?
- What is my responsibility to God, my team, my church, and my pastor?
- Am I contributing to the problem? If so, how?
- Is my relationship with God healthy, allowing me to be an effective problem-solver?

RULE #2: You’re Not Alone

Index finger. In the midst of problem solving, we often forget to look to the people we’ve assembled around us—a big mistake. Ask yourself these questions:

- Who is legitimately involved in the issue? Who should be involved?
- How can other team members directly or indirectly help the situation? Hurt the situation?
- In what ways can I use the talents and gifts of my team to resolve this issue?
- What procedures or policies can be instituted to discourage such a problem in the future?

RULE #3: Leaders Stand Together

Your middle finger, standing tall, is a reminder that leaders need each other. As you grapple with a problem, ask yourself:

- Who in your leader network has had a similar experience?
- What other leader has expertise in, or is a good source of support for, this situation?

- How can you make a more informed decision with the input of other leaders?
- In what other area of ministry or life have you seen someone lead a successful resolution to a similar problem?
- What traits do you admire in other leaders that you can emulate now?

RULE #4: We All Have Weaknesses

The ring finger “can’t stand alone,” so it reminds us to bring our weaknesses to light. Ask yourself these questions:

- Specific to this problem, in what ways is our ministry weak? Strong?
- How do these weaknesses impact our volunteers, children, parents, leadership, and congregation?
- What would it take to remedy these weaknesses?
- How can we learn from our strengths to improve our weak areas?

RULE #5: Children Are the Reason

The pinky reminds us who and why we serve—the little ones. When others ask us why we work so hard, we all know the answer: “We do it for the children!” So, for the children, ask:

- How could children be impacted by this problem?
- How does this problem affect our mission, value statement, and ministry goals?
- What resolution best serves children?
- What is the potential fallout for children?

With these rules “in hand,” you’ll find God at work, helping you hold tight to him and improving the ministry you are privileged to serve in his name.



Users Weigh In on WNU Training

After taking the online course, *Jesus Master Teacher*, Hazel wrote: "Some excellent suggestions for us to use in teaching Sunday school. Much too often we forget to have a sense of humor. We somehow seem to think that religion needs to be somber and serious. We can make our classes more enjoyable by seeing the humor in things."

Pastor Jonathan wrote in response to taking *Teaching Sunday School: A Wonderful Calling*: "Thank you for this course. I took it to try it out. I am planning to share this with my SS teachers. What a blessing to have this resource to remind us of the blessings of both personal and public ministry."

OOPS!

In the last Partners issue, we put in the wrong Web address to access WELS.net University Sunday school mini-courses. The correct address is www.wels.net/jump/wnustraining. Sorry!

Brian, who took the course, *Teaching the Way Children Actually Learn*, wrote: "Good course. It is mostly theory and concept. It would be good to give a few examples of how to put the concepts into practice in a Sunday school class. Including such examples would be helpful to those of us who are not trained teachers. Thanks for this resource. It is excellent!"

After taking the mini-course on recruiting staff, Judy wrote: "Thanks for the great listing of resources from Northwest [Publishing House] and WELS. The requests I hear most at our meetings is for us to share innovative ideas to get the message through to the children. Although we have the reference books for our Bible story facts, we have little resources on hand for new activities. I will be looking into these resources once I complete the classes presently offered through this great internet series."

Need more convincing? Take a mini-course yourself! Go to www.wels.net/jump/wnustraining and log in. They are free and fabulous!

Only At Sunday School!

A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five and six year olds. After explaining the 4th Commandment to honor your father and your mother, she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" Without missing a beat one little boy answered, "You should not kill."

Dear God,
I read that Thomas Edison made light, but in Sunday school they said you did it. So I bet he stole your idea.

Sincerely, Donna

I Have a Secret!

by Kimberly Hierlmeier, Trinity – Waukesha, WI

Psssst! I have a secret! Our church has a Sunday school! And guess what else? Everyone's invited!

Do you sometimes feel your Sunday school is one of the best kept secrets of your church? I know I have. However, I've seen many positive things the Lord has done through this ministry. Many of our Sunday school graduates, throughout high school and beyond, glorify God by gladly serving as ushers, Sunday school teachers and helpers, pianists, organists, soloists, participating in our teen program, video ministry and in other areas. WOW - what a joy!

But I'm also a numbers person. I love numbers and mathematics. It is a gift the Lord has blessed me with and challenges me to use to His glory. And boy do I watch our Sunday school numbers! Those numbers give me a pulse on where my ministry is at and where it needs to go – especially the attendance number. You, I'm sure, do the same. As I reviewed our 2006 attendance and compared it to the number of Sunday school aged children in our congregation, it became very clear that it was an area in critical condition. We only enrolled 7% of our Lutheran Elementary School (LES) children and 35% of our public school children. But how could it be resuscitated? As with anything, prayer and God's Word are always good places to start.

Our Sunday school, of course, makes use of all the traditional communication channels – letters, bulletin inserts, newsletter, announcements, video bulletin, personal phone calls and our own large bulletin board. This year, we added a new communication source – the "Tour of Trinity." The "tour" is the opportunity to share what has become a very well kept secret in our congregation – **we have a Sunday School!** The "tour" continues and has had a number of stops in our congregation including:

- Personally addressing the congregation after the services celebrating the opening of another school year for our LES. It was a great opportunity to reach these families and let them know why they would like to take advantage of another opportunity to spend time in God's Word and even have a personal bonding experience with the Holy Spirit.
- Meeting with our congregational Boards and Committees to not only encourage them in their ministries but to ask them, as the leaders that they are, to support the Sunday school ministry by actively involving their families in it. Members of our congregation "follow the leaders" and Hebrews 13:7 urges us "Remember your leaders, who spoke

the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." By sharing the well kept secret of Sunday school with our leaders, we encouraged them to have positive spiritual impacts on our other members.

- Joining our LES students for their mid-week chapel service and sharing the Sunday school secret with them. I brought props to share and outlined what fun we will be having in God's Word this year. I even challenged them to tell their parents they want to go to Sunday school because I don't know of any one of those parents who would say "no" to their child wanting to be in God's Word.

In addition to our lessons, singing in church, Christmas program, invitation outreach and mission project, we have added three programs: Visitor Packs; Family Days; and a Pin Collection. Our Visitor Packs include info about our church and youth programs as well as a "Survival Kit for Jesus' Kids" (Partners, Spring 2007). Our five "Family Days" are set to allow Trinity families who do not currently send their children to Sunday school a chance to "try us out." And the Pin Collection (which ties into various areas of our church) allows every student an opportunity to receive a set of pins throughout the year. WOW! The kids and families are really charged up about this program!

It's no secret! We have a great agenda of God's Word, fun and service set for our students and families! Our staff and the kids and families enrolled are very excited! It is early in the year to tell exactly what impact our new actions have had on the numbers, but I will let you know as I share the details on our Pin Program next time. May the Lord continue to strengthen you and bless you as you do His work in this vital Sunday school ministry!



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Partners



A Great Holiday Stocking-Stuffer!

Need a simple, yet effective way to help your students learn how to share Jesus with others? Need a neat Christmas gift “extra” to distribute to students? Take a look at “*Called to Share*,” a unique resource from WELS Youth Discipleship.

In a 20 page, comic book style, “*Called to Share*” introduces you to brother and sister, Val and Alex. In their interaction with friends, Eddie, who has trouble with peer pressure, and Mike, who doesn’t know about Jesus, Val and Alex learn how important and easy it is to share Jesus in everyday situations.

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or CYD (cyd@sab.wels.net) 414-256-3274.

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