



Sowers & Seeds

Published by the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship & Parish Schools to assist those in early childhood ministry.

Conduits For Christ

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



A Christian teacher is...

*A MIND through which Christ THINKS.
A VOICE through which Christ SPEAKS.
A HEART through which Christ LOVES.
A HAND through which Christ HELPS.*



The words above, adapted from *Uncle Ben's Quotebook* (1980), are a fitting reminder of what you are. In your early childhood ministry you are a "conduit for Christ." Your mind, voice, heart, and hands are used by the Holy Spirit to pass on Jesus to the children you serve and their families.

In 1990, Peter Benson and Carolyn Eklin of the Search Institute, surveyed 11,000 adults and youth from churches in several denominations, and wrote, "Christian education matters much more than we expected. Of all the areas of congregational life we examined, involvement in an effective

Christian education program has the strongest tie to a person's growth in faith. While other congregational factors also matter, nothing matters more than effective Christian education, and this is as true for adults as it is for children."*

The seven most important words in that quote are these: nothing matters more than effective Christian education. You and I know that, and everyday we see that as the Holy Spirit, through the Good News of Jesus Christ, molds the hearts and lives of the children and families we serve. The Benson/Eklin quote also reminds us that Christian education is for all ages. And that's what's so amazing about where God has placed you. You are engaged in a ministry where children and their parents can be touched by God through you – where you can be a conduit for Christ to the entire home at a point in the family life cycle when everyone is more willing to hear what you have to say. Take advantage of that, be intentional, ponder new and better ways to become a sharper mind through which Christ thinks, a louder voice through which Christ speaks, a bigger heart through which Christ loves, and a stronger hand through which Christ helps.

Have a wonderful summer!

* *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*, Search Institute, 1990.

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Using Stones to Reach Families

By Dan Nommensen – Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service

Anyone who is a parent knows the tremendous responsibility we have to raise our children in the Lord. At our child's baptism we made a promise to teach the truths to them so that they may remain a child of God. It is easy to pass off this all important work to others in the church. However, teaching the truths of God to our children is not the sole responsibility of pastors or teachers – but parents. In Deuteronomy 6:5-9 the Lord reminds us that this teaching and training can become a natural part of family life,

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.”

Unfortunately statistics are revealing that parents in America are neglecting their role as spiritual leaders in the home. In fact, by the time a child in America hits grade school, he will already have spent more time with the television than he will spend with his father for the rest of his life. Recent research by the Barna group <www.barna.org> has also shown that parents do indeed realize they have the responsibility to teach these truths to their children, but few have the tools and confidence to do it.

Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, Inc. (WLCFS) has announced a new ministry program called *Faith Stepping Stones* which will help congregations address these serious issues. With this ministry, congregational leaders (called workers or lay people) will teach parents with children ages 0-5 how to nurture the

faith of their infants and toddlers every day within their own homes. Parents are equipped as faith mentors and guides for their own children so the church can serve as a reinforcement – not replacement – of the parents' duties.

Each component of the program (Stone) consists of three 90 minute seminars. Each “Stone” focuses on helping parents learn practical ways to foster the emotional, physical, and spiritual growth in their children. The three “Stones” are:

Raising a Healthy Baby Raising a Healthy Preschooler Entry Into School

These seminars can be used as great outreach tools and are highly relational using a variety of presentation methods such as games, activities, skits, role plays, singing, drawing, small and large group discussion and visual media.

WLCFS hosts regional *Faith Stepping Stones* training seminars across the country for WELS leaders on an annual basis. Once trained, leaders have the opportunity to implement *Faith Stepping Stones* in their own congregation and begin to train parents to take an active role in their children's faith development. WLCFS offered three regional trainings in 2004. Attending these trainings, were 155 people including lay leaders, pastors, teachers, staff ministers, preschool directors and childcare administrators. Here is one of many comments regarding the trainings offered in 2004:

“Faith Stepping Stones provides a wealth of resources, and encouragement to help parents use the gospel to make an eternal impact on their own children and the generations that will follow them. Instead of wringing our hands about spiritually weak families, Faith Stepping Stones helps us as congregations to take practical steps to equip families with what they need to grow stronger in Christ.”

Plans are now being made by WLCFS to expand these first three “Stones” and offer a total of eight “Stones” which would cover birth through graduation from high school.

If you are interested in learning more about *Faith Stepping Stones*, supporting this exciting family ministry program, or helping congregations establish this new family ministry program please visit the WLCFS web site <www.wlcfs.org> or contact Dan Nommensen at 888-685-9522.



Resource Recommendations

Simple Stories Jesus Told: 13 Lessons and Songs for Young Children

By: *Mary Rice Hopkins*

Group Publishing <www.grouppublishing.org>

Order #: 0-7644-2796-2 / Price: \$23.99

It's sing-along time with *the* Mary Rice Hopkins! Loved by young audiences everywhere, these Hopkins hits quench kids' thirst for knowing Jesus. In song, teach your pre-schoolers about the parables of Jesus. They'll learn about the Good Samaritan, The Lost Coin, The Unmerciful Servant, and more! *Simple Stories* includes 13 lessons with songs, activities, crafts, games, prayers and more to bring children's joyful noise to life! Each one-hour lesson instills a simple, age-appropriate Bible point. Includes book and CD.

"This publication is a good supplement in teaching Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarteners the parables of Christ. Good usage of multiple learning styles."

(Lisa Stellick, Hope Lutheran Church, West Chicago, IL and member of the WELS Southeastern WI District Youth Discipleship committee)

Children in the Church

Children in the Church (2003) is a WELS-CYD produced video and print resource for anyone involved in children's ministry: Sunday school staffs, Lutheran elementary school faculties, VBS staffs, early childhood ministries.

The four part video and companion study guide encourage participants to seriously evaluate the ministry they are doing with the children in their congregations, and by extension, their families. While the future of our congregations rests with our children, connecting these children and their families to Jesus, is what ministry is really all about.

Children of the Church (38-3087) is \$21.25 plus shipping/handling. Order from WELS Youth Discipleship: <cyd@sab.wels.net> or 414-256-3274 or online at <www.nph.net/welsproducts> or by calling NPH at 800-662-6022.

Seed Notes

► Got Something to Say?

Special discussion boards for early childhood ministry and ministers can be found at <www.wels.net/jumpword/ecm>. Look in the "Discussion Boards" folder. One discussion board (ECM Share) is hosted by WELS Parish Schools and covers topics for full-time early childhood ministries. The other discussion board (EC Chatter) is hosted by WELS Youth Discipleship and covers topics for more part-time early childhood ministries. Enter the discussions and post questions, share ideas, and recommend resources.

► We Need Your Support

Sowers & Seeds is coming to you free of charge. In order to maintain this level of service and continue this new ministry effort, we could use your help. If you believe you will benefit from this newsletter, please consider a financial gift to *Sowers & Seeds* in care of WELS-CYD. *Sowers & Seeds* is currently made available to 2,500 called and lay early childhood ministers.

► 238 Children and 274 Parents

For the 2004-05 school year, 8,449 children are enrolled in WELS preschools – 3,581 (42%) WELS and 4,868 (58%) non-WELS. Of the 4,868 non-WELS children, 3,332 (68%) are members of other Christian churches, 196 (4%) are members of non-Christian religions, and 1,340 (28%) are unchurched. WELS preschools also reported that 238 children (7%) from this non-WELS cohort and 274 of their parents joined WELS congregations.

For the 2004-05 school year, 3,209 students are enrolled in WELS kindergartens. Of these 1,809 (56%) were students in a WELS 4-year-old preschool in 2003-04. Further study is needed to determine how many non-WELS preschool children are enrolling in our Lutheran elementary schools.



Share Your Story

What interesting, exciting, and innovative things are you doing with the young children in your congregation/ECM and their parents to connect them better to your ministry, each other, and Jesus?

Email us: cyd@sab.wels.net





The Director's Corner - Everyone a Leader

By Professor Cheryl Loomis, Martin Luther College

"You're not the boss of me!" Certainly every teacher has, at some point in time, heard this sentiment expressed. Often it is shouted as children battle for control; other times it is spoken in defiance. The idea of who is in control is appealing to young children. A conversation at the snack table reinforced this for me. Preschool children were trying to determine who the boss was. Using their peculiar brand of logic – the tallest is the boss, no, the heaviest, or maybe, the oldest – they finally concluded that I must be the boss. As the conversation progressed the children wondered if even their teacher had a boss. They concluded that the director, Miss Haar, must be the boss of all of us. After all, they reasoned, she has an office. "But who is Miss Haar's boss?" – a logical sequence in thinking. This stumped them for a moment till one child announced that God was the boss of Miss Haar. The discussion stopped as the children reached a satisfying and accurate solution to the chain of command at our early childhood center.

Children, obviously, do not realize the structure set in place for an early childhood ministry to run effectively. Administrative flow charts and hierarchy are foreign to them. Children view all adults who work with them as equals by virtue of the fact that they are grown-ups. They learn from those things we do and from that which we choose not to do. Every interaction with an adult has an impact on children whether positive or negative. Do all the adults in your ministry view themselves as role models for the children

they serve? What about the people who serve behind the scenes? Would they consider themselves to be leaders? Do we acknowledge the service they provide as leading?

Leadership involves relationships. Building supportive relationships with all involved is a critical in running an effective ministry. The director's actions provide a model for others to follow. Everything you do or choose not to do contributes to the way an early childhood ministry functions. Followers are always learning from the leader. A good leader is also learning from those followers in the group. Learning to follow helps build relationships and can influence decision making. Taking time to talk with one another is necessary to equip one another with leadership skills. Relationship building is successful when all involved feel their voice is heard. Do all the adults involved in your program know and understand your mission statement? Unity in purpose helps everyone involved understand their role as leaders.

In *Learning to Lead*, Debra Sullivan describes leadership as "the recognition of individual strengths and contributions as well as the recognition of individual responsibility in the leadership process. It is a subtle process of leaders and followers influencing each other. If you interact with people, you are leading." See leadership opportunities everywhere. Teach leadership every day.

Written for All of Us

I received the first issue of *Sowers & Seeds* and it affirmed what I believe - early childhood is a very important time of life. This newsletter came from the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship (CYD) and Parish Schools (CPS), those God has chosen to lead others who are in leadership positions in our congregations. The first *Sowers & Seeds* newsletter was uplifting, encouraging, and personal. It was written for all of us in the early childhood ministry.

The work we do is rewarding, yet challenging. It is so nice to know that someone is paying attention and cares. Because of *Sowers & Seeds* I feel connected to all the preschool/childcare workers in WELS. As one body, no matter how far apart we are from each other, we have one mission. That mission is to share Jesus at Bible time, in every interaction we have with the children, and in every conversation we have with families. We do this work with Jesus' help knowing he will bless our efforts and forgive our failings.

CYD and CPS, I sincerely thank you for your encouragement. I think you have done more than you thought or intended. Together we praise Jesus, the one who makes the seeds grow.

Janis Visaggio, Director

Bethany Preschool - North Fort Myers, FL





Home + School Partnership in Literacy

By Professor Sharon Burow, Wisconsin Lutheran College

How often do we lament to colleagues our disappointment in a family's lack of partnership, specifically in the understanding of literacy? We know that a young child's ability to read is not nurtured in the stack of workbooks at the grocery/discount store checkout isle. However, well-intentioned adults are often coerced into purchasing commercialized materials and books based on television cartoon characters and advertisements, and other literature that is not supportive or doesn't engage children as readers.

Developing a family packet program can ensure that the children in your classroom are being immersed in quality reading materials. You are at the helm in providing appropriate literature and books with predictable patterns that reinforce what has been initiated in your classroom. Research attests that frequent reading supports children in their understanding of written language and developing reading skills (Barbour, 1998/99)*. A family-centered reading program can provide additional literacy opportunities and may aid you in developing or refining the literacy bridge between your early childhood classroom and the home.

Family learning packets are designed to bring meaningful and enjoyable extensions of the early childhood curriculum

into the home. The materials serve as a partnership between the classroom and the family in anchoring children in developmentally appropriate activities that celebrate and nurture a child's spiritual, physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth. Teachers take into consideration a child's experiences and interests and the family's culture, skill level, and busy schedule.



Family learning packets reinforce specific skills at a child's developmental level, engage the child through hands-on learning, support all families through culturally diverse literature, promote collaborative experiences between the family and the classroom, expand the foundation of the classroom curriculum, and create another way to share Jesus with families.

You can learn more about family learning packets and see specific examples of components at <www.wels.net/jumpword/ecm>. Look in "WELS Early Childhood Resources (Full-Time Settings)," then in "Print Resources." You can also contact Professor Burow at Wisconsin Lutheran College (414) 443-8800 or via email: Sharon_Burow@wlc.edu.

* Barbour, A.C. (1998/99). Home literacy bags: Promote family involvement. *Childhood Education, Winter*, 71-75.



The Mouths of Babes

One evening, my two and a half year old daughter, Lindsay (she's now 13), was trying to put on her pajamas with every stitch of independence she could muster. After several attempts, she just could not pull the pajama top over her head properly. Of course, my laughing only irritated her more. Finally she yelled, "Help me you jingle-heimer-schmidt!"

Joel Nelson

A kindergarten teacher gave each pupil a bar of soap and a popsicle stick and said, "Carve whatever you like." After a bit she circulated among them, asking each child what they were making. The answers went like this:

- "A gun."
- "A duck."
- "A face."
- "A boat."
- "Soap Flakes."

A preschool teacher was explaining first day procedures to her new students: "If anyone needs to go to the washroom, hold up two fingers." From the back of the room came the question, "How's that gonna help?"



Sowers & Seeds

Five Tips for Helping Children in Church

Adapted from Cindy Bailey - "Shining Star" 1996, Issue 44

- ▶ Start by doing your best to make sure everyone gets enough rest the night before. Avoid unnecessary commitments the night before church.
- ▶ Fix something fast and satisfying for breakfast. Then, when you pray for the food, ask God to bless the time you'll all be in worship.
- ▶ Dress your child comfortably. The pink, lacy confection from Grandma won't be so cute if little Susie starts screaming, "Get this cwazy thing offa me!" during the sermon.
- ▶ If you have already been in Sunday school for an hour, take a brisk walk before worship begins. Maybe march, jump, or stretch. Then get a drink and use the bathroom.
- ▶ A "Sunday morning only" activity bag filled with soft toys and books (especially Bible story books) can be very helpful.

** Next time, five more tips.*



All Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, New International Version © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. **Sowers & Seeds** is published four times a year by the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship & Parish Schools. Comments about this **Sowers & Seeds** and ideas for future issues can be directed to Joel Nelson, Administrator WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship.

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