



Sowers & Seeds

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

Are We There Yet?

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

Will you be taking a trip this summer? God-willing, my family will go to “The Thumb” of Michigan to visit my wife’s family in Pigeon. My in-laws actually live on Sand Point which is a peninsula that sticks out into the Saginaw Bay of Lake Huron. It is a very beautiful setting, right on the water. The problem is, it takes nine hours to get there by car from where we live near Milwaukee, and that’s if you can get through the Chicago/Gary juggernaut quickly. I love

my wife and her family dearly, but I have told my children on more than one occasion – usually when we are into the seventh sweaty, smelly hour of our long trip to Pigeon – that when they start looking for a life mate, they might want to look closer to home.

When you take a long trip like this, especially if you have children along, you have to be prepared. You need to pack

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Just like on a long earthly trip, we can whine all we want about getting to heaven, but that’s not going to get us there any faster.

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DID YOU KNOW...

9 in 10 parents favor requiring all child care programs to meet basic quality standards, train caregivers, and pass regular inspections (www.foxnews.com).

61% of children under age 1 watch TV for at least one hour each day. 19% of children this age also have TVs in their bedrooms. (The Kaiser Family Foundation).

Language explodes for children between 18 and 24 months. During this stage, toddlers learn approximately nine new words a day and begin to form two-to-three word sentences. (How Babies Talk-Roberta Michnick Golinkoff).

Although no two children are alike, there are certain norms we can use to measure a child’s developmental progress. When it comes to social skills, the typical preschooler should be able to name a friend and play board and card games with parents, teachers, and peers (Children’s Ministry Magazine).

Over 2.5 million U.S. grandparents are responsible for the care, support, nurture, and protection of their grandchildren (National Center on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren).

40% of infants and toddlers are sleep-deprived. 60% of school children say they are tired during the day (www.startribune.com).

Young children who are closely monitored and communicate well with parents are less likely to have behavior problems at age 9 (Child Magazine).

The leading cause of accidental, injury-related death for children under 1 is airway obstruction injury, including choking, strangulation, and suffocation (Safe Kids Worldwide).

something for the kids to do. . .books, maybe some games, some pillows, of course they bring their own electronic gizmos, and also plenty of food. Food is a must because as soon as anyone starts to whine, “Are we there yet?” you can shove a bunch of crackers in their mouth. I will not take this trip to MI unless I have my own personal bag of Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies. Doing all these things during a long journey does help to keep everyone occupied, but most of the time, when you finally get to your destination, you have a headache, a stomachache, or both.

Talking about long, summer vacation journeys makes me think about another journey that seems to be taking way too long. It’s the trip to heaven. I don’t know about you, but there are a lot of times when I kind of whine, “Are we there yet?” I can’t wait to get to heaven. It’s going to make beautiful Sand Point, MI look like a desolate, deserted, weed-infested wasteland. And just like on a long earthly trip, I can whine all I want about getting to heaven, but that’s not going to get me there any faster. I won’t get to heaven until God sees fit to end my earthly journey.

What’s cool though, is that God has given me some really great things to do to meaningfully occupy my time between now and then.

- He gives me his Word to read, study, and follow.
- He gives me a church to attend, to worship and praise him along with my brothers and sisters in Christ.
- He gives me Christian family and friends to enjoy, do things with, to love and be loved by them.
- He gives me all kinds of people to pray for and things to pray about.
- He gives me countless opportunities to serve: at home, in my church, in my community.
- He gives me many chances to share the Gospel with others.
- He allows me to work every day with other awesome Christians.

And the things God gives me to do to occupy myself while I’m waiting to get to heaven, make me feel good, inside and out, and give me tremendous purpose, focus, confidence, and optimism. Two passages of Scripture reinforce this so well:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:20

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 2 Peter 3:13

Whether the trip to heaven is still much longer for some of us, or ends while reading this newsletter, we all know we are going to be there. And will it be great to finally be home! In the mean time, let’s occupy ourselves totally with the great things God has given us to do. Have a wonderful summer in Jesus!

Early Childhood Education Spells Later Success

by Professor Cheryl Loomis – Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN

High-quality early education promotes children’s development and learning. Early education includes all experiences at home, in a childcare setting, and in other preschool settings. All experiences, regardless of the setting, are educational. Brain research demonstrates that development is affected by a child’s environment and experiences.

In “Preventing Early Learning Failure,” Lawrence Schweinhart highlights the lasting effects both short and long-term that quality early education has on children. Children who participate in these types of programs have greater confidence and are better prepared to learn how to read, listen effectively, and interact with their peers. Over the years, these students perform better academically and are more likely to complete high school and pursue higher education. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) shares this viewpoint by stating, “Participation in high-quality preschool programs is a key predictor of educational success later in life.” The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that high-quality care and education pro-

grams have been documented to promote children’s development and learning, whereas poor-quality programs may place children’s development at risk.

Indicators of high-quality early education include beginning earlier rather than later in a child’s life, strong support for families, well-qualified teachers, a rich language environment and strong focus on emergent literacy, low student-teacher ratios, along with a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Compliance with state regulation and health and safety practices are additional indicators of a high-quality program.



It is estimated that one-third of America’s children arrive at kindergarten unprepared. This emphasizes the need for quality education to be in place for all children before they head to elementary school. Early childhood educators need to be discussing the indicators of high-quality and working toward implementing these as best as possible. If we are to make a difference in a child’s life we must continually seek to improve the long-term value of early childhood experiences.

Also consider this...

“Experiences that fill [a child’s] first days, months, and years have a decisive impact on the structure of a child’s brain and, in turn, on every aspect of a child’s life throughout adulthood.” *Ten Tips for Raising Happier, Healthier Children* (2002)

“Childhood experiences act as the primary architects of the brain’s capabilities for a lifetime. Consistent, nurturing, structured, and enriched experiences lead to a flexible, empathetic, and intelligent adult.” *Great Beginnings: The First Years Last Forever* (1998)

“Environment is the first influencer of our belief system. Therefore the foundation of an attitude is laid in the environment to which we were born. Environment becomes even more significant when we realize that the beginning attitudes are the most difficult to change.” John Maxwell, *Becoming a Person of Influence* (2003).

“Every positive inclination toward personality, intellect, even faith itself is formed in childhood. . .Regardless of culture, economics, or any other factor (apart from the Means of Grace), the chances of a person coming to faith in Jesus go down dramatically after childhood. On the other hand every sinful dysfunction, character flaw, and destructive tendency in any person’s life are also formed in childhood – in the very womb itself. What we learn in childhood is so critical that the good of it sustains us throughout life and the bad of it takes a lifetime to try to overcome. Jason Nelson, *Children in the Church* (2003).



Outreach Strategies for Early Childhood Ministry

by Cynthia Holman – Commission on Parish Schools Early Childhood Task Force
& Kindergarten teacher at St. Marcus Lutheran School in Milwaukee, WI

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

When considering the Great Commission, we often think of missionaries far from home in countries and cultures vastly different from our own.

For several years, WELS has been quietly doing mission work in a far different setting than pictured above. WELS congregations operate over 375 early childhood ministries (ECM) such as preschools and early childhood centers in 31 states and two foreign countries. In these preschools and early childhood centers, over 450 WELS ECM teachers share the love of Jesus with over 6,500 children every day. Many of these schools have been formed to intentionally reach out to their community with the Gospel. Over the past several months, WELS Commission on Parish Schools (CPS) Early Childhood Task Force asked these missionaries to share their work and ideas with us. Our intention was to gather and share outreach strategies with our early childhood ministries so they might share the Gospel more effectively.

The results of the survey were both inspiring and for the most part, surprisingly simple. We often feel we need a clever plan or ingenious program but our findings showed quite the opposite. Most of the strategies fit under three significant categories.

1. First and most importantly an outreach ministry has a congregation and staff that are deeply committed to being in the Word and have an intentional outreach focus. These two concepts naturally go hand in hand. The more we are students of the Word, the more the Holy Spirit works a stronger faith in our hearts and our eagerness to share the Good News becomes something we do as a natural fruit of that faith.

2. Realtors often talk about location, location, location. While location of our schools is important, even more important are relationships, relationships, relationships. It takes time and effort and is one of the keys to outreach. It is crucial to have a purposeful plan to get to know not just the children, but the families and the communities we serve. It is most often as simple as taking the time to have frequent and meaningful conversations.
3. The third concept that appeared over and over was the pastor’s involvement in the school. This involvement was not in administrative tasks but rather that the pastor is intentionally available on a regular basis to build relationships with families in a friendly, natural way. They greet the families as they drop off or pick up their children each day. The pastor visits the classroom from time to time and reads a story or shares a Bible story. The pastor makes a home visit on families just to get to know them and find out how the school is meeting the needs of their child and their family.

On the early childhood portion of the WELS Web site (www.wels.net/jump/ecm) you will find a list of outreach strategies for early childhood ministry. We have provided a simple key (see below) that might help you to sort out some of the ideas listed. We would encourage you to go through this list with your staff, your director, your principal (where applicable), and your pastor. We encourage you to be honest and bold for the sake of the Gospel with which we are entrusted. Hopefully you will find some strategies that will present a new concept you can either use or adapt for your ministry. We have grouped the suggestions received into the three categories listed above.



Key:

- A. We are already using this strategy or something similar.
- B. We are using this strategy but it needs some fine tuning.
- C. We need to consider this strategy.
- D. We are planning to implement this strategy.



Age Level Insights

Children's Ministry Magazine (Group Publishing, Loveland, CO, 800-447-1070, www.group.com – bimonthly, \$19.95/year) is a Christian educator's magazine with a wonderful section in each issue called "Age Level Insights". The insights are organized Birth-2, Ages 3-5, Ages 6-9, and Ages 10-12.

For the early childhood minister, the Birth-Age 5 sections provide craft ideas, teaching tips, activities to try, developmental characteristics, helping special needs children, resource reviews, and more. Though not a WELS publication, *Children's Ministry Magazine* would be a very helpful resource. Here are two examples:

Comfort Photos

Help soothe fussy infants and toddlers in your room by creating family photo cards for them to look at while Mom or Dad are away. At various times, take photos of Mom, Dad, or a sibling holding the child. Print 5x7 photos, glue them individually to card stock, and laminate. Create a file folder for each child's family photos. When the child gets fussy, take out the family photos for them to look at and play with. Ask the child to name their family members as they look at each card. Remind the child that Mom and Dad love them very much and will be returning soon. Talking about and holding the familiar faces helps calm the child's anxiety and reminds them that even when apart, their families love them. [You could even insert a picture of Jesus and tell the child about his love for them, too.]

Mirror, Mirror

Using a mirror in the nursery is a great way for infants and toddlers to develop an awareness of themselves and others. Try these entertaining ideas to help little ones discover themselves and God's love.

Who's That? – Place a baby on your lap in front of the mirror and point to his/her reflection. Ask, "Who's that?" Then say "That's (baby's name) and Jesus loves (baby's name)."

Hide and Seek – Place a baby with an object in front of the mirror and say: "See (baby's name) and the (object's name)." Then pull the object out of sight, then back into view. This will strengthen the baby's observation skills.

God Made You – As a baby views his or her reflection in the mirror, point out the different parts of the body and say, for example, "God made your toes" (wiggle baby's toes) or "God made your hands" (clap baby's hands together), etc.

Safety Tips On a Sensitive Subject

Safety Tips On A Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse is a 15-minute look at steps you and your congregation should take to help prevent an incident and how your organization should react if there is an allegation.

Noted attorneys and psychologists who specialize in sexual abuse cases share their knowledge and will help you to learn:

- Screening steps when recruiting employees and volunteers
- Physical changes to your facility that discourage abuse
- Supervisory policies for employees and volunteers, particularly those in direct contact with children
- Steps to protect your ministry, staff, and volunteers against lawsuits resulting from these crimes.

The video is designed as an aid to worship centers, camps, and schools. It's yours FREE simply by asking.

To request your copy of the *Safety Tips On A Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse* video, please fill out Church Mutual's E-mail Contact Form at www.churchmutual.com. Church Mutual will mail the video to you free of charge.

You also can order the video by phone by calling Doris Neubauer at (800) 554-2642. Select menu Option "4" and then enter her extension, 4205, followed by the # key. If you receive voice mail, leave your name, the name of your organization, and mailing address.



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From the Mouths of Babes

One day Maverick (name changed to protect the innocent) was playing in the sandbox on our playground. As he was digging a hole, he tossed the sand over his shoulder and it landed on a friend's head. He didn't know what had happened when the friend squealed, but he got up and ran from the sandbox. One of the teachers went over to Maverick and brought him back to the sandbox. "Do you know what you did, Maverick?" she asked. "I don't know, but I'm forgiven!" he said with great relief.

*Sent in by Janis Visaggio
Bethany Christian Preschool – North Fort Myers, FL*

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 Dr. Joel A. Nelson, Administrator WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship.

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