



# Sowers & Seeds

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

## You Are an Ambassador

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



D'Arcy Maher, Director of Early Education Services for the Association of Christian Schools International, (ACSI) says, "Early [Christian] educators have the opportunity to reintroduce elements of faith to parents and serve as ambassadors to the greater details of a child's unfolding educational experience" (*Early Education Services, CSE Volume 12.4, 2008-09, p. 25*). How is this possible and, more importantly, how is an early childhood minister prepared and supported in this important task?

D'Arcy has experienced that, "When parenthood comes to a couple, the event can often be a catalyst for the two of them to seriously consider what they wish to build into their child's life." As the young couple ponders what it wants for their little one, they frequently think about the spiritual

training they'd like to see, but aren't quite sure how to direct it. This presents a great opportunity for the early childhood minister to be a real ambassador for Christ.

D'Arcy recalls situations from her years as an early childhood teacher in a Christian center. During the year, young parents would ask questions like...

- "I don't remember too much about the Bible, and my son is insisting that I retell him the stories of Jesus he hears from you. Where would I find them?"
- "My son came home singing, 'This Little Light of Mine,' and his brother wants to know what it means. What should I say?"
- "My son wants me to memorize Psalm 23 with him. What do you think about that?"
- "My son wants me to bring him here on Sundays. I think that's probably a good idea. How can I reconnect with God and stuff?"

As she encountered each question, D'Arcy says she prayed that these young parents' spiritual interest and curiosity would continue to expand and that she'd be able to give them the answers they needed. What she found, however, was that she faltered a bit with her answers to these simple, conversational questions. Although D'Arcy's college education prepared her to engage the children, sometimes she felt intimidated by conversations with parents, and great opportunities were missed.

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# What Makes Families Strong?



Some wise, Christian educator once said, “When you enroll the child, you enroll the family.” The point being, that your ministry should be concerned about the spiritual development of the family as well as that of the child.

Christian and secular experts on family suggest that there are eleven things families should do or be in order to remain healthy and whole.

- Practice good communication.
- Spend time together.
- Are committed to each other and the family.
- Cope successfully with crises and problems.
- Promote values and moral behavior.
- Establish clear member roles and generational boundaries.
- Are intimate, showing affection and appreciation for each other.
- Allow for the development of each individual family member.
- Are adaptable and flexible.
- Have a sense of purpose.
- Have a spiritual focus.

You can learn more about these eleven characteristics and encourage the families you serve to do the same. Go to [www.wels.net/jump/wnuparenting](http://www.wels.net/jump/wnuparenting) and take the mini-course, “Strong Families, Blessed Lives.” Other mini-courses are there for families and parents as well.

“Your Are an Ambassador” . . . cont. from page 1

Preschool parents easily build rapport with early education teachers who may seem less intimidating than the teachers they will meet as their child enters formal education. In this friendly environment, parents frequently ask spiritual questions, and we must be prepared to give an answer as 1 Peter 3:15 instructs. D’Arcy suggests some simple questions to help you reflect on your preparedness.

## Questions to Consider

### For Teachers

Am I nervous when talking to parents about spiritual concepts? Why or why not?

What can I do to become more confident in my knowledge of the Bible and biblical concepts?

What are some ways I can intentionally expand classroom activities to prompt spiritual questions from parents?

Which colleague could support my endeavors and pray for me as I engage parents spiritually?

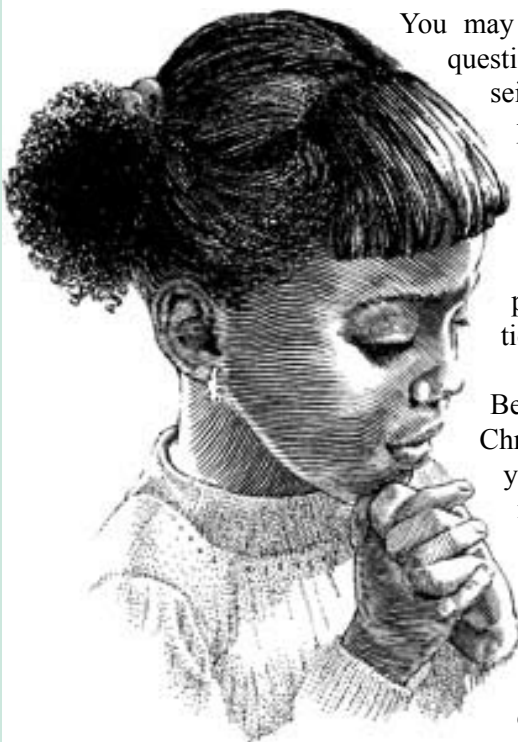
### For Administrators

Do I consider parents to be part of our ministry target? Why or why not?

How could I be equipping teachers better when it comes to their own Bible competency?

How can I intentionally train and support teachers to engage parents in their family’s spiritual quest?

How can I expand my leadership vision to include more spiritual training for parents and families?



You may think of additional reflective questions, but the dual point is to a) seize the opportunities that God presents by being prepared to give a good answer to the spiritual questions that naturally will come, and b) intentionally develop ways to move the parents to ask you more questions of a spiritual nature.

Being a good ambassador for Christ with the young parents in your early childhood ministry is not hard, but it can be easily overlooked. Do your best to be ready, and then when the chance presents itself, ask the Holy Spirit to make you the most awesome ambassador you can be!



# Where Should Kids Worship?

by Dr. Joel A. Nelson



Last May, Children's Ministry Magazine conducted a survey asking this question: Should children worship with adults in church or in their own children's church setting? The report on the survey findings shared this comment: "Of all the issues that will get children's ministers debating, this one has to be the hottest." The results bore this out: 2,032 people responded, with 48% saying children should worship in the corporate worship setting and 52% saying in a separate children's church setting.

Here are some of the comments each "camp" included in their survey responses:

## PRO FAMILY WORSHIP

- "My children need to see their parents worshiping. They learn so many things by parents' example -- including worship."
- "Families are separated enough in our society. Worship should involve everyone . . . keep my family together on Sunday morning!"
- "If kids learn at an early age that it's acceptable in the house of God to separate themselves from the adults, later on they learn that it's okay to segregate themselves."
- "We try very hard to incorporate plenty of kid-friendly elements into the service...I've seen kids' eyes light up when we've used video clips from Finding Nemo to explain the parable of the prodigal son."
- "If children are set apart and not allowed to learn what's expected, what's going to happen to our churches? When the older members die out, what are we going to do?"
- "There's nothing more beautiful than to take part in services of worship with children present. Just to see their little eyes widen and faces light up fills me with joy."
- "We have the service for everyone...Children are trained to sit still and quiet, the little ones are taught to lie on the floor and sleep, and the school-age ones sit and read a book, but stand for the prayers and hymns. Once they are about 11 or 12 they listen to the service."
- "Keep children with us in the sanctuary. Let them experience the Holy Spirit, listen to what's really going on, and be able to ask questions that'll cause us to have to spend quality family time in giving them the answers."
- "When the kids in my church worship, I feel the adults are motivated by this and are even inspired by the kids."
- "Kids need to be in the presence of adults who can model the passionate, sold-out worship that kids need to survive in this world!"
- "I love sitting in a service watching a child as he watches his father and raises his hands the same way or puts his hand over his heart like his mother."

## PRO CHILDREN'S CHURCH

- "In our children's church we teach the same Jesus, the same death on the cross, and the same resurrection."
- "Just because children have been placed in the adult service in the past doesn't mean that it was the best way; it was just the only way."
- "Children also need a place where they can learn to worship God freely and not be intimidated by the grown-ups."
- "An adult worship service is for adults. Vocabulary is not on a child's level; concepts can be abstract rather than concrete, which is difficult for children to understand; and the method of delivery doesn't sufficiently reach the generation we're teaching today."
- "It's great if children can worship in church with adults, but too many times I have seen children messing around and parents not doing anything to teach their children to worship God."
- "After 20 years of children's ministry and having had it both ways, I've seen a greater freedom in children when they worship alongside other children."
- "If we shove children into a service where they only understand 25 percent of what's going on (and that's a very generous number), we're wasting 75 percent of the time we have with them."
- "In my situation it would be ideal to have a children's church, because each week I don't get anything from the service and neither do my children, only because they're too noisy. So I take them outside and I don't get to hear the message."
- "Let them rejoice the best way they know how and to have fun with it. Worshiping God should be fun!"

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- "Restless kids are a huge distraction to the adult service, and children can really begin to dislike church because they're continually corrected during the adult service."
- "It's really neat to see the kids with hands in the air worshipping God with the same songs the adults sing, but with a style of music they can relate to."
- "Whatever we choose to do, we have to make sure it helps the children in our community to have a growing relationship with Christ Jesus, and I am confident that he will perfect the rest."

The above responses are, more than likely, not from WELS people (although some WELS people get Children's Ministry Magazine and could have responded). My sense would be that the WELS results on such a survey would skew toward the "Pro Family Worship" side because of our strong feelings on the place and value of corporate worship. But, there is growing discussion in our circles on how we can



## **AUTISM WORKSHOP** *God's People Are Differently Aabled*

**October 10, 2009**

**Our Savior Lutheran  
Church & School  
Grafton, Wisconsin**

**8:00 AM - 5:00 PM**

Keynote speaker, Alison Wolf, is the parent of three sons whose ages range from the teens to the twenties. Two are on the Autism spectrum. She will make basic information come to life as she shares the blessings and challenges of day-to-day life.

### **Registration fee before September 23:**

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\$80 married couple

\$25 student

\$40/four person group  
rate.

*(An additional \$10 fee will  
be charged to all groups  
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better engage children and families in the worship experience.

As a result of a recent Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) request to hear from those in WELS who are making any kind of special accommodation for children in the worship services, 26 congregations sent information almost immediately. My guess is that there are many more congregations doing things, but they just did not respond for one reason or another. Of the 26 who did respond, 20 of those incorporate a children's message/devotion into the normal service on all or some of the Sundays each month. Five of the congregations actually do a special children's church when children are moved away (for a time) from the corporate worship service and engaged in something unique to them. One congregation responded saying it was liturgically improper to do something unique for children, even if just a short children's devotion. (Anyone interested in finding out more from the 25 congregations who are making worship service accommodations for children, can e-mail [cyd@sab.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sab.wels.net).)

I am not bringing up the topic of children's sermons or children's church because I feel the WELS needs more "heat" generation or because CYD has a specific agenda. I am merely sharing some data and encouraging you and your congregations—if you want to—to evaluate and reflect on what you are doing to help children and families get more out of their worship time and grow closer to Jesus. As ministers to children and their families, this discussion, whether it brings any changes or not, is always good to have.

## **Out of the Mouths of Babes**

A preschool teacher was reading Bible stories to her young students. She read, "The man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city, but his wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt."

Little Dustin asked, "What happened to the flea?"

# WNU Is for You!

Do you or your staff in your early childhood ministry (ECM) need some quick, engaging training? If so, go to [www.wels.net/jump/wnustraining](http://www.wels.net/jump/wnustraining). Here you will find several mini-courses that can help you become a better teacher of the Word and minister to your students and families. Though this area of WELS.net University is designed for staffs of Sunday schools, most of the courses would be great for ECM staffs as well. Courses particularly suited to ECM staff development (though titled for Sunday school) would be...

- Should I Be Teaching Sunday School?
- Teaching Sunday School: A Wonderful Calling
- The Sunday School's Mission: Totally Possible
- Teaching Law and Gospel: A Real Balancing Act
- Law and Gospel: What's the Big Difference?
- Teaching the Way Children Actually Learn
- What Kind of Teacher Are You Anyway?
- Recruiting Staff: I Thought You'd Never Ask!
- Partnering with Parents: From "Us and Them" to "We"
- Developing a Sunday School That Reaches Out
- Shaping a Better Sunday School Culture
- Jesus: Master Teacher
- The Seven Principles of Learning for All Age Groups
- The Learning Process in the Human Being According to God's Creation
- The Gradual Development of Learning
- The Four Basic Teaching Techniques
- Types of Questions
- The Functions and Qualities of the Parts of the Lesson



## An Encouraging Word

I just finished reading the latest *Sowers and Seeds* and had to comment on your article "Are We There Yet?" (Summer 2009). I can't tell you how much I needed that today. The Lord always seems to have a way of letting someone or something speak right to your heart just when you need it the most, and today, you did that for me. Thank you so much!

Please know that your work for our synod is greatly appreciated. The Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) through something like *Sowers & Seeds*, has such a wonderful way to communicate God's truths to His people. I know that there are difficult decisions that will have to be made soon that may greatly affect what CYD does. Please know that my husband and I are praying not only for the future of our synod, but also those faithful workers who may be affected, and for CYD in particular.

Each day I share a 'Thought for the day' with my staff. Tomorrow's is "The best way to cheer yourself is to cheer somebody else up." I know you have helped to cheer and encourage me today, I pray the Lord is using me to give your day a boost too!

*Signed: Another weary (but encouraged!) traveler*

# It Just Makes Sense - Part I

by Dr. Sharon Burow — Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, WI

When meeting with teaching cronies of 15-plus years of experience, inevitably the conversation turns to the well-worn topic, “Do we have more diversity in our classrooms than earlier in our careers, or are we finally coming to our senses about the differentiation that has always been there?” Such vacillation and ruminating aside, early childhood educators indeed have begun to focus their energy, professional integrity, and creativity to appreciate the uniqueness of the lambs entrusted to their care. Thus, doing our best to celebrate the tiniest of gains made and look for opportunities to increase children’s learning potential, just makes sense.

Over the years I have been privileged to work with early childhood special education teachers. I have gleaned so many insights from them that I now look at early childhood classrooms with a much clearer lens. In addition, the growing base of brain research demonstrates that the sensory support given to physically and/or cognitively challenged children can dramatically enhance the entire class in all developmental realms. What follows are the “why’s” and suggestions for beginning to create a sensory responsive environment starting this coming Fall. As you assess on-task behavior, emotional IQ, and motor coordination (large and small) that unquestionably impact social development, remind yourself that the sensory processing “machine” of the brain is meant to be a well oiled facet of the central nervous system. Regardless of academic prowess, when all of the sensorial gears are not in sync the ability to function as a whole person is impaired presently and can follow into the future (Kranowitz, 2005). It would certainly be factious and a hasty generalization to say that the information shared is a tidy package that will solve all classroom sensory issues. Teaching is a mind-boggling calling, but taking steps to provide student resources with the senses in mind is vital to one’s ministry.

The positive effects of sensory designed rooms are remarkable. Time spent in such a room can elicit improved concentration, purposefulness, increased motor control, alertness, calming behavior, social adeptness and a better awareness of the patterns of one’s world, (Arnwine, 2005).

It has really been in the past ten to fifteen years that classroom teachers and educational interventionists have wrestled with developing the appropriate support for children who struggle in inclusive early childhood classrooms. Additionally, it becomes more complicated as other children in the classroom straddle a variety of unidentified and/or borderline developmental concerns. Due to the complexity of young children who cross the threshold in early childhood settings for the first time, it is imperative that early childhood educators be extremely skilled in their ability to observe, assess, and support young children. When one provides a uniform environment with universal expectations versus differentiation, it can have a profound effect on the success or failure of children’s continuing journey throughout schooling.



## Next time:

### A Sensory Conscious Teaching Environment is for EVERYONE...

- Sense of Time
- Sense of Emotional Appropriateness (EQ)
- Strengthening Mobility and Vestibular Orientation
- Some Auditory Issues
- Sense of Touch
- Fine Motor skills—Toward “Right Coloring/Painting/ Writing”
- Resources Available

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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