



Sowers & Seeds

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

Who's Pulling Your String?

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

In many parts of the country, spring weather includes some breezy days. Pictures of this time of year, especially if they include children, will show kites flying in the wind.

Have you ever flown a kite? Growing up in rural Wisconsin, I remember some great, spring excitement when my brother and I chased a green dragon kite—one we purchased with our own money—across an entire cornfield and into a woods when it broke loose from its string. The kite was lodged beyond our reach in the branches of a bur oak tree. We caught our breath. We tried to climb. We sat and cried. The kite was a goner, a vivid reminder of the helplessness of two simple, country boys against the mighty power of the spring wind.

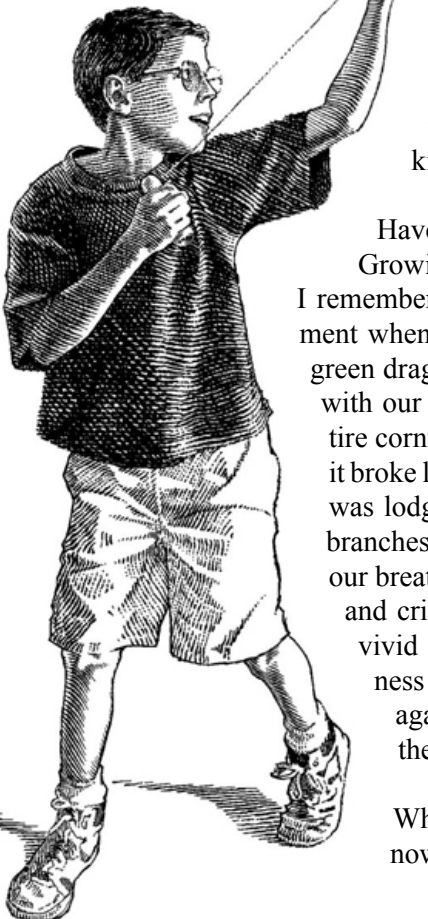
When my daughter, Lindsay, now a high school junior, was

three years old, we flew a kite in an open church parking lot. The kite ascended quickly on that gusty day, and I let out almost all of the line. The kite soared almost three times higher than the church steeple. When Lindsay saw that dad seemed to be having all the fun, she asked for a turn to hold the string. I gave it to her and she was immediately pulled forward a couple feet. She was quite surprised by the force of the unseen wind.

Kites remind me of something a student once said in answer to the question, “If you were to describe God, what would you say?” The student answered, “God is like a kite high up in the clouds. I can’t see him, but I can feel his strong pull.” What an insightful response.

When you think about it, God can be described like that. We can’t see him, yet we know he is there. We can’t touch him, yet we feel his pull. Through Word and Sacrament the power of the Holy Spirit is given to us, and we are guided to love and serve Jesus in forward and upward directions.

Perhaps this spring on a sunny, breezy day, you can take children from your early childhood ministry outside and let them feel the pull of a kite. Maybe it could become an entire family event at some park or in your own church’s parking lot. After the activity, you could share how, in Christ, we are all being pulled closer and closer to heaven.



CrossWalk Kids: The Ultimate Adventure!

by Katie Behm — Crosswalk Kids Director



CrossWalk Kids is a dynamic children's ministry at CrossWalk Church (WELS) in Phoenix, AZ, that takes place during Crosswalk's regular Sunday morning services. This adventure started in 2004 when CrossWalk Church began as a mission congregation meeting at Arizona Lutheran Academy. We constantly strive to be a church for the unchurched. Knowing that, *CrossWalk Kids* is designed to reach kids who have never heard about Jesus before with enjoyable, understandable, age appropriate and approachable messages.

Our goal is to make kids feel welcomed, loved and comfortable enough to:

- Ask their questions about God and receive solid Biblical answers
- Rely on Jesus whether hurting or happy as their Savior from sin
- Enjoy Christian friends
- Realize and use their special, God-given talents
- Learn to show their love for the Lord in all they do
- Share the way of eternal life with others

With God's amazing blessings over the last 2 years, our average Sunday attendance has grown from 25 to 130 kids. We have encountered challenges along the way that have made this journey an adventure in every sense of the word. Our main goal has always been that God's words and promises be taught in truth and purity, but we also continue to research, change and challenge ourselves to develop the ministry in an exciting way.

Currently, we offer four different age-appropriate worship environments. Each one has a unique way of helping kids worship their Savior and learn Bible truths. The curriculum theme changes every eight weeks to keep kids excited for what's coming next.

- **Little ones who are walking through age 1** are introduced to a simple Bible story as well as worship CD's and DVD's to sing and dance along with.
- **Our 2-3 year olds** have a fellowship/welcome time where they get to know their classmates' and teachers' names, a worship time with theme-based worship songs and finger plays to get their wiggles out, a Bible story, a story application game/activity, prayer, and a light snack. It's amazing how after 8 weeks these little ones can remember the characters in the Bible story, the words to the songs, and each others' names. Most importantly they know the name of their Savior, Jesus and that he loves them so very much!
- **Our 4-5 years olds** have a busy scheduled morning with *Kai* and *Lil' K*. *Lil' K* is a video-based curriculum (non-WELS) that takes them through

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Audio Devotions

Listen to devotions for the whole family at www.parentscrosslink.net. Click on the "Family Devotions" channel and then the audio player.

a Bible truth they can apply to their everyday lives. They also have a welcome time where a group game is played to introduce the lesson for the day. Once the video starts *Kai* keeps them involved in worship by having them stand up to worship actively in song and dance, memorize their Bible passage with actions, watch the animated Bible story, pray and use knock, knock jokes to review the Bible lesson. The morning is complete with a teacher-led craft and final review of the lessons learned. Learn more about the materials here: <http://www.lilk.com>. While we need to do some revision of these materials to mesh things with Lutheran doctrine, we have found them quite usable at this level. Someday we hope to develop our own resources.

- **The Kindergarten-4th graders** look forward each week to learning what the Bible has to say and what Jesus has done for them. A VBS-like theme every eight weeks is just one of the ways the anticipation is built. Even the decorations and teacher costumes correlate with the theme. Past themes have included everything from Sports, Superheroes, Treasure Quests and Adventures in Science. They begin in smaller groups led by a teacher who is interested in getting to know them personally. Fellowship is enjoyed with their other small group members as they play a game which helps introduce the main point for the morning. They then head off to a 45 minute large group worship time where all the kids get a chance to sing their praises, hear a Bible story, learn how the story can be applied to their lives, give their offering, pray, memorize a Bible passage and finish up with an interactive review time. The kids end up back in their small groups to further discuss the lesson and build relationships with each other.

We make it a goal to have Sunday be the best day of a child’s week. By best, we mean teaching God’s Word with the passion and excitement it deserves. We believe that if a child’s experiences in church are positive, that child is more likely to remain in the church and/or turn to the church for help when they are older.

I am currently leading a team of 70+ ministry leaders who share in the joy of Sunday mornings with the kids. The Bible teachings are easy to lead and the experience is greatly rewarding as they see their students running into their classroom with smiles on their faces each week. Leader motivation and energy stays high when they hear numerous stories from parents who are dragged out of bed to come to church.

CrossWalk Kids is only the beginning of a child’s adventure at CrossWalk. Our 5th-8th graders get to be a part of *Ignite*, an energetic ministry that begins in the main worship area in their very own worship “Pit.” During the sermon they head out to study God’s Word with their friends and apply it to their lives. Many of our high school students who have also grown up through the system are enjoying being ministry leaders in *CrossWalk Kids*. So the adventure never ends!

The Lord has and continues to bless the mission and direction of *CrossWalk Kids*. It truly is an adventure: an exciting and remarkable experience!

To learn more about the *CrossWalk Kids* ministry, e-mail:
Katie@crosswalkphoenix.com

Start Appreciating the Sky

For Spacious Skies (FSS) is a non-profit organization founded by Jack Borden who worked to develop and promote a curriculum guide with activities involving art, creative writing, music, science, and meteorology that are uniquely dedicated to evoking an enduring awareness of the beauty and wonder of the sky. You can order the curriculum guide from the FSS Web site (www.forspaciousskies.com) or e-mail Jack Borden directly at jjborden@webtv.net. The cost is \$9.00 for the curriculum guide, \$17.95 for the cloud chart, or \$24.95 for both which includes shipping and handling. Mention you are a WELS school and receive an additional discount.

Esther A. Yant took Jack Borden’s sky concepts and applied them to the Bible. The curriculum called ***Over Our Heads in Wonder: A Sourcebook of Ideas, Readings and Activities for Home Schools, Christian Day Schools and Families*** is in a workbook, blackline master format. Complimentary copies of an older edition are available upon request by contacting WELS Youth Discipleship:

E-mail: cyd@sab.wels.net
Phone: 414-256-3274

Cool Quote:

“If God had a refrigerator,
your picture would be on it.”

Early Childhood Ministry Standards: How Do You Measure Up?

The *Ten Self-Study Standards* for early childhood ministry (ECM) in the *WELS School Accreditation Handbook* are intended to serve as a benchmark of quality by which WELS ECM can measure themselves. Those standards reflect a Bible-based philosophy of education, reflect sound educational principles, and help an ECM maintain high quality Christian education. The primary reason why an ECM proceeds through a process of school accreditation is to improve. Every WELS ECM strives to serve God and His people in the very best way possible. When an ECM evaluates itself based on the *Ten Self-Study Standards*, blessings for the school and congregation(s) will result. In this issue of *Sowers & Seeds* we share standards 1-5.

STANDARD 1

Mission, Vision, and Objectives of the Early Childhood Ministry

The mission of the WELS Early Childhood Ministry (ECM) is clearly defined through the cooperative efforts of those concerned that developmentally appropriate quality education is provided in accord with the scriptural encouragement to “do all things for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The Christ-centered mission statement and supporting objectives give direction for the ECM and provide criteria for evaluation. This standard establishes the scriptural framework for all subsequent self-study standards. (8 detailed criterion)

STANDARD 2

Congregation and Early Childhood Ministry

The Early Childhood Ministry (ECM) is a vital part of the ministry of its operating congregation(s). The church and



the ECM share financial, personnel, and information resources. The ECM concerns itself with the ministry of the whole congregation. The ECM is aware that this program may introduce many new families to their church’s ministry. (25 detailed criterion)

STANDARD 3

Family Partnership

God has given parents the primary responsibility for the Christian education of their children. WELS Early Childhood Ministries serve as a distinctive and collaborative resource in supporting parents in their role of nurturing the whole child. (13 detailed criterion)

STANDARD 4

Early Childhood Ministries and the Community

The Early Childhood Ministry (ECM) has unique opportunities and challenges for ministry in the community. ECM programs need to be good neighbors and be responsive to local needs. (11 detailed criterion)

STANDARD 5

Interaction Between Staff and Children

In the Early Childhood Ministry’s (ECM) program there is an atmosphere in which staff and students enjoy effective and harmonious relationships. It is evident that the love of Christ compels service rooted in joy, care, and compassion. (14 detailed criterion)

Next time: Standards 6-10. You can obtain all the ECM self-study materials from WELS Parish Schools - cps@sab.wels.net - 414-256-3223.

WELS Early Childhood Ministry Stats

There are currently 398 ECMs in WELS. These ministries enroll 9,823 children and are staffed by 588 teachers. WELS ECMs are located in 36 states and two foreign countries.

"Shhhh! . . . We're in church!"

by Corrine Magiera

There's nothing more precious than a sleeping baby in church. But if those days are only a memory, then you must be the parent of a toddler. It may seem hopeless, but there are some things you can do to keep your weekly worship with a toddler from becoming a taste of hell on earth.

My two-year-old was at the phase in which he gave a running narrative of everything he saw: "People. Chairs. Many chairs. More people. No singing. No people sing." This was especially disconcerting during prayer. On one occasion I told him, "Be quiet, honey, we're praying to Jesus." A frown came over his face as he said with a pout, "No Jesus." Again I told him to be quiet. To which he responded, "No Jesus. No Jesus. No Jesus. No JESUS!" I scooped him up and ran to the exit as fast as possible. But his voice echoed down the corridor like the "Hallelujah Chorus." That day I realized the value of our church nursery.

If you're lucky enough to have a nursery at church, use it. The nursery is perfect for rambunctious two-year-olds. But eventually they will have to learn how to behave in church. There are a few things you can do to prepare.

Beyond the church nursery

Two- and three-year-olds love to pretend, so one way to prepare for church is to play church. Kids love this. Set some chairs in rows and create a congregation from your child's collection of stuffed animals and dolls. Sing songs. Bow your heads to pray. And whisper to each other.

Whisper at other times of the day, too. Make a game out of trying to be as loud as you can and as quiet as you can. Talk about different situations and which voice, quiet or loud, is appropriate. Soon your child will learn to whisper like a pro.

Family devotions are another great way to introduce your child to proper church behavior. Include even your youngest in this important family activity. It's important that he sees the family sitting quietly together and repeating all the same basic components of a church service at home.

When your child is old enough to start attending the service, set a date to begin and then stick to it. Have a positive attitude about this event. Promote it by referring to the big day as a "big boy" or "big girl" activity.

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The infamous diaper bag

Once you make the transition, preparation is still important. But don't overdo it. We've all seen the parents with the giant diaper bag. That infamous bag of goodies used to distract kids in church leads to a big mess of cereal crumbs on the pew and crayon marks on the hymnals. It's a mistake. It starts off subtly. Just a few extra items in the diaper bag: crayons, coloring books, some cookies, milk . . . but before you know it, you've got a meal for a family of four, complete with dessert.

I used to think that as long as I had enough diversions, I could satisfy every whimper. It took me a while, but I learned I was wrong.

One Christmas Eve I got some friendly advice from the family sitting behind us. I had come to church with a bag full of treats and toys. The church was decorated beautifully. The choir was accompanied by an orchestra. But my kids were awful. They squirmed and complained despite all the distractions I had faithfully dragged to church.

After the service I apologized to the family behind us. I explained that I brought more stuff each week, but it seemed to make it worse. It was the father who told me quite bluntly, “That's the problem. Give your kids a chance to be good. You're bringing too much. Sometimes less is more.”

The next Sunday I tried it. After a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, we started off to church with just a few

necessities: diapers, juice, a pad of paper, and crayons. To my astonishment my boys' behavior improved. When they knew ahead of time that there was no vast menu of treats, they stopped misbehaving in order to get them. Now I've come to the conclusion that food has no place in church. Prepare your children by feeding them well beforehand. I promise, you will have a more pleasant experience.

Extreme measures for extreme duress

Everyone knows that kids will still act up from time to time. If your child does something deserving of more extraordinary discipline, do it in a private setting. This is to be sure that you don't take overly drastic action just because you have an audience. Think about how you would react if this happened while you were alone with your child. Then act accordingly. But do it after leaving the sanctuary. (And be sure to include a reminder to your child that you love him.)

The most important thing for your toddler to get out of church-going experiences is a sense of joy. Attending church with a toddler shouldn't be an endurance test; it should be uplifting for everyone. Keep a positive outlook. Sing the songs or listen to the choir. Look at the brightly colored windows and the pictures and symbols that decorate the church. Think happy thoughts. That's right! It may sound a little idealistic, but that is exactly what God wants when we visit his house--happy thoughts. That's what worship is. That's what we came to express. So share that joy with your little worshiper.

More articles like this can be found at www.parentscrosslink.net. Look in the “Special Articles Archive”.



From the Mouths of Babes

Little Sarah to teacher: Did you see my dad at church last night?

Teacher: No, why do you ask?

Sarah: Well, you told us that church was the happiest hour of the week, and my dad told my mom he was at happy hour last night.

My four-year-old son was watching me sweat through Pilates in the living room and felt the need to yell out some spiritual encouragement learned at church: “Joshua 1 verse 9. *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and curvaceous!*”

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.

WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship
2929 North Mayfair Road
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53222-4398



Phone: 414-256-3274
E-mail: cyd@sab.wels.net
Web site: www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship