



Sowers & Seeds

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

Early Childhood Education Matters

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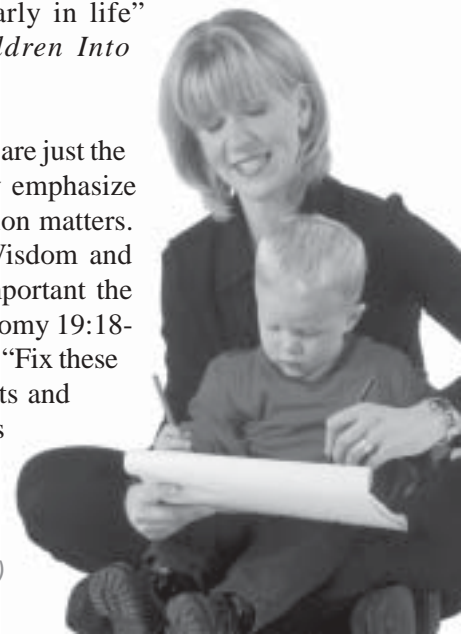
Second to the education and involvement of parents themselves, early childhood education holds the greatest potential for effecting lasting results in an array of ways. In its *Ten Tips for Raising Happier, Healthier Children* (2002), the I Am Your Child Foundation, a national, non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of early childhood development and school readiness, emphasized how, “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.” *Great Beginnings: The First Years Last Forever* (1998), a collaborative project of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, noted that, “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.”

One of the most important parts of a child’s development is what’s called, identity formation—a child constructing a

clear understanding of him/herself. *Early Childhood Development: A Multi-Cultural Perspective* (2000) notes: “The roots of identity can be traced to a child’s early years. Young children come to view themselves as members of a family, as siblings, and as sons or daughters...Piece by piece, the child’s picture of self comes into focus. Gender and ethnic identity are two significant self-discoveries that occur during the early years. Children quickly realize that they are boys or girls, and come to understand the behaviors, expectations, and status that accompany each gender. They also come to view themselves as members of an ethnic group.”

Commenting on spiritual development in children, Christian researcher, George Barna, wrote, “[A] person’s moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach age nine. While those foundations are refined and the application of those foundations may shift to some extent as the individual ages, their fundamental perspectives on truth, integrity, meaning, justice, morality, and ethics are formed quite early in life” (*Transforming Your Children Into Spiritual Champions-2003*).

The above quotes (and these are just the tip of the iceberg) certainly emphasize that early childhood education matters. The Bible, Source of all Wisdom and Truth, also stresses how important the early years are. In Deuteronomy 19:18-20 God instructed parents to, “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.



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Our Mission

The Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD) is a unit of the WELS Board for Parish Services and as such, exists to encourage and assist WELS congregations and parents as they nurture youth in the Word from birth through high school.

The Commission on Parish Schools (CPS) exists to guide and assist WELS congregations in advancing the Gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening Lutheran schools.

Because early childhood ministry falls within the missions of WELS CYD and CPS, they have partnered together to produce and publish *Sowers & Seeds*.

What's In a Name?

Sowers & Seeds is a new quarterly newsletter produced by the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship and Parish Schools as a service to called and lay ministers in early childhood ministry.

Sowers & Seeds joins CYD's other quarterly newsletters, *Partners* (for those in Sunday school and related ministries) and *REACH!* (for those in ministry to teens) and CPS's newsletter for Lutheran elementary and high schools called *Eduternity*. All of these newsletters seek to drive ministry advancement and improvement through the ideas, networking, encouragement, resources, and models they provide. You can contact <cyd@sab.wels.net> to obtain free subscriptions of *Partners*, *REACH!* and now *Sowers & Seeds*. You can contact <cps@sab.wels.net> to obtain a free subscription to *Eduternity*. You can also see past issues of the three CYD newsletters at <www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship>. Click on the "Newsletters Archives" collections. The CPS newsletter can be found at <www.wels.net/cps> in the "Publications" collection.

Giving this newsletter the name *Sowers & Seeds* seemed appropriate. "Seeds" causes us to think about the very beginnings of a plant. "Sowers" reminds us of those who carefully plant that seed in the soil and then diligently tend its growth and development. "Seeds" also reminds us of the young children in our families and early childhood ministries with the "Sowers" being those adults – parents and teachers – who lovingly "tend" to these children's Christian education. The name also brings to mind sowing/sharing seeds of ideas for how to make Christian early childhood ministry better. Finally, the name *Sowers & Seeds*, makes us think about Jesus' *Parable of the Sower* (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8)

and its message to spread God's Word so that others will learn it and grow in their faith, "a hundred, sixty, or thirty times."

Both CYD and CPS believe that the earlier Christian education starts with both children and their parents, the greater the potential for the Word to take root. May the Lord use *Sowers & Seeds* to assist this process.



("Early Childhood Education" . . . Continued from page 1)

Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." The most famous Bible passage about the benefits of Christian education, Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Through the pages of *Sowers & Seeds* we hope to affirm in you, and by extension, in all of the families to whom you minister, that 1) early childhood education matters, and that 2) Christian education begun at the earliest stages of a child's life, with parents and church partnering together, matters eternally.

Jesus keep you as you serve him, families, and the church.

Childrens *BI G BOOKS*

Children need to hear the gospel. Children love BIG BOOKS. Children love to sing. Children love to tell others about Jesus. Four BIG BOOKS combine these elements in an exciting approach for equipping children to be evangelists.



And I Can Go and Tell

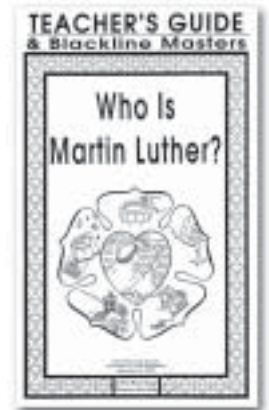
(38-4000) \$17.50

Includes: 11 x 17 Teacher Big Book, 8 ½ x 11 Teacher's Guide and Copy Masters, Two Rings, 5 Balloons.

Who is Martin Luther?

(38-4001) \$17.50

Includes: 11 x 17 Teacher Big Book, 8 ½ x 11 Teacher's Guide and Copy Masters.



Christian Countdown to Christmas

(38-4002) \$17.50

Includes: 11 x 17 Teacher Big Book, 8 ½ x 11 Teacher's Guide and Copy Masters.



Jellybean Easter Stories

(38-4003) \$17.50

Includes: 11 x 17 Teacher Big Book, 8 ½ x 11 Teacher's Guide and Copy Masters.



Order from: <www.shopwels.net> or <cyd@sab.wels.net>

Check out the Northwestern Publishing House early childhood ministry resources at www.nph.net.



Share Your Story

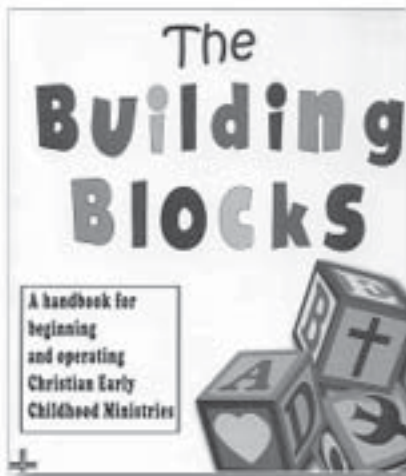
What interesting, exciting, and innovative things are you doing with the young children in your congregation/ECM and their parents to connect them better to your ministry, each other, and Jesus?

Email us: cyd@sab.wels.net





Building Blocks Can Help



More and more congregations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) are discovering that a Christ-centered early childhood ministry is an effective way to carry out the mission of their congregation. *Building Blocks* is a resource designed to provide help for new church-planting teams, for existing congregations who wish to include an early childhood center as part of their total children's ministry and for administrators of Christian early childhood ministries.

Congregations who are examining the feasibility of beginning the operation of an early childhood ministry to serve families in their churches and communities will find valuable direction in this resource. Those who decide to proceed with the start-up of the program will find the steps for getting started a helpful guide. Those congregations involved in the ongoing operation of an early childhood ministry will find a wealth of information to make the operation of their program even more effective. Administrators of early childhood ministries will find the information in this resource supportive of their outreach.

Building Blocks is presented as a three-ring binder publication so that you can personalize it by adding policies and forms you adopt for your program. You will want to use this as a workbook to guide you in the start-up and operation of your early childhood ministry. Initially, you may find it valuable to study a chapter at a time as part of your board meetings or at meetings scheduled specifically for this purpose. Or you may want to concentrate on the chapter that helps you with a particular issue facing your board or administration. While this resource is written for board members and administrators of early childhood ministries that are not connected to an elementary school, administrators of elementary schools that operate an early childhood ministry and extended Christian care givers for elementary children may also find it helpful.

***Building Blocks* (OL-388059) is available at <www.shopwels.net> or from <cps@sab.wels.net>. Cost: \$45.00 plus shipping and handling.**

Did You Know?

According to statistics gathered by WELS Parish schools...

- ◆ There are currently 385 early childhood ministries (ECM) in WELS. This is an 82% increase from 1993-94 when the data was first gathered.
- ◆ 259 (67%) of the current ECM are connected to a Lutheran elementary schools (LES).
- ◆ 66 ECM (17%) offer care to children younger than age 3.
- ◆ 126 preschools (33%) are not connected to an LES.
- ◆ 8,449 children are enrolled in ECM.
- ◆ 501 teachers serve in WELS ECM.
- ◆ ECM students are 39% WELS or ELS (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 40% from other Christian churches, and 21% mission prospects.
- ◆ 21 new WELS ECM were opened in 2004-05.
- ◆ The number of ECM by WELS District follows:

Arizona-California.....	19
Dakota-Montana.....	6
Michigan.....	50
Minnesota.....	57
Nebraska.....	21
North Atlantic.....	7
Northern Wisconsin.....	56
Pacific Northwest.....	8
South Atlantic.....	18
South Central.....	8
Southeastern Wisconsin.....	79
Western Wisconsin.....	56

For more information on this data or to obtain data for 2004-05, contact <cps@sab.wels.net>.



Parents and Church Attendance



According to a longitudinal study, when mom and dad took (not sent) their children to church, 76% of the children followed in their parents' faith. If only the father took the children to church, the percentage dropped to 55%. Interestingly enough, if only the mother took the children to church, the percentage plummeted to 15%. If neither parent took the children to church, only 9% became active Christians. The study also revealed that any plan to help children develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, must include church attendance.

(Families: Practical Advice from More Than 50 Experts. Moody, 1991)

Early Childhood Resources on WELS Web

CYD and CPS have combined all of their early childhood ministry resources in one web location. Go to <www.wels.net> and type ECM (for early childhood ministry) into the jumpword box on the left. You'll go to the special webpage where a host of resources for full and part-time early childhood ministries are listed. More resources and helps will be added as we get them.

If you have any ECM resource or website recommendations, pass them on to us along with a brief review, and we may post them on the ECM page. Also, if your early childhood ministry has its own website, share your link with us. Letting others know what you are doing is what *Sowers & Seeds* is all about.

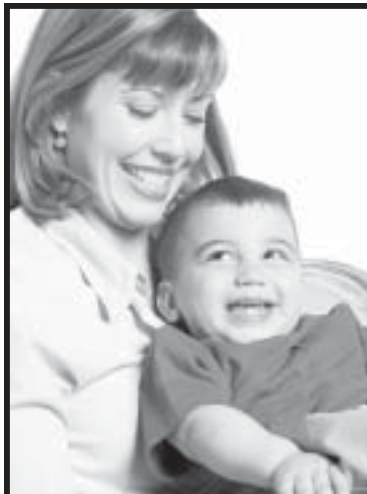


WELS Web sites of Interest

The following websites assist congregations and members in their ministries. Check them out and tell others about them.

- ◆ www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship
(CYD home page)
- ◆ www.wels.net/cps
(CPS home page)
- ◆ www.kidsconnection.tv
(companion website for WELS Kids' Connection)
- ◆ www.livingbold.net
(website for teens)
- ◆ www.welsyouthrally.net
(website about the WELS International Youth Rally)
- ◆ www.parentscrosslink.net
(website for parents – coming in fall 2005)
- ◆ www.whataboutjesus.com
(WELS outreach site)

You can also learn more about the other WELS Parish Services units (Adult Discipleship, Evangelism, Worship, and Special Ministries) at: <www.welsparishservices.net>



The Mouths of Babes

4-year-old: Mom, who is Howard?

Mother: I don't know. Where did you hear that name?

4-year-old: At preschool. We say a prayer – "Our Father in heaven, Howard be your name."

Little Ginny's Prayer:

Dear God, please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter. There is nothing good in there right now.



Sowers & Seeds

Seed Notes

- ▶ Special discussion boards for early childhood ministry and ministers can be found on the ECM web page (<www.wels.net> jumpword ECM). Enter discussions about more full-time early childhood ministry on CPS's *ECM Share*. Enter discussions about more part-time early childhood ministry on CYD's *EC Chatter*. Use the discussion boards to post ECM questions, share ideas, and recommend resources.
- ▶ *Sowers & Seeds* will periodically feature helpful articles and insights from the early childhood education departments of Martin Luther College (MLC) – New Ulm, MN and Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) – Milwaukee, WI. The faculties of both WELS colleges are a repository of practical and spiritual wisdom when it comes to early childhood education and ministry. You'll really enjoy what they write!
- ▶ Early Childhood Administrators: You are invited to be a part of the 2005 WELS National School Leadership Conference held June 28-30, 2005 at Lake Lawn Resort in Delevan, WI. For more information contact Rachel DiGiorgio in WELS Parish Schools: 414-256-3222 or <Redigiorgio@sab.wels.net>.

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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