



# Sowers & Seeds

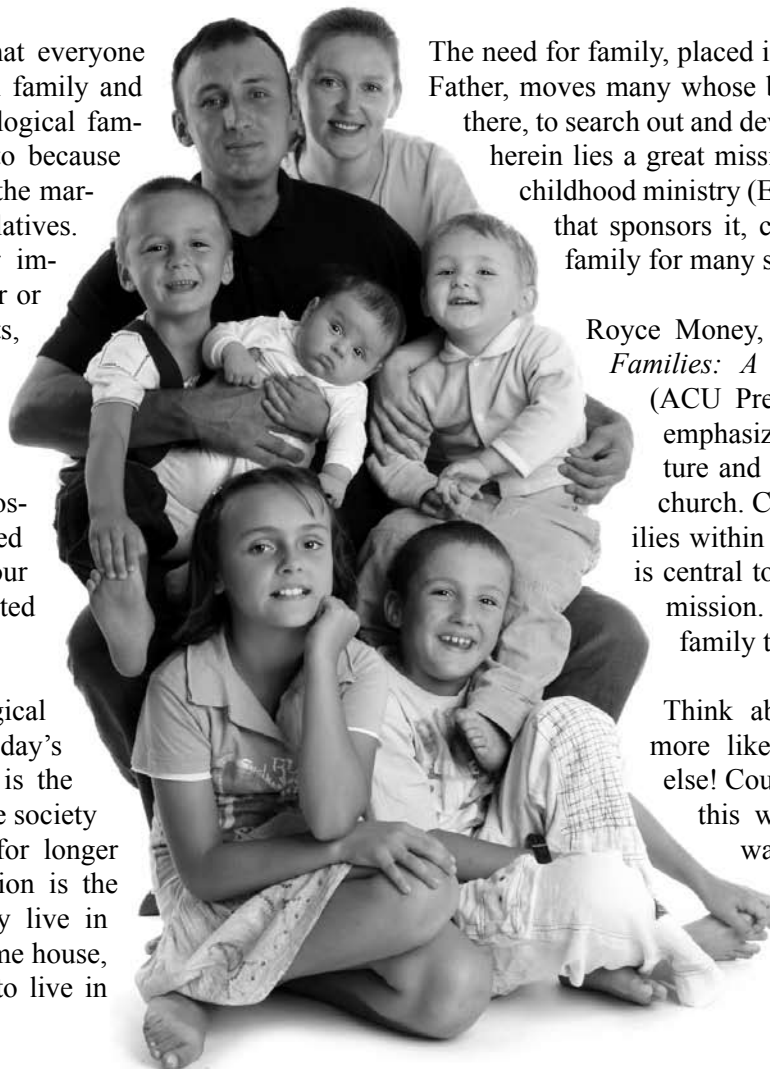
Published by the WELS Commissions on Youth Discipleship & Parish Schools to assist those in early childhood ministry.

## Come, Join Our Family

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

Family studies experts say that everyone has two families: a biological family and a functional family. The “biological family” is those we are related to because of common blood or through the marriage of one of our blood relatives. This includes the nuclear or immediate family and the greater or extended family: grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and in-laws. The “functional family” is those not biologically related to us that function as a family. Adopted children, foster children, unofficially adopted people who take the place of our natural kin when we are separated from them.

Being separated from biological family is very common in today’s world. For some, geography is the reason, as careers and a mobile society keep family members apart for longer periods. For others, dysfunction is the reason. Family members may live in the same town, or even the same house, but cannot bring themselves to live in healthy and happy ways.



The need for family, placed in us by a loving, heavenly Father, moves many whose biological families are not there, to search out and develop functional ones. And herein lies a great mission opportunity. The early childhood ministry (ECM) and the congregation that sponsors it, can become the functional family for many searchers today.

Royce Money, author of *Ministering to Families: A Positive Plan of Action* (ACU Press) wrote, “[The church] emphasizes home-centered nurture and nurture found through the church. Concern for individual families within the greater family of God is central to the church’s identity and mission. The church is more like a family than anything else.”

Think about that. The church is more like a family than anything else! Could your ECM be described this way, too? If not, consider ways to become an even more welcoming and caring family in Christ to those you serve.

## www.parentsconnect.net offers...

- Spiritual growth articles in 16 different topic categories like Child Development, Discipline, Early Childhood, Personal Struggles, etc.
- Links to a host of WELS and non-WELS Web, print, and video resources.
- A Q&A area where, since 2005, 85 family and parenting questions have been answered in 9 categories like Family, Faith, Friends, and School.
- Downloadable devotions from 8 different WELS entities, including special audio devotions developed just for ParentsCrosslink.net .
- A prayer page where requests can be entered and prayer ideas gathered from 5 different sources
- A discussion board of 15 categories with 262 posts on 96 threads.
- BRAND NEW!!! Podcasts on timely topics introduced in Parents Crosslink print. Recent programs discuss parenting in the political season and sleep deprivation.



# Could Developmental Assets Help Your Early Childhood Ministry?

According to Search Institute ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)), its framework of *Developmental Assets* has become, “the most widely used approach to positive youth development in the United States.” Grounded in extensive research among 2.2 million young people, the *Developmental Assets* represent the relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to avoid risks and to thrive. The *Developmental Assets* apply for all young people, regardless of their gender, economic status, family, or race/ethnicity. The sad reality, according to Search Institute is that the average young person experiences fewer than half of the 40 assets. Boys experience three fewer assets than girls (17.2 assets for boys vs. 19.9 for girls).

Search recently developed a list of 40 assets—20 external, 20 internal—for early childhood (ages 3-5). Those involved in early childhood ministry, either full or part-time, would benefit from reviewing the *Developmental Assets* list and discussing what applications they may have. Discussing the *Assets* list, side-by-side with parents, would also have benefit. Each asset listed has a link called “Show me how to take action” that offers very practical helps. View the list at [www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets+3-5](http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets+3-5).



There is also a resource called, “Grounding Assets in Lutheran Faith” ([www.search-institute.org/content/developmental-assets-and-faith](http://www.search-institute.org/content/developmental-assets-and-faith)) which tries to link core Lutheran beliefs and practices to an asset-building approach. It includes Scripture references for each of the 40 *Developmental Assets*. This booklet was developed in collaboration with leaders from three Lutheran church bodies: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Be discerning as you read it, but also open to any good insights it may provide.

# Growing a Theme

by Julie Stratil — Early Childhood Intern from Wisconsin Lutheran College

The savvy gardener needs fertile soil, quality seeds, and specific tools to grow a successful garden. With time and diligent care, the seeds begin to sprout into plants that produce delicious vegetables. The same is true when creating a thematic unit plan with engaging centers. This curriculum format also needs key ingredients in order for it to be successful.

Creating a thematic unit plan that thoughtfully integrates instruction across the curriculum may be a challenging and time-consuming task, but the rewards far outweigh the challenges. For example, when I created a Kindergarten thematic unit, my central theme was vegetable gardens with scents to reinforce the objectives. My art center had a variety of vegetables to create rubbings. The science center had pots, seeds, and tools where the children could grow their own plant. Additionally, the library was filled with books about gardening and vegetables.

Through the open-ended centers, I was able to differentiate instruction using the same materials, but meeting the students' individual needs. For example, one activity was similar to the game Concentration, with a vegetable garden twist. The center offered game boards of varied difficulty. Additionally, the students had the option of matching vegetable pictures or matching the vegetable picture to the written vegetable name. Through differentiation, all the students felt comfortable and confident to take educational risks. Center activities supported the whole child. In the math center, the children not only learned math skills, but they also were using their fine motor skills to pick up the small materials. Furthermore, they were practicing their reading skills when using the different children's books that support the center's concept.

Throughout the centers, the students were not only learning academic skills, but also social skills. In the learning game center, they were learning to recognize vegetables and the vegetable names through the different vegetable cards, and they were learning to work cooperatively with other children. Practicing such important social skills is invaluable.

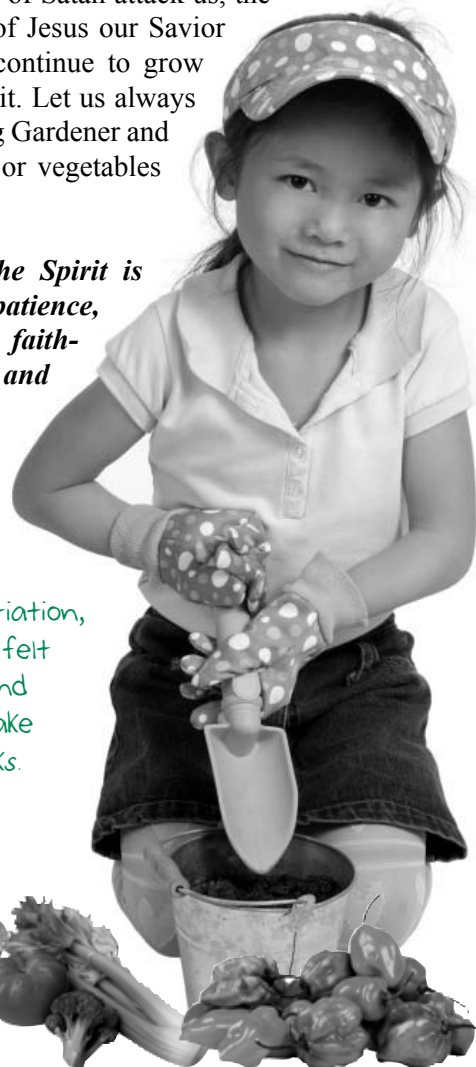
The thematic unit plan is a great integration tool for the classroom and also an effective way to reach out into the community. Guest speakers, such as a horticulturist or a florist could show the students how to properly care for plants or share gardening tips. Additionally, the class can reach out into the community. For example, the students could donate food from the garden that they planted and cared for to a food bank. The opportunities are endless to create a bond between the classroom and the community.

The Vegetable Garden Unit shows not only the miracle of plant life and the great blessing of fresh vegetables, but it also reflects the love of our Savior. The vegetable garden is a great metaphor for the life of a Christian. Through water and the Word in Holy Baptism, our faith sprouts and takes root in our hearts, just as the tiny seed takes root in the ground. Through a gardener's loving care and diligent weeding, the plant grows and begins to produce vegetables. When the weeds and thorns of Satan attack us, the protection and love of Jesus our Savior allows our faith to continue to grow and begin to bear fruit. Let us always remember our Loving Gardener and bear abundant fruits or vegetables for Him.

***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”***

***Galatians 5:22-23***

Through differentiation, all the students felt comfortable and confident to take educational risks.





# More Ideas for Teaching Letters

by Susan Saatkamp - St. Jacobi-Greenfield, WI; Deb Kolbow - Peace-Hartford, WI;  
Peggy Janke - Christ-Big Bend, WI, and Lynn Groth - NPH, Milwaukee.

- 1 Set out 10 learning game/activity areas each week for the letter being studied. Each day the children take turns playing or experimenting with the various items at the areas. Example for M: Mickey Mouse Memory game, Marbleworks, magnets, match the mittens, make marshmallow men, etc.
- 2 Use tape to make a large square on the floor. At the center, tape the letter being studied. The children stand so they see the letter properly (not upside down or sideways). Then they take turns doing an action around the square. The action starts with the letter's sound. Good letters and actions to use are: **B**—bounce; **G**—gallop; **H**—hop; **J**—jump; **R**—run; **S**—skip.
- 3 Make a “Feely Bag” for each new letter. For example, fill a bag with many playthings that begin with M (monkey, marbles, mask, markers) and a few “foolers” that do not. The children take turns removing and showing the items. If the object passes the “M test,” it stays out for the children to use. If it fails, it goes back into the bag. So, if a ball were in the bag, the teacher would help the children discover that to begin with M the item would be called a “mall” not a “ball.” It’s a fooler, so it stays in the bag.
- 4 After learning about the letter for two or more days, have the children bring an item from home that begins with that letter and share it during “Show and Tell.”
- 5 Make a class book of photos. Include children’s photos under letters that begin their first names (Madison and Maya under **M**). Put photos of activities under letters (snacking under **S** and painting under **P**).
- 6 Provide or have families provide snacks that start with the letter being studied.
- 7 Make a stack of colorful letter flash cards to review just once each day. Go through only the letters that have been introduced to the children. Some will know all the letters, and others will struggle. But seeing the letters and hearing their names often will give a head start to children who know few or no letters. Let children take turns being the teacher and showing the cards to the rest of the class. Make the activity short and fun.

- 8 Remind children that learning about letters and their sounds is one step toward learning to read. And the most important reason we learn to read is so that we can read the Bible and learn more about our wonderful Lord.

## WELS.NET UNIVERSITY COURSES FOR PARENTS



**Four mini-courses for parents have been posted on WELS.net University:**

- Strong Families, Blessed Lives: A Look at What Makes a Family Healthy
- Right At Home: Help for Christian Parents (video-assisted)
- Family Devotions: It Can Be Done!
- The Christian Family at the 21st Century

148 people have taken the current courses. New courses are in development. Go to [www.wels.net/jump/wnuparenting](http://www.wels.net/jump/wnuparenting) and grow in your Christian parenting skills.



# Kids InC: Engaging the Youngest Through Worship

by Patty Starke — Holy Word Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

Challenges and opportunities come hand in hand with the development and implementation of a new ministry. Congregations must equip themselves to seize opportunities and overcome challenges to allow for a successful ministry. Starting a children's church ministry at Holy Word came with its own challenges and opportunities.

The board of elders at Holy Word met and discussed the idea of implementing a children's church. They felt such a ministry would offer many opportunities to its members and also potential members, as well as children ages 3 - 7 years.

What are some specific opportunities our children's church, **Kids in Christ (Kids InC)**, offers? It allows parents to worship without the stress of disciplining fidgety children, increases our outreach opportunities to families with young children, and gives children a chance to worship and hear the Word of God at an age-appropriate level.

Worshipping at an age-appropriate level makes worship meaningful to the children. Our **Kids InC** format combines most of the elements of a traditional worship service (prayer, music, scripture, lesson, offering), but presents them on a child's level. The "worship service" floor-plan is also similar to our worship service with rows of chairs in a pew-like formation. The service is interactive with responsive prayer and Q&A during the lesson.

Challenges we have faced during the past year include: addressing congregational concerns, developing a curriculum, dealing with logistical limitations, and staffing the program. We will explore each of the mentioned challenges in more detail below.

**Congregational concerns:** Before **Kids InC** began, Holy Word had some members express concern that the children wouldn't be sitting in the service with their parents, learning to sit quietly and worship. We decided to have the children begin worshipping with their families in church. Those

who choose to attend **Kids InC** are dismissed following the children's message every Sunday. In addition, knowing the children are practicing worship at their age level and not doing crafts and playing games has also helped ease concerns.

Concerns and suggestions from **Kids InC** workers, parents, fellow parishioners and even the children themselves have been addressed throughout our first year of this ministry. A few examples: A staff member felt we needed to add saying the Lord's Prayer instead of only singing it with a DVD. A member observing the service noticed we didn't close with the blessing and suggested it was good for the children to be exposed to it. A parent noticed that her child missed giving his offering in church so we added that element to the service. A child mentioned she wanted **Kids InC** to have Bibles like the 'adult' service. All of these suggestions were taken and added to our **Kids InC** service during the past year.

**Content:** Once the elders decided to go forward with this unique children's ministry, we faced the challenge of finding a suitable curriculum. We needed one aimed at ages 3-7, flexible enough for our time allotment and, of course, true to Scripture. After doing some research on available curriculums we settled on resources from Group Publishing.

Developing the **Kids InC** schedule held the challenge of fitting the elements of traditional worship into a small amount of time. We decided to do the following (it has been tweaked during the year):

- Leave church after children's talk
- Welcome kids (1-2 min)
- Praise & Worship (5-8 min)
- Learning Point (20-25 min)
- Offering (5 min)
- Praise & Worship (10-12 min)
- Popcorn prayer & Lord's prayer
- Blessing (5 min)
- Return during last hymn

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**Logistics:** Finding an appropriate space to hold *Kids InC* was one logistical challenge we faced. We settled on our fellowship hall as it has ample space, is in the same building as the church, and has electrical outlets for the audio/visual equipment.

The equipment we use for *Kids InC* includes a laptop, LCD projector, large screen and sometimes a TV/DVD player. We use these in conjunction with the CD's and DVD's that come with our curriculum. The children love to sing along, especially while imitating motions specific to the songs.

**Staff:** One of the biggest challenges was finding volunteers to staff our new ministry. We put together the following description for the positions *Kids InC* would need.

• **Leader/ Music**

This person prepares the lesson and songs from the provided materials and teaches the learning point (ie: God is kind). S/he also leads the children in the songs, possibly demonstrating motions. It's good to reserve five minutes to learn/review the words and motions of a song. Prep is minimal and materials needed are typically something one would have at home.

• **Helper**

Younger children aren't used to sitting and listening for extended times so the helper sits near those children and encourages them to sit and listen. Transitioning between sitting and singing is another time the helper is needed, especially with younger children or visitors.

• **AV**

This person doesn't need to be a computer genius. S/he sets up either the projector and laptop or TV and DVD player. S/he is given a lesson plan which shows when to play musical and video selections. Basically this person pushes some buttons and changes CD's and DVD's.

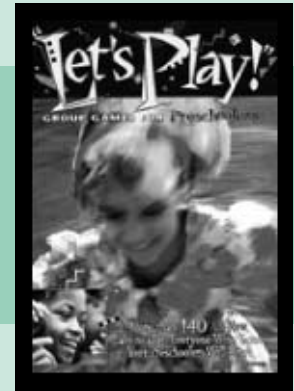
We began the program asking for people to commit for a month to six weeks at a time. We thought the consistency would be good for the children attending. Finding volunteers for such a long time commitment was difficult, therefore we put together 6 teams. Now our volunteers work once every six weeks. This rotation seems to be working much better and the children are fine with it.

As expected, we have found our *Kids InC* ministry to have an ongoing learning curve. We are continually making the most of new opportunities and attending to the latest challenges as they arise. We have found the blessings of our children's church ministry to far outweigh the challenges. We thank God for these blessings and the opportunity to bring his saving Word to our children.

## Let's Play!

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By Group Publishing  
Item Number: 9781559456135  
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Make playtime learning time with great games that work in any size class! Here are more than 140 easy-to-lead, fun-to-play games that teach preschoolers about Bible characters and stories. You'll love the clear, simple directions, and your kids will love that they can actually do these games! Pull them out for Sunday school, children's church, preschool, anywhere you want preschoolers to learn Bible truths as they play!

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- Songs and Finger Plays.

This is not a WELS or NPH product so be discerning.

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