

DECEMBER 2018

SCHOOL MINISTRY

Mailing



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod

School Ministry



DECEMBER 2018

SCHOOL MINISTRY MAILING

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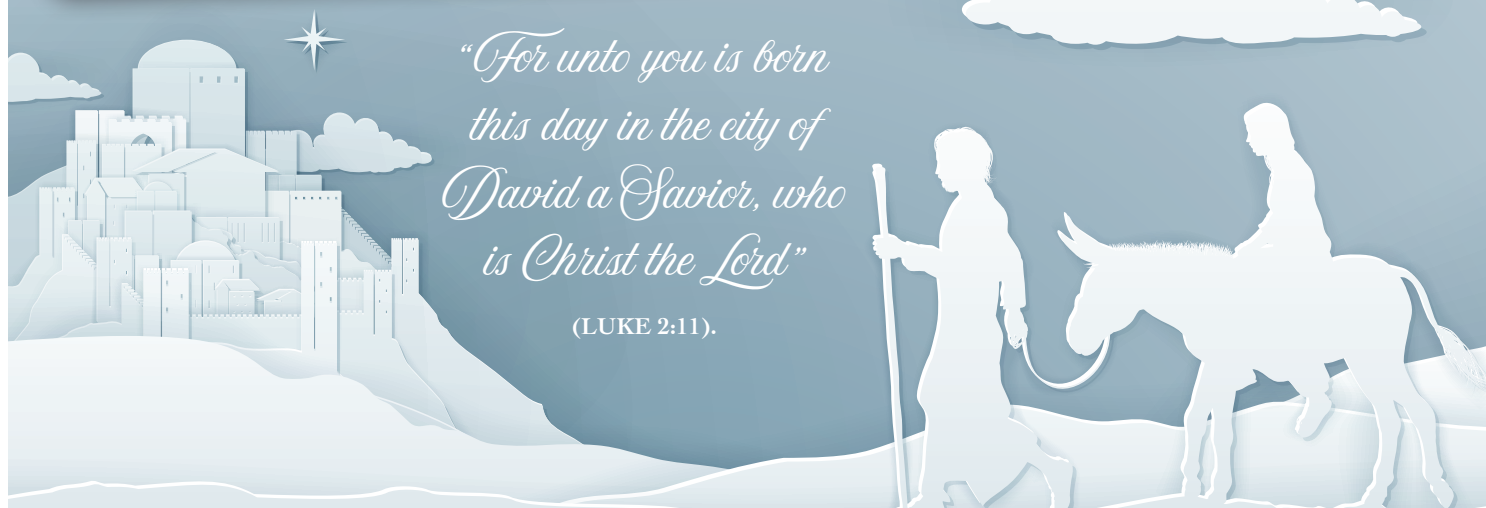
Alight

FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND EDUCATORS



*"For unto you is born
this day in the city of
David a Savior, who
is Christ the Lord"*

(LUKE 2:11).



ALIGHT // VOL. 49, NO. 4 // DECEMBER 2018

A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Author: Dr. Rebecca Schmidt, Director of LCMS School Ministry Designer: Lisa Moeller

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December 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						Rosa Parks Day 1
Advent, First Sunday 2	Cookie Exchange Week 3	International Space Station Launch (US) 20th Anniversary 4	Walt Disney born, 1901 5	National Christmas Tree Lighting 6	Pearl Harbor Day 7	America Enters World War II, 1941 8
Petrified Forest National Park Established, 1962 9	Emily Dickinson born, 1830 10	UNICEF Established, 1946 11	Poinsettia Day 12	Mary Todd Lincoln born, 1818 13	South Pole Discovered, 1911 14	Bill of Rights Day 15
Boston Tea Party, 1773 16	Wright Brothers Day 17	Steven Spielberg born, 1947 18	First NHL Game, 1917 19	Sacagawea dies, 1812 20	St. Thomas, Apostle 21	Be a Lover of Silence Day 22
23 First nonstop flight around the world without refueling, 1987	24 Christmas Eve	Christmas 25	St. Stephen, Martyr 26	St. John, Apostle and Evangelist 27	The Holy Innocents, Martyrs 28	American YMCA Organized, 1851 29
30 Falling Needles Family Fest Day	31 Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus / New Year's Eve					

Visit lcms.org/worship to find resources and information connected to the church year.



Computer File



THE MAKER MOVEMENT – PART 1 More Questions than Answers



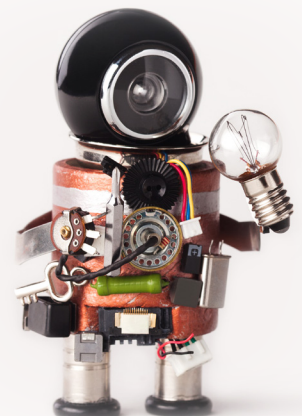
While makerspaces are becoming more and more common in schools, the journey to creating one is still very different in each school. While schools might appreciate a more formulaic approach to creating and building a makerspace, the very nature of what these spaces are does not lend itself to that type of approach. Before even thinking about the what and the how of building a space, the first critical question a school must answer is the why. If the why is not part of a shared value and culture of learning at the school, the space will likely become a dormant wasteland of expensive gizmos and gadgets.

First, a “makerspace” needs to be defined. In a broad sense, a makerspace is a place in which students and teachers can gather to work on projects, create, invent, collaborate, learn and experiment while sharing ideas, equipment and knowledge. A makerspace is similar to a library. In a library you have rows of books and other

resources available for learners to use to answer a specific research question they have in mind, or a person might wander the shelves looking for inspiration and ideas. A makerspace serves a similar purpose. It is a place with the tools, resources and technology available for a person to create a specific product he has in mind, or a person might allow the space itself to serve as her inspiration to create. Like libraries, makerspaces are multidisciplinary. The tools and resources available should serve many different types of makers, basically allowing all types of users to take something out of their imaginations and make it real.

Think about your school. Do you want to foster this type of freedom and creativity? Are you more about the process than the end product? Is there a design culture and creative mindset? If so, your school is probably ready to start thinking about a makerspace, since the culture is more important than the space itself.

It is also important to think about how the makerspace can be used throughout the entire school day. Schools want to take advantage of that space and not allow it to sit empty. How are teachers going to be encouraged to use it across the curriculum? Are there going to be specific classes that utilize that space? Is it a combination of both of these options? Additionally, schools need to consider the extra times outside of the school day. Will the space be used before and after



school? Who is supervising that space? Will there be community involvement and open hours for outside constituents? While these questions are important to answer, schools should start small and grow into it.

The key to a successful makerspace is the people — both leaders and students. Find someone who is passionate about making and sharing her experiences. That person probably already exists at your school; it could be an existing teacher or maybe an excited parent, but the space won't drive itself. Who will support and encourage teachers to utilize the space? Who will champion the space? Who will supervise the space? Who will organize and order items for the space, and teach people about it? It is clear that this requires more than just an existing librarian or technology teacher. They have enough to do already. A successful space will take full-time support.

Once the people of a school have an idea about why the space exists and how they are going to support it, then they can start tackling ideas about what can go into the space. Those questions are all going to be filtered through your context. Are you in an elementary school, middle school, high school or a K – 12? Is the makerspace in the library or is it in its own room/building? This will determine if the school will be able to have saws and



Top photo: Student Projects, International School Manila. Middle photo: Creative Arts and Design (CAD) building, American School in Japan. Bottom photo: STEM building, Wheaton Academy in West Chicago.

Next month we will step down from the 10,000-foot view and take a look at specific curriculum ideas and the specific tools that can support a school's vision.

hammers. What types of digital items are appropriate for your level of student? Makey Makey or Arduino? 3D printers for modeling or simple things like pipe cleaners and cardboard? For obvious reasons, you can't have second graders cutting a two-by-four in the middle of the library. No matter the context and location, how are you going to create a space for the kids to design and create? Create the space, considering the student needs and abilities first. Remember, it is about the process, not the product!



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A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Writer: Jonathan Orr Designer: Lisa Moeller

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Early Childhood Devotions

FOR CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 7



REAL. PRESENT. GOD.

FOCUS: Jesus Is Real. Jesus Is Present. Jesus is God.

The Promise and Birth of Jesus

LUKE 1:26–38, 2:1–7

Before You Teach

Of the four Gospel writers, only Matthew and Luke tell of Jesus' birth. These somewhat sparse scriptural accounts leave plenty of room for our imaginations. Our need to elaborate signals the importance of the narrative, yet the message remains simple: Jesus is God, part of the Triune God's eternal plan for the salvation of the world. "Advent" means "coming." Jesus, God's Son, came as a baby, the promised Savior for all. Through the work of the Holy Spirit and in the Means of Grace, Jesus is still present with us.

Greeting

Welcome each child upon entry, "Good morning (afternoon), child of God. God sent Jesus for you!"

Gathering

You will need: Advent Wreath, three dark blue candles, one pink candle and one large white candle. Place the blue and the pink (third week in Advent) candles around the wreath and the white Christ candle in the center (usually lit on Christmas day).

Introduce the Advent wreath. "The circle wreath reminds us of God's never-ending love. The candles remind us of the light of Jesus." Light and add one candle each week in Advent. Light the Christ candle during



your Christmas party, celebrating Jesus' birthday. Sing the corresponding verse(s) of "Light One Candle" (LOSP, P. 78–79). Speak the following:

Week 1: Come Lord Jesus! Bring to us Your promised HOPE.

Week 2: Come Lord Jesus! Bring to us Your promised HOPE and caring PEACE.

Week 3: Come Lord Jesus! Bring to us Your promised HOPE, caring PEACE and unending JOY.

Week 4: Come Lord Jesus! Bring to us Your promised HOPE, caring PEACE, unending JOY and gracious LOVE!

Tell the Story

JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

You will need: Seven volunteer staff and/or other adults, crèche figures.

Distribute crèche figures and related texts to volunteer adults as indicated. Station them around the building.



Following number order, lead children from person to person.

PERSON 1 Angel: God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary. The angel said, “Do not be afraid, Mary, God has chosen you to have a baby boy. You are to name the baby, ‘Jesus.’ He will be great and will be called ‘Son of God.’”

PERSON 2 Ruler: The ruler of the country where Joseph lived ordered all to travel to the town where they were born to be counted.

PERSON 3 Joseph: Joseph and Mary traveled to the town of Bethlehem. There, they slept in a stable because there was nowhere else for them to stay.

PERSON 4 Mary: While in Bethlehem, baby Jesus was born. Mary wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a manger.

PERSON 5 Shepherds: Shepherds were watching sheep in a nearby field. An angel of the Lord appeared to them saying, “Today in Bethlehem a Savior has been born; He is Christ the Lord.”



PERSON 6 Baby Jesus: The Shepherds found Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, who was lying in the manger. Praising God, they worshiped Jesus, then told others all they had seen and been told.

PERSON 7 All God’s People: God kept the promise to send our Savior, Jesus. We celebrate Jesus’ birthday on Christmas.

Remember the Story

BIBLE WORDS TO REMEMBER

Pre-K & K: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (LUKE 2:11).

Gr. 1 & 2: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (LUKE 2:10-11).

ACTIVITIES

Create: Jingle Bell Shakers. *You will need:* Toilet paper tubes (one per child), Christmas wrap cut into 5½-inch squares, red and green pipe cleaners, jingle bells (five per child), ¼-inch ribbon for streamers.

Directions: Guide children to spread glue on wrapping paper squares and to place toilet paper tube on top. Roll to adhere paper to tube. Tuck excess paper into tube ends. Twist a red and a green pipe cleaner together for 2 inches. Slide a bell onto one pipe cleaner and then twist to hold in place. Repeat, adding bells at equal distances. Fold and tape pipe cleaner ends inside the tube. Add ribbon streamers. Use when chanting/singing. *Helpful Hint:* Enlist adult helpers.

Do: Together chant:

*Jesus came from heaven above.
God’s promise kept, a gift of love.
My Savior, Jesus, rescued me.
And praises now I sing to Thee.*

Sing: “Mary Had a Baby” (LOSP, P. 90); “Happy Birthday, Jesus” (LOSP, P. 88).



Live the Story

Children’s routines tend to be disrupted by holiday preparations and resulting adult anxiety. Be the place of calm for children. Maintain the daily schedule! Plan events and celebrations that benefit and serve the needs of children. Encourage families to do likewise!

Sending

Gather children in a “Sending Circle.” Pass a Christmas angel, inviting each child to offer a brief prayer as the angel is received. Children may silently pass the angel along. As children depart say to each, “*Jesus was born for you!*”



Family Matters

A CHRIST-CENTERED RESOURCE FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS



REAL. PRESENT. GOD. God With Us

“I got your back!” “I’m here for you!”

A promise by someone to be there when needed is very meaningful. Words such as these give us a sense of assurance. They are words that give us hope and a sense of well-being. The promise of someone to come alongside us, supporting us in a time of need, is a sign of love in action. When love is experienced in this way, side by side, it can be one of the greatest bonding moments in life.

As parents we know that our presence with our children can be very meaningful to them. It has a powerful impact on a child when a father or mother:

- › shows up at a musical or drama performance,
- › attends a game or competition,
- › comes alongside a child during a time of uncertainty,
- › attends an academic awards ceremony,
- › just sits down with a child for a chat on the couch,
- › asks him what he wants to do with an open Saturday — and then does it with him, or
- › is there for her when she sheds a tear when physically or emotionally hurt.

The power of the presence of a parent in the life of a child — at any age — cannot be overstated. You never outgrow the need to have a parent in your life, nor does a parent outgrow the desire to support and be there for his child.

As Christmas approaches, our children will no doubt create “wish lists” of things they want

as gifts. That list may be in the form of a letter to Santa or an email to the North Pole. It might be a list compiled on a computer, printed in a colorful design and placed on the refrigerator for all to see. It might be done as a text or even presented in video form. Get ready parents — these requests are coming!

In contrast to these lists, which can read like an invoice from an online ordering company, consider the “mature” individual, who when asked what she wants for Christmas, simply says, “to be around my family and friends.” She is no longer interested in presents — she is interested in presence. It takes us a while in life to get to the place where others become the priority over objects, where people are more important than possessions.

Our loving God is all about people. He created us in His image. He loves us and forgives us, welcomes us back when we stray, is interested in our daily walk of life. As we celebrate Christmas once again, we experience that God has given us the greatest present, by giving us His presence through the gift of Jesus as our Savior. God came in the form of a baby, who grew up, who experienced life on earth and who then went all the way to the cross for us.

Jesus will be with us in the good times and the tough times of life. May we again have the opportunity this Christmas to celebrate the presence of God in the Present given to us in the manger — Christ the Lord!



FAMILY LINKS // Activities for families to reinforce Bible truths in the home.

Gather the family together in a comfortable place for study and discussion using the outline below.

OPENING PRAYER

Given by the person who has the biggest present under the family Christmas tree — thus far.

FOR OPENERS

Ask the following questions and see which answers family members would give. Allow for responses not on the list.

If you had good news to share with others, how would you communicate it?

- 1 Visit with people in person,
- 2 Put it out there on social media,
- 3 Call people on the phone,
- 4 Buy a billboard message,
- 5 Write a letter,
- 6 Put up a banner in a prominent location,
- 7 Send a text, or
- 8 Other: _____.



Follow-up questions:

- Why this means of communication?
- How effective do you think it will be?

FAMILY INSTRUCTION TIME

Have an adult briefly explain the following definitions:

PRESENCE: a time when you have eye-to-eye contact and hand-to-hand contact with another person physically in your midst, and

PRESENTS: gifts that you designate for another person, often given on special occasions or in recognition of a celebration.



FAMILY STUDY TIME

Have someone read Luke 2:4-16 and discuss the following questions as a family.

- Where do you hear about “**presence**” in the verses of the Christmas story?
- Where do you hear about “**presents**” in the verses of the Christmas story?

FAMILY IDEA TIME

Have a family discussion and fill in the following chart

“PRESENTS” — *the gifts we want to give to people this Christmas*

WHO	WHAT	WHY
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

“PRESENCE” — *how we want to connect with other people this Christmas season*

WHO	HOW	WHY
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

CLOSING ECHO PRAYER

Have an older sibling or adult read the following prayer with everyone else in the family repeating the words phrase by phrase.

Gracious God, we thank You for the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ our Lord. May we celebrate His presence with us this Christmas season, even as we give presents to one another. We ask for the presence of Jesus every day in the coming year. In Your Name we pray. Amen.





Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS



Students with Attention Difficulties, Part 1



Students with attention difficulties, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed, may often be students who cause a great deal of frustration for teachers. It may be difficult to see the strengths of a child who is not attentive, is impulsive and may have trouble sitting still, but these students do have unique strengths and abilities, just as students with other disabilities do as well. We'll start by looking at the signs and strengths of students with attention difficulties, who are also fearfully and wonderfully made.

While it seems easy to identify students who are hyperactive, those with attention difficulties are typically categorized as students who are either predominantly inattentive or predominantly hyperactive and impulsive, or a combination of both of those types. Students who are predominantly inattentive may be more difficult to notice because of the lack of hyperactivity that typically grabs teachers' attention. These students often do not

finish what they start, do not seem to listen, are distracted by irrelevant sights and sounds, have difficulty concentrating or paying attention for extended periods of time, do not pay attention to details, rarely follow instructions and lose or forget items needed to complete a task. Students who are predominantly hyperactive and impulsive often move from one activity to the next quickly, have difficulty with organization, need a lot of supervision, speak out in class, do not take turns, and act or speak without thinking and then later feel remorseful. While it may not be necessary to detail the signs of hyperactivity since they tend to be more obvious, these students typically are fidgety, need to move frequently, have difficulty sitting in a seat, act as if they are driven by a motor and may have excessive activity even during their sleep.

There are also emotional implications of having attention difficulties that may not be thought of initially as being associated. Sometimes, these students experience great frustration and have angry outbursts. They may also be social loners and blame others for their problems without taking responsibility themselves. Students with attention difficulties may fight with others and react quickly, but also be very sensitive to criticism. It is always important to note with these signs that the age of the child is considered in diagnosis. The behavior needs to occur to a degree that is considered inappropriate for the child's age. Also, when an appropriate professional is diagnosing an attention disability, these symptoms must be present in multiple settings and occur over a period



of time, even though the signs may appear more in one setting than another.

While the excess energy of some attention difficulties may seem like a challenge, it can also serve as a strength. When the student's energy can be channeled appropriately into a task or activity, the student may hyperfocus and be able to remain on task for long periods of time. This hyperfocus can be a benefit, especially when the students are engaged in tasks or future vocations in which they have specific passions. These students may be extremely motivated to complete tasks in areas of interest, and knowing what these areas are can be a useful resource for teachers to help the students focus. Individuals with attention difficulties are often very bright and creative and have great senses of humor. They are often a lot of fun to be around and interact with and get along well with their peers. Having attention difficulties often results in being creative and learning how to overcome obstacles and challenges to move forward after experiencing setbacks. There is a characteristic of resilience present, as may also be the case for students with other disabilities.

Students with attention difficulties often can come up with their own unique organization system and out-of-the-box ideas that may not make sense to others. For a teacher who likes things in the classroom to be done the same way by all students, this may not seem like a strength. For the students, though, that system works, and they should be encouraged to implement ideas and systems that work for them and build on how their brains think and process information. Their unique ideas offer a different perspective to other students and

teachers alike, and their creativity should be encouraged. Along those lines, these students are often very willing to take risks and try new things. Rather than seeing something as impossible, they may see something as a challenge and work to find a solution without being overly discouraged by failure. Students with attention difficulties may also be extremely compassionate and helpful. They are often empathetic toward others and go out of their way to help other students or adults in need of assistance.

While this newsletter addresses some of the signs and strengths of students with attention difficulties, there is much more information on this topic available concerning significant struggles and helpful strategies for teachers. In next month's *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, those aspects of attention difficulties will be discussed.



If questions arise regarding working with students with attention difficulties, or any type of disability, please reach out to Lutheran Special Education Ministries for help! Visit luthsped.org or contact us at lsem@luthsped.org.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

VOL. 2, NO. 4 // DECEMBER 2018

A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Writer: Kara Bratton Designer: Frank Kohn

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Growing in Governing

GROWTH TOPICS AND DISCUSSIONS FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL GOVERNING BOARDS



Confidently Leading



Developing confidence typically takes time, training and years of experience to gain some level of comfort. It typically takes many years of trial and error, of successes and challenges to hone skills needed to confidently lead. It should be a goal of every board to have a confidence level that promotes trust and the ability to serve effectively.

Looking at a hero of faith, Moses, one can see that the key word to focus on is faith. Faith in the Almighty God. Faith that the Holy Spirit is present and is continually at work. Faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son, who died so that we might live. When reading about Moses and learning about him as a faith-filled, confident leader, it becomes obvious that his leadership development took time and growth in the ability to listen to and follow God's will for his life. While he was sometimes reluctant, his faith in

God always sustained him as he led the people of God.

“By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned” (HEB. 11:27–29).

Those Around Can Sense It

Hopefully Moses' experience is one that many leaders can empathize

with. Considering his life, it is important to remember that the more leadership experience someone has, the more comfortable that person can become in moving forward with confidence. Meetings, conversations and group presentations are all learning opportunities to hone confident leadership skills. Observing confident leaders also allows for continued professional development. However, the key to the entire process is practice, more practice and relying on God to give the needed strength and opportunity to make a difference. Those who lead and govern would do well to ask for constructive feedback from those who have high levels of confidence — with that usually comes encouragement and, yes, more practice.

Confidence Will Inspire Others

Being a confident leader gives opportunity to engage others as a mentor. This process alone gives one the

opportunity to act in a supporting role and give back. It is similar to Aaron and Hur holding up the hands of Moses at Rephidim. “But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun” (EX. 17:12). Aaron and Hur may have been inspired to provide this supporting role, and as such were given the confidence to be there for Moses. At the same time, their confidence was able to promote such inspiration to the people who followed Moses as the leader that God had appointed to take them to the Promised Land.

The Governing Board Will Have a Sense of Trust

› **They will take your lead.**

Confidence spurs on more confidence. Trust follows.

› **They have a mission to follow.**

This is the lens through which all conversations, interactions and decisions are made. It is a powerful and focused lens.

› **They answer to the congregation.**

At congregational meetings, subjective and objective data will assist with understanding the importance of Christian education within the precious school entrusted with the mission. Also, telling stories and a strong narrative will bring strength to this dialogue.

› **They will enjoy their work.**

Confidently working together toward a future bright



with promise exudes immense joy and a fervent desire to thrive and to serve the Lord with gladness.

› **They will embrace the challenges that will arise.**

Instead of shying away from conflict or challenges, the board is enabled to work through these and to learn from them.

› **They will celebrate those things that are intended to be celebrated.**

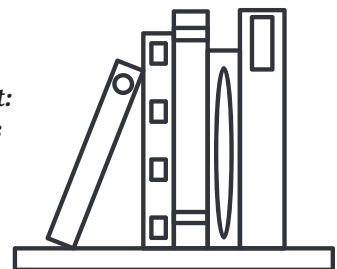
They won't let opportunities slip by that are intended to be embraced with celebrations, both small and big. Examples include official groundbreaking, lifting up staff when acknowledgment should happen and, of course, baptisms!

How Trust Can Create Great Dividends

Speaking on behalf of the governing board at Voters' Assemblies or at congregational meetings gives the church or the organization important moments to share in the life of the school. The board itself needs to be confidently trusted to fulfill this role. Seeing the board confidently doing its work could encourage others to desire to serve in the same capacity. The greatest dividend, though, is to see the Gospel shared and faith lives strengthened and lived out in service to God and to man. As a school ministry leader, one can confidently lead the community in fulfilling the Great Commission and in sharing the love of Christ to all.

Resources

› **Moses on Management: 50 Leadership Lessons by the Greatest Manager of All Time**, by David Baron and Lynette Padwa (2000).



› **Raising a Modern-Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood**, by Robert Lewis (2007). (Don't let the title fool you; there are many applications here to suggest the power that comes from celebrating milestones.)

Resources or continued conversations are available by contacting the author at thomas.wrege@zionwalburg.org.

Growing in Governing

VOL. 31, NO. 4 // DECEMBER 2018

A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Writer: Thomas Wrege Designer: Frank Kohn

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Insights & Ideas

FOR TEACHERS OF CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 7



Happy Anniversary *Insights & Ideas!*

Here's a little bit of history! In 1945, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) recorded 127 kindergartens and one nursery school in operation. Twenty-six years later, 52 nursery school programs were listed in the *Lutheran Annual*. In 1973 at the LCMS Synod Convention, the Board for Parish Services presented Resolution 7-03 titled “To Encourage Development of Early Childhood Education Programs.” The result was the vision of Melvin Kieschnick (LCMS Board of Parish Education) with *Project Young Child*. Joanne Eisenberg was its first director. One of her initiatives for equipping teachers was the creation of the *Insights & Ideas* newsletter, designed for educators working in the field of early childhood education in Lutheran schools.¹

This school year we are sharing nine issues of *Insights & Ideas* from the 1978–79 school year to celebrate Joanne Eisenberg's inspiration and 40 years of talented writers and their remarkable resources for the Lutheran early childhood classroom.

¹ Judith Christian, “Early Childhood Education in the LCMS,” *Issues in Christian Education – A Publication of Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska*, Vol. 47, no. 2 (2014): 7–9.

1978 December

“**A**h, December! Time for tree trimming and carol singing and gift giving,” writes Joanne Eisenberg. She tells of a favorite object lesson where a picture of Jesus is wrapped in a gift box. When the children open the gift, Joanne helps them discover that Jesus is the best gift of all! In doing so, Joanne reflects on the gift of people in her life. With a shared vision for early childhood education, Joanne is touched and inspired by the many people who walk beside her as writers, educators and consultants. She shares her idea of service learning by helping children to understand the joy of giving and encouraging them to bring a toy to school to donate to underserved children. God cares for us through His people. As you read Joanne’s article, think about the many “gifts” in your church and school that are a blessing to you, and remember what a blessing you are to the children and families entrusted to your care, now 40 years after the article was first published.

INSIGHTS & IDEAS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

JOANNE EISENBERG - BOARD OF PARISH EDUCATION - LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD
3558 S. Jefferson - St. Louis, Missouri, 63118.

GOD THE YOUNG CHILD & RELIGION

DEC. 1978

Ah, December! Time for tree trimming and carol singing and gift giving.

Most of us have used the object lesson of a wrapped gift with a picture of Jesus inside to communicate to children that Jesus is the best gift of all.

Often the gift of Jesus becomes alive to me through the ministry of people as Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25:40:

"As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me."

Especially at this time of year, I am reminded of the people who are God's special gifts to me and to early childhood educators. Three years ago when I joined the Board of Parish Education, I didn't know the Leah Sercks and Shirley Morgenthalers and Pat Shoplands at our teachers colleges who were enthusiastically filling young teachers with the proper dose of methodology and practicality. I didn't know the Marti Bueschleins and Sue Richterkessings and Chris Lehls and Esther Zadieks, officers of the Department of Early Childhood Education of LEA, who keep our DECE running and early childhood resources flowing. And I never would have imagined that we could set up a team of consultants in each district who would be willing to run their legs off in hopes of stirring up interest in early childhood education for "zero pay."

Then there are the people on the home front. The gals in the office who type and take messages and help pack me up for workshops, who pray for my safe goings and comings but don't get to feel good about a presentation or seeing their name in print or receiving compliments from all of you. I think particularly of Frances Brandhorst who is retiring this month after working for the School Department for more than 20 years. What a gift! Not to mention my colleagues on the staff who daily encourage me and help me along the way. These have got to be the best Christmas gifts of all. For through the gift of people we find Jesus.



"Framed in light, Mary sings through the doorway
Elizabeth's six month joy jumps, a palpable greeting,
a hidden first encounter between son and Son.
And my heart turns over when I meet Jesus in you!"



Thanks to Bev Beckmann, "the story telling lady," and another example of a special gift to me and early childhood educators. Bev shared these ideas at the Sunday School Convention in Chicago last July:

Bible Story telling devices:

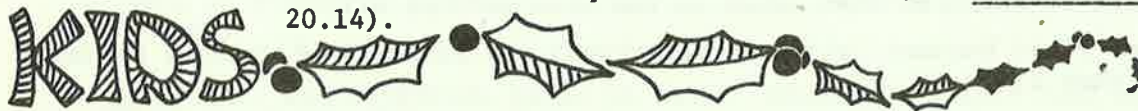
1. Flannelboard: Make figures out of flannel, pellow, or paper. If paper is used, glue felt or flannel to reverse side. (For variation, cover a large pizza board with felt. Place elastic on back to slip hand through for holding.)
2. Rubbings: Draw or trace a character or scene from a story. Cover the lines with a trail of Elmer's glue. Dry over night. Place a piece of newsprint over the scene and rub with chalk. Picture will appear as the story is told.
3. Clay: Create a portion of the story with a clay item. (i.e. make the cave where Jesus was buried and have the children make the stone to roll in front of it.)
4. Torn paper: Tear paper to form an item in the story you are telling.
5. Story bag: Create your own story bag by decorating a paper bag or sewing one of fabric. Place an item in the bag to introduce the story. (i.e. mustard seed, cross, palm leaf.)

THE WORDS BECAME

FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US!

6. Recycling: Use old Sunday School lesson pictures to introduce the lesson.

- a. Cut up pictures to make puzzles. Encourage children to discuss the picture after putting the puzzle together.
- b. Make a shoe box peep show. Make a slit covered with wax paper for light on the top of the box. Place pictures at one end of the box and cut a small hole in the other end for viewing.
- c. Make a matching game from Sunday School leaflets. Use the game to introduce the story or review it.
- d. Make a box which opens into a cross (See Preschool Curriculum Guide, p. 20.14).



CHILDREN

Several years ago Art Linkletter wrote a book entitled "Kids Say The Darndest Things." Kids do say the darndest things as evidenced by these answers from the children at Trinity Lutheran School in Marysville, OH:

WHAT IS A CHURCH? . . .something with a top on it. . .you get bread there. . .a place to talk to Jesus. . .a home for Jesus. . .a thing with a point on top. . .Jesus lives in it, it's as big as a jet plane. . .

WHAT DOES THE CROSS REMIND YOU OF? . . .they 'hanged' Jesus on the cross and he came alive cause he wasn't very much dead. . .Jesus died on the cross, went behind a big rock and then came alive. . .Jesus, he's nice to grandmas and watches over me too. . . a cross says there is a church somewhere. . .a cross is like an apple cause it got worms in it like wood. . .

WHAT DOES A PASTOR WEAR? WHAT DOES A PASTOR DO? . . .he dresses up real fancy and tells us about Jesus. . .tells people about Jesus and wears girl's clothes. . .he doesn't do nothing and wears real funny clothes. . .he reads the Bible and wears long clothes. . .he works for the church but I don't know what. . .he's in a church and goes ding-dong, ding-dong. . .he wears pants and tries to catch someone when they are in bed. . .

Glory to GOD  **Peace on Earth** 

Paper Doll Angels: Cut a string of paper dolls in the shape of angels. Write "Glory to God" or "Peace on Earth" on them.

Picture Story: Each child has a turn to draw a portion of the Christmas story. Punch holes and tie pictures together with string from ceiling to floor.

Christmas Candle: Have the children fashion a candle holder out of self-hardening clay. Insert a large birthday candle and artificial Christmas greens. When dry, spray with artificial snow. Attach this verse:



"Light this candle Christmas Eve.
Let its' bright light shining gay,
Say to all who pass your way,
We keep Jesus' birthday here."

--Fern Pfitzer, Madison, WI

CHILDREN

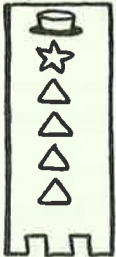
Ways to use Christmas Seals and Wheat Ridge Stamps:



1. Paste the entire sheet of seals on a piece of cardboard and cut into puzzle pieces.
2. Draw an outline of a Christmas shape (tree, star, bell, etc.). Have child select stamps and fill in outline with pasted stamps.
3. Use a family calendar to count down the days until Christmas. Each day the child selects a stamp, talks about its picture and pastes it on the correct date.
4. Glue a stamp or two on folded pieces of construction paper to make place cards or gift tags.

Bulletin Board: Make a large green tree on the bulletin board. Using John 3:16, ask the children to cut pictures out of magazines for which they are thankful. Turn this into a litany having the class thank God for the items on the tree.

Gifts for Jesus: Ask the children to draw a picture of something they would like to give Jesus for His birthday. Share these pictures at a birthday party for Jesus.



Advent Strip: Children constantly want to know "how long until Christmas Day?" In order to keep "Christ" in Christmas, give each child a 1" wide strip of ribbon approximately 24" long. Have them cut out triangles (23) and glue them on the ribbon...from bottom up. At the top of the ribbon place a star for the 24th day and a birthday cake for the 25th day. Each day the child removes an article starting from the bottom up.

--Annetta Dellinger, Plain City, OH

Sand Table: Use your sand table to tell the ongoing Christmas story. Puppet people can be made from paper cups, toilet paper rolls, or clothespins. Boxes can be painted for houses and plastic animals purchased from the dime store. Gather rocks, weeds, and twigs for scenery. Children will love to help set up the scenes as well as tell the story.

Sharing Gifts: Talk about gift giving at Christmas time. Discuss what the children want for Christmas. With the consent of the parents, ask each child to bring a favorite toy to school to give to an orphanage or child in a school in a poorer area of town. Emphasize the "giving up of something precious to you" just as Christ gave His life for us. Or toys, clothes, etc. may be sent to LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF as part of the gift sharing of Christmas.

Advent Wreath: In Christian circles the Advent wreath is as common as the Christmas tree. Speaking of circles, introduce the Advent wreath by declaring a circle week. Read Joanne Marxhausen's THANK GOD FOR CIRCLES, wear circular wreath pins made out of felt (let the children decorate them), wear circular crowns, make circular wreath cookies for snack.

The Advent wreath will become an important part of your classroom tradition if the children understand its symbolism:

The Advent wreath is round and reminds us of the never ending love of God. It is made of evergreens to remind us of the gift of life. It has four candles for the four Sundays in Advent. (These candles are usually purple, the liturgical color for Advent.) A fifth white candle in the center symbolizes the birth of Christ. The candles are lighted one per week starting with the first Sunday in Advent and have the following meaning:



- First Candle: reminder of the light of hope of the prophets
- Second Candle: symbol of light and warmth Mary and Joseph found in the stable
- Third Candle: represents the great light and joy which surrounded the shepherds at the announcement of Jesus' birth
- Fourth Candle: represents the light of the star leading the wisemen to Jesus and which keeps watch over us by night

Advent Wreath: See FINGER FUN, Augsburg Publishing House (page 16) for a verse titled "Four Candles in a Ring." Adapt this to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell." Using the Advent wreath in the room, the verse goes like this:

"Four candles in a ring, four candles in a ring
 One is burning and three are left, four candles in a ring."
 "A happy song we sing. . .Two are burning and two are left. . ."
 "His birthday time draws near. . .Three are burning and one is left."
 "Christmas time is here. . .Four are burning and none are left. . ."



HE CAME...HE COMES...HE IS COMING. --Jackie Fuchs, Parkville, MO

CHRISTMAS GIFTS, CARDS, ORNAMENTS

1. Paste dried flowers on a piece of burlap for a picture gift.
2. Use baby food, olive, mustard, jelly or peanut butter jars. Decorate with ribbon, glitter, sequins, etc. Put small candles inside.
3. Cover an orange with whole cloves. Good small muscle coordination project. Insert a ribbon in the middle with a large darning needle so mom can hang in her closet.
4. Cut styrofoam balls in half. Decorate rounded half with sequins. Paste a school picture of child to flat cut side. Trim edge with rick-rack. Attach hook for hanging on tree.



--Lois Runge, Orchard Park, NY

5. Make cards out of old Christmas card pictures. Use the following verse:

The world is full of moms and dads but none as nice as you
So here's a special Christmas wish and a bunch of kisses too!

Kids can write XX's and OO's for hugs and kisses and sign their names.



6. Make shrink art key chains. Use pieces of plastic cut in circular or rectangular shapes. Punch hole with paper punch for inserting chain. Children draw designs with permanent magic markers. Bake on baking sheet in 300° oven. Practical and fun to make.



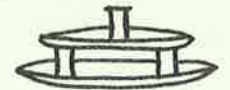
--Martha Bueschlein, Tinley Park, IL

7. Mix dry colored tempera with Elmer's glue in glue bottle. Squeeze a design on wax paper. Sprinkle with glitter and let dry over night. Peel off wax paper and hang on tree.



--Kathleen Fischer, Houston, TX

Holiday Cookie Tray: Needed - 2 eight inch paper plates, 2 six inch paper plates, 3 wooden thread spools.



Glue the two 8" plates together. Also the two 6" plates. Let dry. Attach stickers and decorations around the edges. Paint spools with tempera. Let dry. Coat spools and decorated plates with Modge-Podge. Glue two spools onto center of 8" plate and glue the 6" plate on top of it. Add the other spool on the top of the 6" plate to serve as a handle. Allow to dry. Add paper doilies when serving cookies.

TEACHER'S CORNER

Arch Books: "The Happiest Search," "Mary's Story," "Donkey Daniel," "Little Benjamin and the First Christmas," "The Secret of the Star."

The Very Special Baby by Carol Woodard, published by Fortress Press, is a picture book which tells the story in very simple language.

Celebrate While We Wait (Family Devotional Resources for Advent and Christmas Too) by Linda Schroeder, Concordia Publishing House, \$2.95. Each Devotion contains a meditation, Bible references, a prayer, and song verses written so that all age members of the family can participate. Plus a "how to" section for making a yule log, Advent wreath, Advent cookies, etc.

The Little Tree and his Wish by Viola Rutz, Concordia Publishing House, \$3.95.





Parent Pages

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



The Teasing Dilemma

Teasing is like anxiety: we need a little bit, but not too much, and definitely not the wrong kind. If we had no anxiety in our lives, we would likely not get much done and not stay safe. A little bit of anxiety keeps us sharp. It's too much anxiety, or misplaced anxiety, that causes us trouble.

Finding the right balance in teasing is much the same. Good teasing (sometimes called pro-social teasing) has strong benefits in terms of emotional development.

Teasing promotes affection and affiliation. It can even reduce anxiety when a child realizes that a gentle tease means a friendship has reached a new level — sort of an “If I’m teased, then I’m accepted” mindset. Teasing helps small groups to bond because members develop a common humor. The laughter that comes from these shared moments reinforces group cohesion. In other words, friends who laugh together stay together. Children who are never teased can develop problems just as children who are over teased. Both situations leave children confused regarding their relationships with others.

If your child is struggling with teasing, it is helpful to teach the difference between friendly and unfriendly teasing. You want your child both to successfully navigate social situations involving teasing and to be aware that it is common for a bully to claim a behavior was “just teasing.” A child

who understands this difference will be better equipped to assess and react to the situation. We want children to understand, accept and apply teasing in good ways.

Help your child to understand that unfriendly teasing usually comes from someone they do not often play with and do not know well. This is a good thing to realize because sometimes mean teasing starts by luring someone in with fake kindness. While friends might try teasing to cheer each other, unfriendly teasing is



glad to see someone sad or hurt. Most importantly, unfriendly teasers will not stop when asked.

It is equally important to teach your child about friendly teasing. It is not unusual for children to assume that all teasing is bad. If children tattle on every kind of teasing, they may miss out on a good friendship and may set themselves up to be victims of bullying.

Friendly teasing means the receiver can laugh along with the giver. Of course, this assumes that your child is comfortable laughing at himself, which is a good social skill. Laughing at ourselves puts our faults into perspective. Good teasing comes from a friend who knows your child well and enjoys being teased back. If there is gentle teasing at home, children learn to judge the limits of what is appropriate and learn to take as well as they give. Additionally, while friends can make mistakes and go overboard on teasing, they also know how to apologize. Teach your child how to repent and forgive.

Most importantly, a friendly teaser will stop when asked, or when body language indicates the teasing has gone too far. Good teasing comes with the ability to read emotions and feel empathy. Being a part of a group that indulges in gentle teasing can help children to learn these skills.

One of the tough things about friends and teasing is when a longtime friend is in the process of changing

relationships and turns to mean teasing. This can happen when children transition into a new level of school, and it is an unhealthy way to change friendships. If your child experiences this, the best you can do is to help them re-evaluate that friendship while reminding your child she is loved by God and family. Losing a friendship in this way is difficult, but it can result in good things as your child becomes kinder from having experienced unkindness. Also, new friends often make for even better relationships.

Proverbs 27:6 hints at another benefit of teasing. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” Teasing can be a way for friends to teach each other better behavior. In this way, a wound (or teasing) can be a good thing. Sometimes a child has a gift that needs to be reined in a bit. A strong leader who is occasionally teased for being too bossy, for instance, will gradually learn how to use the gift of leadership in a more appropriate way.

Good teasing strengthens relationships and creates a good environment for children to teach each other social skills. It is interesting to note that both of these things also promote strong academic learning. Healthy friends are developing social capital which they can use during difficult and stressful times. The essential skill for your child to learn is how to discern between good and bad teasing.



Professionally Speaking



Faithfulness Supported in Embracing History

Recently, I heard this story: “Some time ago, when I was in Germany, I watched a grandfather and his grandson on their way back from hunting morels in a nearby forest. If you know a little bit about mushrooms, you know that mushroom hunting can actually lead to fatal consequences. There are so many different kinds of poisonous mushrooms, including some that even mimic the appearance of the prized morel. Then there is just the right time and place for getting just the right kind of morel, and the process of properly cleaning and preparing the mushroom for eating. At first glance, the picture of a grandfather and his grandson coming back from picking mushrooms appears quite simple. However, this cherished moment between grandfather and grandson is not quite as simple as it first seems. How many persons had to go out looking for morels before a larger group of people could come to know that this delicacy only grows best during spring? How many persons had to get sick or die from eating the poisonous mushrooms for a larger group of people to know how to even discern which is the right kind? How many persons were scared to eat what they thought might make them ill before a larger group came to know what was safe? When we start to look beyond the simple picture of the grandfather holding the basket of mushrooms with his grandson, we see how the avoided complications of hunting give this grandchild something for which he is to be thankful. Without his grandfather, his knowledge would be back at the beginning of human experience. But through his grandfather, he enjoys the inheritance of years and years of trial-and-error-wisdom that amounts to a delicacy.”



History is studied because it is the subject that, like the grandfather, teaches us what we have inherited from the generations and generations of men and women before us. Yet, if we take time to look at the curriculum of schools today, we will see a dramatic change from studying history to studying social studies. Rather than learning about our past and all that was involved, we spend more time with anthropology (specifically *present* cultural anthropology), economics, geography, political science/government, sociology and psychology. While history is about the past, social studies is mostly about the present. Social studies is often impacted by relativism; history has history to interpret itself.

How does one know that the academic shift has impacted our culture? Statements like “Who really cares about something written hundreds, even thousands of years ago?” and “My life doesn’t have any influences from knowledge of the past — I am living just fine without it!” are well accepted and unchallenged.

This shift should have all Christians, not only Lutheran educators, extremely concerned. Caring about “something that happened 2000 years ago” is the focus, the core for each of our lives, our schools and our future. The historical Jesus of Nazareth is the Jesus of Creation and the Jesus who redeemed us.

The writer of Psalm 44 knew history, its importance and its need to be shared.

“O God, we have heard with our ears,
our fathers have told us,
what deeds you performed in their days,
in the days of old:
you with your own hand drove out the nations,
but them you planted;
you afflicted the peoples,
but them you set free;
for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor
did their own arm save them,
but your right hand and your arm,
and the light of your face,
for you delighted in them” (PS. 44:1-3).

We should be careful to have a strong history curriculum in our schools, to share family history in our homes and to be ready to add to history as we are mindful of the future.

History also keeps us from being self-centered and self-absorbed. Ps. 77:8-15 says,

“Has his steadfast love forever ceased?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?’ *Selah*
Then I said, ‘I will appeal to this,
to the years of the right hand of the Most High.’
I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.
Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is great like our God?
You are the God who works wonders;
you have made known your might among the peoples.
You with your arm redeemed your people,
the children of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*”

Note how Asaph changes focus from his troubles to God’s track record. The result of this change in perspective is *Selah*.

From a humble beginning of 12 churches and 19 schools, the LCMS has grown to 1,127 Early Childhood Centers, 778 elementary schools and 87 high schools (2017-18 data from LCMS School Ministry). These schools educate more than 184,000 students who are taught by almost 22,000 teachers. Lutheran schools operated by the LCMS also exist internationally in Vietnam, mainland China and Hong Kong. The LCMS also operates nine universities and two seminaries.

It’s good to embrace and cherish our history. But even more, knowledge and appreciation for history binds us to the saints who have gone before us, who were faithful and who experienced God’s faithfulness.

We, too, experience God’s faithfulness, and we also can know with certainty, because of history, that God’s faithfulness will continue.

Professionally Speaking // DECEMBER 2018

A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

Writer: Mark Muehl Designer: Chrissy Thomas

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School Shepherd

TIPS AND SUPPORT FOR PASTORS OF CONGREGATIONS WITH SCHOOLS



REAL. PRESENT. GOD.

The School Shepherd: Real and Present in Celebration

"Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you" (Ps. 67:3).



celebration of our Savior. The central activity of the school and church family is worshipping together. Not every church season has the joyful anticipation of the Advent season or the joyful fulfillment of the Easter season. There are seasons for humble penitence. The school shepherd also leads the more reflective worship times and teaches the significance of all seasons of the church year.

Celebrative worship is not dependent on a traditional or contemporary format. Celebrative worship depends on sharing, singing and living the joy of Jesus. The law emphasis of mandatory worship attendance yields to the Gospel invitation to celebrate God's real presence in Word and Sacrament.

Lutheran schools also have the weekly school chapel worship celebrations. The celebration format varies with the school facility and culture. In many settings, school administrators and classroom teachers assist in leading the chapel services. It is the privilege and responsibility of the school shepherd to resource the leaders and to provide kind instruction on the formality of the service and some guidelines on Law/Gospel teaching. Staff and students look forward to the school family gathering together for worship.

Parishioners of two different community churches were sharing their parish perceptions. One noted that he belonged to what was locally known as the "glad church." The other regretfully noted that he belonged to what was perceived as the "sad church." The Lutheran school shepherd is privileged to serve in a "glad" ministry. Lutheran schools are places of celebration. Children, parents, parishioners and others want to be part of a "glad" school. The school shepherd is real and present in celebration.

Celebration Centers in Worship

It is a season of celebration. The Advent and Christmas seasons generate classroom, school and community celebrations. Sometimes our attempts at school celebrations detract from the central

Celebrate the Ministry of the School

The school shepherd is in a unique position to share the blessings of the Lutheran school with the congregation and community. Weekly announcements verbally and in church bulletins celebrate students, activities and blessings of the Lutheran school. Congregation members are also welcomed into the school setting to see the blessings of the school.

The school shepherd also celebrates the “ministers” in the school ministry. Our Synod has historically affirmed the calling of the “commissioned minister.” Teacher installations and anniversaries are opportunities to celebrate their calling and to affirm their role in the church and school. This affirmation is also informal as the pastor visits teachers in their classrooms and other ministry contexts and affirms their kingdom efforts.

Celebrate the Children and Families

In Holy Baptism, the child receives the gifts of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Through Baptism, God sends the Spirit’s gifts to all the baptized so that they, too, might bless the body of Christ. The school shepherd sees and celebrates the Spirit’s presence in God’s children. Children have the opportunity to use their gifts in worship singing, playing instruments, reading the Word, representing the Word in drama and in other ways leading the celebrations.

Children’s gifts are celebrated informally. A personal appearance in the gym bleachers, at the school concert or on the school playground give the opportunity for a genuine, “Great job, Joe!” and “I saw your picture in the art display, Amy, and I really appreciated it.”

Family celebrations provide doors to family ministry. The school family rejoicing in a new baby receives a congratulatory note from the pastor. The return home of the deployed parent provides opportunity for prayers of thanksgiving with the family. The family



“Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes, The Savior promised long; Let ev’ry heart prepare a throne And ev’ry voice a song. Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, Thy welcome shall proclaim, And heav’n’s eternal arches ring With Thy beloved name.”

(LSB 349, v. 1, 4)

grieving the death of a loved one receives a note or visit of comfort and compassion. The hospitalized student or parent receives a visit assuring the family of God’s presence and the school’s support in all circumstances.

School shepherds lead celebrations in light of their own personalities, styles and gifts. Not every school shepherd is a school “cheerleader.” Some lead celebrations more quietly with notes and one-on-one conversations. Be present in your own comfortable style. Make the celebrations real.

Reflections (for staff, board, and others):

Is your Lutheran school perceived as a “glad” or “sad” school?

What celebrations are unique to your school?

How does the congregation celebrate the blessings of the Lutheran school?

How could children and families be celebrated more intentionally?

How could the teaching ministry and teaching ministers be celebrated more intentionally?



Time Out for Directors

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TIPS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER ADMINISTRATORS



Christmas – The Best Adventure – Always!

Christmas is almost here — at least on the calendar! The busyness of the Christmas season is one aspect that people either love or prefer to leave behind. Presents, cooking, traveling and numerous social gatherings often put people in either a bad or a celebratory mood. As a teacher, you know that early December brings a long list of things to do within just a short amount of time. However, the joys of Christmas break can hopefully fill your mind with a few days of rest, relaxation and time with those who mean most to you. Christmas really is a special time of year!

As you think about Christmas and the many things that surround this time of year, ponder why the busyness of the season exists. As the familiar saying goes, “Jesus is the Reason for the Season.” Yes, it’s true; however, sadly, this real reason often gets a backseat to the other things that surround the holiday. God is real; He is present; He is God! The birth of the world’s Savior, Jesus, deserves more than a backseat. Consider ways you can celebrate Christmas now and throughout the year. You may be aware of “Christmas in July,” but in all reality, you should celebrate “Christmas 365 days a year!”

Jesus Christ came to earth to save sinners. Who are sinners? Everyone! Jesus came to save all people, and, for this reason, Christmas is something to celebrate at all times! God doesn’t love or forgive only at specific times; He does so at all times. As an educator and leader in a Lutheran school, you have the joyous honor, and responsibility, to share this Good News with those who enter your doors, not just one day but during each and every day!

As you make plans for a special Christmas service, prepare for students to create gifts to give to parents or make arrangements for a classroom party, remember to keep



the ultimate focus of your classroom environment and interactions firmly on Jesus — after all, it is His birthday! As a leader, it’s important to ensure all teachers and staff members in your school share the Good News of Jesus’ birthday. Consider sharing the following ideas that are focused on common classroom learning centers and incorporate ways to foster a Christ-centered, faith-filled Christmas learning environment.

Math Center:

Because God placed a star in the sky to show the place where Jesus was born, include different colors and shapes of stars in your Math Center. Children can count the stars, sort them by color or size, or place them in numerical order (if numbers are written on them). Dialogue with your students about other ways to use the stars that help them learn not only about Math, but also about Jesus.

Literacy Center:

As you know, children love to read and look at books. Find as many Christian Christmas books as you can and place them not only in your literacy area, but also around the classroom. When books are placed throughout the classroom, children have more opportunities to leisurely pick one up and read. Be sure to read and reread the Christmas story with your students. Repetition helps students learn the many special details of the story. And, remember to



read from a children's Bible to help children understand that we receive God's Word from the Bible.

Art Center:

As you engage in conversations with students, encourage them to use their artistic expressions to share what they know about Jesus' birth. Provide a variety of art materials for children to use: paper and paint, crayons and markers, play dough or even a tablet/iPad where children can create something imaginative. Also encourage students to use natural materials in their work, such as leaves, small sticks or other found materials.

Block Center:

Provide pictures of different representations of what the stable where Jesus was born may have looked like and discuss these with the students. Keep these pictures in the block area and encourage students to build their own representations of what they think the stable looked like. Provide paper and crayons so students can make pictures of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus and include them in the stable as well.

Writing Center:

Depending on the age of students you teach, consider what types of writing materials may be most appropriate for them to use. Provide pictures and written words that connect to the Christmas story. While looking at these labeled pictures, students may choose to write the words on paper and make their own stories or lists. Have students display their work and read it to friends and family members.

Sensory Table:

Use a plastic nativity set in a sensory table filled with sand. Children will love exploring through the sand to find their favorite pieces of the nativity. For some extra sparkle, add some plastic stars in the sand. Include tongs, spoons, shovels and other items for the children to use as they search

for nativity pieces.

Outdoor Play Area:

It doesn't matter where you live geographically, as children can use their imaginations to recreate the Christmas story amongst palm trees or piles of snow. As you celebrate Jesus' birth throughout the year, think of how you can make nativity sets available in October and April. Could your students use materials to create one when the weather is nice? Children are great at remembering story details, and providing them with resources at unexpected times is a wonderful way for them to recall and retell.

Dramatic Play Center:

Again, as mentioned before, children love to utilize their imaginations and creativity. Try to locate some extra fabric and allow children to use it as dress-up clothing as they retell the Christmas story. If your church or school has child-size costumes that may be appropriate, use them as well. Don't forget to provide props to use: hay, baby Jesus doll, stuffed animals or even gifts brought by the Wise Men.

Sharing the story of Christ's birth is special and important, at every time of year. As Christians, it's important to model and share the Good News of what God has done. As John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." What a great message this is! This news is not something to bring out just once each year, but, rather, daily!

As you enter December and, eventually, the new year, make a goal to continue sharing the story of Jesus' birth in the coming months regularly. Providing even just a few opportunities for children to exhibit their knowledge and faith is meaningful. Think about ways you can share items and resources with other staff members, perhaps rotating materials that you use in different learning centers. Always remember: God is real. God is present. He is God!

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