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Sunday School

We've never done it that way before!

A guide for assessing and strengthening your Sunday school ministry

Is Sunday school dead? Hardly! Though some may claim it is dying. It can be argued that what began in 1870 in England as a way to educate poor and orphaned children on their one day away from factory work is now in serious need of resuscitation and revitalization! Before we prematurely plan the memorial service, a careful review of Sunday school's purpose will be helpful.

The gospel calls us to teach and learn! While Jesus didn't take attendance as children and adults gathered around him or call such gatherings "Sunday school", his words and actions clearly teach that learning and faithfulness are intertwined. Through baptism we are named and claimed as God's own. Our daily return to baptism is a "post-it-note" reminder of who we are and how God wants us to live. Sunday school is a place for children, youth and adults to hear the Bible story and to be reminded of their baptismal identity. It is a place for us to sense our belonging as God's children and to grow in the knowledge of God's love. It is a place where we use and discover our gifts as we learn how to be Christian disciples.

There will likely be much about your current Sunday school program to affirm and celebrate. The goal of this discernment process is not to reinvent what you already do well. It is to strengthen your ministry offerings in a way that works best for your context and needs.

This resource is designed to help you and your Christian education planning team:

- Reflect on your present Sunday school ministry,
- Define your mission (the heart of what you hope to accomplish through your Sunday school),
- Reflect on eight Sunday school approaches being modeled by congregations of the ELCA today,
- Consider and weigh the value of nine elements found in many Sunday school programs, and
- Strengthen, enhance and perhaps even reshape (if necessary) your present Sunday school ministry to meet your vision for a new century.

Everyday Vitamins for a Healthy Education Ministry

The following seven premises are key to vital Christian education in your setting. Keep them in mind as you evaluate and plan.

1. In education ministry what we do is in response to God's gracious love; why we do mirrors Christ's example and great commission and how we do is not our doing but the Holy Spirit working through us.
2. All God's children are called to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through life long learning.
3. The central purpose for Sunday school is to nurture faith and to support each other as disciples.
4. Sunday school is only one of many opportunities for fostering faith that extend from the church to the home and into the community.
5. Context is key! Even the most innovative program will fail if planners fail to attend to factors like congregational make-up, community context, and specific program and resource needs.
6. Congregation sponsored learning opportunities are not only for members. Vital education ministry

- looks for ways to include the unchurched and guests in learning and growth.
- All are welcome, including those with physical, sensory or cognitive limitations.

Congregational Sunday School Trends

In advance of your first meeting design a report that offers a grid on Sunday school attendance history for the last five years. Include youth and adults as part of your grid if classes are being offered for those age groups on Sunday morning. If you cannot access exact numbers for each age group, provide your best estimate. Use the following outline and questions to complete your report. Duplicate copies and use this report as a discussion starter during your first planning meeting. As you engage your team in reflecting on this report ask:

- *What present Sunday school strengths can we celebrate?*
- *What do the trends and statistics suggest about the health of our education ministry?*
- *Are there trends or concerns to keep in mind as we continue our planning?*

Logistics, Environment and Personnel

- How many teachers and other leaders are involved in Sunday School this year? Do you have a superintendent? Has that number changed in recent years?
- Has the personnel changed or are the same teachers and leaders in place each year?
- Is your education facility adequate to accommodate future growth in Sunday School?
- Are the educational facilities shared with other groups during the week?

Content and Structure

- How is your Sunday school structured? Are classes group graded?
- What curriculum is currently being used for each grade level? Has this changed in the last few years?
- In addition to regular classes, what special Sunday School events have been offered during the past year?
- What "elements" (review the listing on page XX) are presently a part of your Sunday school program?
- What learning opportunities are available at times other than Sunday morning?
- What summer learning opportunities are provided?

Planning, Training and Evaluation

- When and how was the last evaluation of your Sunday school program conducted? What were the key discoveries?
- Who evaluates and makes decisions about program elements, direction and content?
- How are teachers and other leaders called to the task?
- In what ways are teachers and leaders trained?
- In what ways are teachers and leaders recognized and supported?

Steps to using this guide

Work through these steps as a planning team to breath new life into your existing programming and to counter the notion that Sunday school is a dying ministry that has outlived its usefulness for today's time and context.

- Gather a representative planning team consisting of children, youth and older adults; including staff, education team members and representatives from appropriate education ministry programs

and congregation committees. Order copies of this workbook for the planning team and pre-study the contents.

- Complete the "Sunday School Trends and Practices Report" (page 3) in advance of your first meeting. Invite group reflection on trends and patterns after you begin your meeting with prayer.
- Invite the team to complete the assessment tool (page 4) individually to measure perceptions of present effectiveness. Share as a group and consider implications.
- Identify and reflect on the eight approaches and nine elements in light of your context and needs.
- Work through the "Sunday School Planning Steps" process on page 13 {or 14 depending on layout}. Consider implications for enhanced programming or new directions. Move forward with your plans.

How do we measure up?

A Tool to Assess Present Strengths and New Opportunities

**We're doing this well
We could do this better
We COULD do this!!!**

Below are twenty statements you can use to evaluate your present Sunday School program. Complete this worksheet individually and share answers as a group.

1. We have a clear vision statement that defines our Sunday school ministry and it's relationship to the overall mission of the congregation.
2. Sunday school is planned, coordinated and regularly reviewed by a team of church leaders (representing staff, teachers, parents, youth and children, and other congregational ministries).
3. We have expanded our leadership team by providing opportunities for team teaching, short-term commitments, family support and leadership by older youth.
4. Teachers and leaders are not simply recruited but are prayerfully called to this ministry because of their God-given gifts, graces and talents.
5. We support a learner-based approach to Sunday school by encouraging multi-sensory, interactive learning with special attention to learning styles and age level capabilities.
6. Our Sunday school can be described as fun, vital and engaging.
7. Sunday school is not merely an "activity" of the church, but a time for the care and nurture of all learners.
8. Life-long faith formation is fostered by providing learning opportunities for people of all ages from toddlers to older adults.
9. The Bible, prayer and key Lutheran teachings are "the core curriculum" around which most learning is shaped.
10. Grace driven problem solving and conflict management are evident in congregational life.
11. Prayer, Bible study, regular worship and devotional practices are modeled by adult leaders.
12. We uphold a strong church/home connection by engaging parents in partnered learning experiences and by providing take home materials that foster faith conversation and regular devotions.
13. Teachers and leaders are regularly equipped and trained to be effective in their teaching.
14. Teachers and leaders are recognized, supported and prayed for regularly by the congregation.
15. Unchurched visitors and guests are welcomed with intentional care and consideration.
16. We seek opportunities to enhance faith growth and community nurture through special events and projects.
17. Our facility is clean, safe and inviting.
18. We make intentional connections between what happens in Sunday school with worship and other

areas of congregational life.

19. Sunday school is planned with clear coordination with other learning opportunities such as midweek ministry, confirmation, small group ministry, and other Bible studies.
20. Our pastoral staff is actively involved in learning ministries.

Eight Approaches to Sunday School

A review of present Sunday school practice in congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reveals there are at least eight primary approaches to the way Sunday school is structured. The defining lines for these approaches are not hard and fast and congregations may draw from several models as they shape their program. It is helpful to think of the approaches as a framework around which a variety of elements are used to build a Sunday school that meets the needs of the individual, the congregation and the community in which they live.

Traditional Approach

A healthy percentage of ELCA congregations offer what might be described as a "traditional Sunday school program." However, traditional does not imply a program that is archaic, boring or lacking in faith-shaping experiences. It refers to a basic framework and content which, by its nature, is wide open to innovation. A traditional Sunday school typically meets on Sunday morning for 45 minutes to one hour. Many congregations set the tone for the day by beginning with a large group "gathering time" that includes singing, prayer, announcements, and an activity related to a particular theme (either tied to the lectionary or a special congregational emphasis such as Global Mission or Hunger). Classes are closely group graded with one or two teachers. Learning opportunities are usually also provided for junior and senior high youth as well as for adults. With this basic picture in mind, add pieces like computer learning, intergenerational learning events, special projects, inter-class friendly competitions, innovative multi-sensory activities, and clear connections with worship and other congregational activities, and soon this snapshot of a traditional approach does not look so conventional.

Bethlehem Lutheran in Fairport, New York builds their thriving Sunday school around the traditional approach but several innovations have given this program a look of it's own. Each class is staffed with three teachers. While this means an added recruitment effort in the beginning, the elimination of "scrambling for last-minute substitutes" has been a much appreciated benefit. A class for the 2 1/2 year old begins in January of each year and there is a class for each age group including two adult learning options. One of the highlights of Bethlehem's program is the 30+ Senior High youth that come consistently on Sunday mornings. After a large group opening youth self-select from two learning offerings: a Bible study led by parents and a discussion group exploring current issues.

Lectionary-Based Approach

Congregations are utilizing a "lectionary based" approach to learning when all of the children, youth and adults are experiencing age appropriate learning built on the use of the same Bible story on the same day and when there are intentional connections made with worship and ministry in daily life. The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) is a uniform 3-year cycle of scripture texts laid out to guide ELCA congregations and other Christian denominations in the use of designated Old and New Testament lessons for weekly worship and daily devotions. Use of the RCL provides a holistic approach to faith formation that strongly connects the experience of the learning environment with the worshiping community, other gatherings of Christians, the home and other contexts of daily life. Usually this approach includes: an age-appropriate, interactive learning experience based on a particular Biblical story; the intentional connection of this story and its theme in worship; and the provision of materials to encourage personal reflection or home-based faith conversation on the story and theme during the week. Limitations to this approach include use of some Biblical texts that are difficult to teach small children (a good curriculum will substitute an alternative text) and the reality that a number of "favorite"

old testament stories aren't a part of the three year cycle (a good curriculum finds ways to incorporate these standard favorites). Note: this approach refers more to content than structure; in other words, a lectionary based approach can work well within the more traditional approach highlighted earlier.

Good Shepherd, Plover, WI chose the lectionary approach because of a desire to find "continuity between worship, learning and the liturgy of life." They wanted families to worship and to find a connecting theme that would feed conversations on the way home and through the week. Because of space limitations, adults hold their Sunday school classes in the Plover library and youth meet midweek. Primary grade classes begin each Sunday with a general assembly featuring music and storytelling led by mentors who model faith sharing. The storytelling sets the stage for what the children will explore in the classroom and hear again in worship. The Lords' Prayer, the Creed or some other part of the liturgy completes the large group time after which children move to their individual class settings. On occasion, just prior to reading the lessons, the worship leader will remind parents of the ways the children heard the Word in Sunday school and will encourage families to make the weekday connections.

Intergenerational Approach

Educational leaders from small-membership congregations sometimes share that intergenerational learning is rarely an option for them. It's a way of life. For others, however, intergenerational ministry takes a little more intentionality. America is an age-segregated society in which extended families often live far away from each other, parents sometimes spend more time in their daily commute than they do with their children, and adults generally work with people of the same generation. These realities impel some congregations to move from a segmented "silo" mentality to an appreciation for generations learning, teaching and growing in faith together. Congregations incorporate intergenerational learning in a variety of ways. The Total Family Sunday School developed by Faith Inkubators (see resource listing on page xx) brings generations together weekly. Other congregations have found that the rhythms of the church year provide a natural opportunity for a cross generational monthly learning event. During the summer months when attendance fluctuates, intergenerational learning can also be an effective and fun way to avoid the Sunday school slump.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Vermillion, SD uses an innovative approach to intergenerational learning that includes age specific activities. One Sunday a month everyone involved in Christian education gathers for "Family Sunday School." The pastor sets the theme with a short engaging drama. The youngest children are invited up for a "children's sermon" where the theme is presented in ways they can understand. Then the total group divides into small groups with the stipulation that at least three generations must be represented in each group. One simple theme-based question is presented with sensitivity to the comprehension levels of the youngest children. Then the young children are dismissed for music and crafts. The remaining participants engage a new question with sensitivity to elementary age children. Following discussion these children leave for choir, leaving the adults for further discussion.

The rotational approach is based on the "learning center" concept popularized in the 70's, with 90's-style attention to multiple intelligences and faith development.

Rotational Approach

The rotational approach is based on the "learning center" concept popularized in the 70's, with 90's-style attention to multiple intelligences and faith development. Typically, six to eight Bible stories or themes are explored in depth each year. The same Bible story is taught for several weeks depending on the number of "learning centers" or "workshops" offered. The children rotate through a different workshop each week; the teachers stay in the same workshop and teach the same lesson each week of the rotation. Popular workshops include: drama, puppets, computers, music, Bible skills and games, writing, cooking, crafts, global activities, and service projects. This approach models a shift from a single format

presentation to multi-sensory, multi-media presentations as a way to speak relevantly to an audience that has been shaped by media. It celebrates the unique and special gifts each workshop leader brings, eliminates teacher-burn out, and the fitful panic of "Saturday night lesson planning" by inviting workshop leaders to sign on for one rotation at a time and to plan one lesson with only minor adjustments and improvements each subsequent week.

The people of St. Luke's, Park Ridge, IL rave about their rotational "Funday School" approach: "children want to come to Sunday school, adults are eager to provide leadership and everyone is learning about the Bible!" They offer six workshop modules that reinforce their educational goals: a) Drama which includes puppets, costumes, props and videos. b) King Solomon's Temple, a theme room in which children learn to use their Bibles through Bible games and other activities. c) A computer workshop using Bible software and a writing program. d) An art workshop for creating theme related crafts, and e) Lutherland, where children meet heroes of the faith such as Martin Luther, and f) A movie room complete with theater seats and a popcorn machine. St. Luke's uses three types of educational staff: coordinators who write the materials, teachers who agree to a six week commitment and shepherds who rotate with the children and provide one-on-one nurture and support.

Home and Family Approach

For a variety of reasons some congregations are just not able to offer a viable Sunday school program. In places like these, several have adopted "home-schooling" models by putting the privilege and responsibility of faith nurture back into the hands of parents. Other congregations with viable Sunday school programs also find creative ways to build "at home" components for learning and faith conversation. Congregations support families in a variety of ways. Some churches prepare "take home" packs from existing curriculum for various ages. Others simply provide a syllabus suggesting core concepts parents may want to teach their child at a particular age. It is then up to the parents to select books and other resources that will best match their family's style of learning. Home-based Sunday school can also be done by clusters of families meeting in the home for scripture, prayer and intergenerational learning activities. The term "home-based" rarely implies that learning takes place independent of others. On the contrary, a congregation using this approach needs to provide regular opportunities for learners to gather.

At Holy Redeemer, San Jose, CA things had gotten to the point that Sunday school just wasn't working anymore. A parent meeting was held during which all the possible solutions to the struggles of this small membership congregation were considered. Would a mid-week option make a difference? Would clustering with other area Lutheran congregations be the answer? When they asked themselves "Whose job is it to bring children to faith?", the answer clearly came from the service of baptism. The congregation expressed a willingness to support their families by providing whatever materials were needed. One person agreed to be the coordinator and to put together a "home packet" geared to the individual child. Parents accept the responsibility of sitting down with their child for a minimum of one hour per week. A quarterly outing is planned for families to gather socially or to engage in a outreach project.

Concentrated Approach

Many congregations, faced with the reality that people are not willing or able to spend a full Sunday morning at church, find they need to adjust their schedules. There is a growing expectation for dynamic worship, quality Christian education, and invigorating fellowship opportunities all packaged in a concentrated time frame. Congregations that use a concentrated approach to Sunday school have carefully and prayerfully evaluated their context-the lifestyle of their congregation and community and their mission as a people of God. Elements of the concentrated approach typically include a "family centered" worship service which lasts no longer than 30 minutes. Children and youth often take active roles as worship leaders. What follows is a time for fellowship with shortened Sunday school classes for all ages taking place afterwards. Congregations using this format report that adults seem more willing to

engage in adult learning because of this concentrated approach. A traditional worship service usually follows. With only 30 minutes to present a lesson, Sunday school teachers must be prompt, well prepared and willing to streamline learning activities so key concepts rise to the top.

St. James Lutheran, San Leandro CA has been using this approach for several years as a way to serve a rapidly changing community comprised of young families with both parents working outside the home. The 9:00 am family worship service is geared toward the children but always holds elements to help parents in their role as faith nurturers. The style of this thirty minute service is informal utilizing a simple litany, joyful and easily sung songs, a short sermon delivered from the aisle, prayers around the font, and communion for all the baptized. Following the service, children and youth move to a thirty minute Sunday school class. Adults gather for informal conversation on current topics, the scripture lessons or parenting issues. St. James builds in an intentional time for fellowship following Sunday school to encourage connections with worshipers who gather for the second, more traditional service.

Midweek Approach

After exploring the needs of the congregation and community, many congregations are turning to midweek ministry to augment, or in a few cases substitute for Sunday school. Many children spend weekends with non-custodial parents making it difficult to participate consistently in Sunday school. For some families, Sunday is the only time they are able to spend time together. What makes this approach appealing is that the expanded time frame used in a midweek format usually allows for recreation, a family meal and adult mentoring through tutoring or skill-sharing. This holistic approach to Christian education is having a far reaching effect on families and even in public schools. Anecdotal reports indicate that teachers note a profound difference in children who consistently participate in midweek ministry. Behavior, attitude and study skills often improve dramatically. Midweek ministry is also proving to be one of the most strategic entry points for unchurched families. Furthermore, as adults participate in leadership, meal preparation and tutoring, children receive the rich blessing of a healthy intergenerational experience.

St. Paul Lutheran, Wilmington, NC considers their midweek program "Wednesdays Together" a supplement to Sunday school. They are finding some families worship on Sunday but choose instead to learn on Wednesdays to experience the more expanded format.

Winifred American Lutheran Church is a small rural congregation in Winifred, MT dealing with time and travel issues in a different way. Instead of a school on Sunday, an ecumenical after-school learning opportunity is offered Wednesday afternoons. This approach is reaching children who are not necessarily involved on Sunday and works well for ranch families traveling long distances.

Montessori Approach*

This approach is used by some congregations primarily in their pre-school and lower elementary Sunday school classes. The classroom is set up to be a sacred space in which the Bible story is shared with children in a way that invokes awe and wonder and is less concerned with imparting Biblical knowledge. Children respond to the story through play using simple figures to discover for themselves the lesson's meaning. This approach reverses the traditional method where an active teacher instructs a passive class. From the time the child leaves the parent, a pattern of activities based on structure of worship are followed each week: preparation, the Word, response to the Word, preparation for the Feast, the Feast, blessing and departure. Two adults are recommended for each classroom, each with carefully defined responsibilities. Freedom is exemplified through the choices a child makes during play.

Godly Play provides an important component for the Sunday school at Christ Lutheran, Blaine, MN. On Sunday morning, all ages between 3 years and 5th grade, gather for an opening patterned after the worship service that is happening simultaneously in the sanctuary. From there, the children disperse to their age specific classes where each room is set with an altar as focal point, a Christ candle, figures of

the Holy family and materials for the lesson. Leaders say this approach works well because it is concrete and founded on repetition. The children learn that worship is a special time. Parents are invited to visit the classroom and on several occasions throughout the year, children attend worship as a class. Although the 4th and 5th grade classes do not use approach, the children, parents and teachers have asked that some elements be carried into the older classes such as the lighting of the Christ candle and the time of sharing and preparation for the meal.

In the Montessori Approach, the classroom is set up as a sacred place in which the Bible story is shared with in a way that involves awe and wonder and is less concerned with imparting Biblical knowledge.

*Maria Montessori was an Italian educator and physician who pioneered a method of education for young children that promotes self motivation and auto-education. It suggests that a child will learn naturally in an environment containing materials such as "learning games" suited to a child's abilities and interests. The typical classroom in a Montessori school is filled with games, toys, household utensils, child size furniture, plants and animals cared for by the children. Godly Play developed by Jerome Berryman and The Catechesis of The Good Shepherd developed by Sofia Cavalletti are two innovative approaches to Christian education based on Montessori principals.

Nine Elements for Sunday School

Under each of the previously named approaches lies common elements that further shape a Sunday school ministry in a particular setting. The practice of ELCA congregations reveals a variety of elements that have been effective in enhancing faith formation through Sunday school. This listing is not exhaustive, but offers a helpful start focused on the basics. A brief description of each element follows with an illustration of how one congregation incorporates that particular element within its educational ministry.

Rally Day

Many congregations kick-off the beginning of their education year with Rally Day. While the term seems old-fashioned, the way we commonly use it parallels the church's mission: a time to celebrate (a congregational fair); to reach out and welcome (special neighborhood invitational efforts); to renew relationships (a picnic or breakfast); to commission (teacher installation); to learn and worship (an intergenerational faith-stories event); and to orient and invite all on a faith journey (commissioning during worship). There are countless ideas for making this "kick-off" time memorable, meaningful and fun, but it doesn't all have to happen on one day. Some congregations hold mini-Rally days throughout the year such as a winter mid-year rejuvenation event, a spring fling or a Reformation Rally.

In Hickory, NC, St. Andrew's Lutheran rallied their small Sunday school together under the theme "Baptism....making disciples." The entire congregation was involved in some way: small children shared their favorite Bible stories, Confirmation youth told stories about their baptism, Adults joined in singing songs from VBS, and the newly baptized were introduced and celebrated.

Special events

Some congregations offer occasional or regularly scheduled "special events" as a way to enhance their Sunday school ministry. They find that the rhythms of the church year, secular holidays made sacred or celebrations prompted by other congregational events are perfect times to create cross-generational faith shaping opportunities. Special events usually allow for multi-sensory activities that often are not feasible within the regular Sunday school schedule. They need to be carefully planned, coordinated and promoted to maximize involvement and they become a great way to use the gifts of those eager to be involved in one-time, short term commitments.

Once a month, teachers are free to attend the adult class while parents and other leaders create an interactive, hands-on learning opportunity for "Something Special Sundays" at Holy Cross Lutheran, Wheatridge, CO. The story, "A tale of Three Trees", provided the foundation for a four-session special event for 3 year olds through 6th graders. Each session included hearing the story, a craft activity, refreshments and prayer. A huge paper tree in the hallway reminded the children of the story as each month their crafts were added to the montage.

Worship and Prayer

Most congregations understand that Sunday school is not merely a time to educate. It's a time for each learner to be drawn into a closer relationship with God through prayer, praise and learning in the company of others in the faith community. Many Sunday school sessions begin with a total group gathering that imitates the gather, hear, celebrate and send pattern found in Lutheran worship. Openings become an opportunity to sing, pray, practice giving, learn about the seasons of the church year and liturgy, and engage in total group activities. For a variety of reasons, this may be a child's only exposure to worship and corporate prayer. Congregations find creative ways to make connections between Sunday school and worship by inviting learners into worship leadership, by writing special prayers or offering special music. Creative congregations also find helpful ways to teach the importance of personal prayer through use of devotionals, prayer partners, prayer chains and prayer journals.

At St. Mark Lutheran, Springfield, VA leaders found young people could not name a favorite hymn. The solution was a special program called "Singing your faith." Once a month a pair of musicians visit with the classes to introduce a hymn or song and to teach a little background on it. An audiocassette is left with the Sunday school teachers to use throughout the rest of the month. With each song learned, the children have their "musical passport" stamped. Recognition of these songs is enhanced through their use in worship.

On Rally day, at St. John Lutheran, Mendota, IL Sunday school children and youth are paired with an adult prayer partner. Together, they work on a craft such as a prayer magnet to exchange as a daily reminder to pray for each other.

Social Ministry and Stewardship

Many congregations encourage social ministry projects and teach faithful stewardship as a way to encourage an active expression of discipleship. Service learning activities such as collecting school supplies for a shelter, birthday pennies for world hunger, supporting a resettled refugee, putting up a mitten tree in winter and a sock tree in summer for the homeless or writing thank you notes to disaster relief workers become wonderful ways to educate about servant ministry. Creative ways to teach stewardship and care of creation help reinforce an understanding that all of life is a gift from God.

Each Sunday during "Faith Place" (a term used instead of Sunday school at Christ Lutheran, San Antonio, TX) a story is presented in a way that encourages the children to carry the message into their daily life. The Good Samaritan story prompted a walk to the home of a shut in to help with simple chores. The image of Baby Jesus provided a perfect opportunity to collect baby food and diapers for the local food pantry.

University Lutheran, Seattle, WA views stewardship as a key component of their Sunday school program. Over the years Sunday school offerings have gone to local projects such as adopt-a-family, homeless shelters, World Hunger and the Heifer Project. One year the Sunday school purchased a motorcycle for a missionary in Africa. Young stewards are taught that their gifts of time and talent are just as important. During Sunday school and worship, children and youth are invited to read lessons, participate in dramas, assist in banner making and deliver the sermon.

Global Education

Many congregations incorporate global education into their Sunday school as a way to teach that God's family reaches around the world. Options have included: a special emphasis during Sunday school opening times; a mission festival or fair, special offerings, adoption of a missionary or mission project. Learning about the church around the world is inherently multi-sensory and interactive. Experiencing the food, costumes, customs, games, language, family life and geographic trivia offers incredible opportunities for creative learning about others around the world.

The huge mission bulletin board in the hallway of Servant of Christ Lutheran, Indianapolis, is a constant reminder of the ways the congregation is connected with the wider church through prayer, financial support and other service projects. An annual mission fest, a global mission adult Sunday school class, projects for Global Health Ministries and global guests are just a few ways this congregation is infected with "global fever."

Parents as Partners

Studies show that the most significant influence on a child's faith formation is a parent who models Christian values. Discipling congregation summon parents to take seriously God's call to be witnesses to their children and to grow in faith maturity along side of them. Many congregations remind parents of their baptismal promises and equip them for the task by inviting them into Sunday school leadership roles, calling on their gifts for special events, providing home devotional materials and family time

ideas, and by offering adult Christian education opportunities.

St. Paul's, Grand Island, NE makes the church-family connection by inviting youth and adults into leadership as Sunday school teachers, puppeteers, and actors. In the two year old class, the teacher facilitates while parents present the lesson as a way to practice effective parenting skills. A "Mommy and Me" Bible study for preschoolers and parents encourages faith nurture in other creative ways.

Year-Around Sunday School

Some congregations, guided by an understanding that short respites throughout the year are far more beneficial to consistent learning than a long summer break, are moving to year-round Sunday school programs. Special events interspersed throughout the year give variety to the Sunday school program and allow for more expanded and elaborate special activities in the summer. Typically a summer staff plans, coordinates and implements an intergenerational or broadly graded Sunday school giving the primary staff a break. Many congregations find this a creative way to avoid the summer slump and encourage visits by new neighbors.

The people at St Luke, Summerville, SC said YES to summer Sunday school. This congregation in suburban Charleston feels that we often send the message "quit coming" when we stop congregational activities for the summer. They also found that this is the time of year when church is least likely to be in competitions with sports, school events or other activities. As families filter in and out of town on vacations, the consistency of having an educational opportunity along with worship on Sunday morning is valued by all. In fact the youth and adult summer Sunday school classes at St. Luke are the best attended of all.

Technology

While computers will never substitute for the spiritual formation that grows through relationships, the church is challenged to embrace the technology and realities of computer age learning. Computers have been instrumental in engaging children, youth and adults in Biblical learning through games, quizzes and reinforcement materials. Some congregations have found creative ways to use the gifts of computer literate youth to design flyers or to create a Sunday school newsletter. Supervised use of the Internet can be a great way to learn about Christianity, the church and world mission. Many sites offer discussion questions, craft ideas and interactive games that can be downloaded and used individually or in group settings.

St. Mark's, Wapakoneta, OH thought they could never budget for computers in Sunday school. One donation started the ball rolling and now this congregation has a computer lab with four stations that is regularly used as part of their rotational approach to Sunday school.

Salem Evangelical Lutheran, Houston, is setting a high-tech pace with satellite teleconference capabilities. Through their facilities they are able to tap into numerous national learning opportunities without even leaving their church building.

Memory Work

Memory work is a valuable component in Christian education for many congregations. They see memorizing books of the Bible, selected scripture passages, the catechism, and parts of the liturgy as an important way to build a firm foundation for lifelong discipleship. Memory work by way of songs, games, cooperative contests, interactive learning activities and even the computer can be effective if the end result is not simply gold stars but a strengthened Christian identity.

Trinity Lutheran, Stevens Point, WI uses memory work to strengthen the church-home connection through "the language of the faith." On Rally day parents are given a Sunday school handbook which outlines goals for Sunday school, procedures, the calendar of events, a syllabus explaining what each class will be learning, and ways parents can provide faith nurture at home. The handbook also suggests memory work for each age level (e.g. The Lord's prayer for three year olds, etc.).

Congregations find creative ways to make connections between Sunday school and worship by inviting learners into worship leadership, by writing special prayers or offering special music.

Sunday School Planning Steps

If you have followed the process outlined on page xx of this resource you should be at the point of

reflecting on implications and possible options for future consideration. Use the following activities and questions as a place to begin your Sunday school planning. Be sure to expand on this process in ways that work best for your setting. More than anything, work to implement your plans and suggestions so that they will truly make a difference into your future.

FIRST STEP: Complete a Sunday school vision statement

Revisit or write for the first time a vision statement for Sunday school in your setting. Include rationale, focus, program description and hoped for outcomes. Make sure your Sunday school vision is congruent with the mission statement of the congregation and includes reference to other learning ministry options. Be sure to share your vision in a way that increases ownership among key leaders in the congregation.

SECOND STEP: Identify present strengths

As you review your present Sunday school program, what elements or parts of the format excite you the most? What pieces are "keepers?" What might be unique to your context and setting? List as many as you can.

THIRD STEP: Identify your present "approach" and "elements"

Based on the information provided in this guide, what is your present "approach" to Sunday school? Is there more than one approach being used? Which of the elements do you use in your setting? Are there unique elements to your setting that haven't been named?

FOURTH STEP: Consider new options

Reflect on your setting, the unique needs of your children, youth and adults and the realities of your congregation's resources. Is there room to consider a new or different approach? What elements might add value to your Sunday school program? Make a list of the possibilities.

FIFTH STEP: Plan your strategy for accomplishing your objectives

Decide on the number of pieces you wish to pursue. Devise a plan that is realistic, achievable, and anchored to a time line. Review the listing of resources suggested on the next page. Consider what new elements or curriculum you might consider to strengthen your new plan.

Sunday School Resources

Consider the following resource and curriculum options as you evaluate your Sunday school ministry programs. Resources are listed by category and often may be used in many of the approaches to Sunday school programming. Except when indicated, all resources may be ordered by calling Augsburg Fortress Publishers at 800/328-4648. For more information, check your Education Resources catalog, the Augsburg Fortress web site at www.augsburgfortress.org, or call 800/328-4648.

Equipping Leaders

32 Ways to Become a Great Sunday School Teacher, Abingdon Press, 800/251-3320

www.abingdonpress.org

More Than Glue and Glitter: A Classroom Guide for Volunteer Teachers (0-8066-2561-9)

Computers, Kids, and Christian Education How and why to use computers in Christian education (0-8066-3714-X)

Nurturing Faith Through the Stages of Life A reproducible guide (0-8066-3714-X)

Lutheran Basics for Teachers (0-8066-3718-8)

Learning Basics for Teaching the Faith (NOTE: One is included free in this packet) (0-8066-3872-9)

Take It to Heart: An asset-based guide to nurturing children, youth, and families in faith community (6-

0001-0655-6).

God, Kids and Us: The Growing Edge of Ministry with Children and with People Who Care for Them (0-8192-1730-1)

Building Faith One Child at a Time (0-570-01552-9)

Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Christian Education (0-8066-2785-9)

Teaching Godly Play: The Sunday Morning Handbook (0-687-08651-5)

Practicing Faith

101 Openings for Church Schools (0-8066-2720-4)

Sensational Learning Centers (0-8066-2721-2)

God=s Kids Celebrate: Sunday School Activities for All Seasons. Ideas to involve all ages in celebrating church year seasons. (0-8066-3825-7)

Including Children in Worship: A Planning Guide for Congregations (0-8066-2544-9)

Hands-On Service Ideas for Children=s Ministry (0-7644-2040-2)

Face to Face with God in Your Home: Guiding Children and Youth in Prayer. Help adults learn to pray with children and youth. (0-8066-2767-0)

Doing Faith A concise guide to basic faith practices (NOTE: A free copy is included in this packet.) (0-8066-3873-7)

Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People Twelve central Christian practices that help deepen one=s relationship with God. (Book 0-7879-3883-1; Study Guide 0-7879-0365-5)

Refer to the ELCA Division for Global Mission to download information from their 75 Country Packets. www.elca.org/countrypackets or call 800/638-3522 ext. 2642 to order.

Faith and Families

52 Fun Family Devotions (0-8066-2698-4)

52 Fun Family Prayer Adventures (0-8066-2841-3)

To Dance With God: Family Ritual and Community Celebration (0-8091-2812-8)

The Home Altar Devotional materials for families with elementary-aged children; for subscriptions or information, call Augsburg Fortress at 800/426-0115, ext. 639.

Let's Explore Inside the Bible: An Activity, Information and Story Book (0-8066-2745-X)

Faith Life Weekly Annual, reproducible handouts for exploring faith in daily activities. Based on the Revised Common Lectionary. (0-8066-4276-9)

Faith Curriculum

Life Together: A new family of Revised Common Lectionary resources for Christian living. Total Family Sunday School, Faith Inkubators, 888/55 FAITH; www.faithink.com

One Room Sunday School, A curriculum for broadly grouped classes. Cokesbury, 1998, 800/672-1789; cokesbury.org

Witness: Quarterly group-graded resources for age 3-grade 8, plus reproducible resources for youth.

Adventures in Summer School: Two 13-session quarters of broadly grouped classes. Reproducible learner resources.

Good News Explorers: Quarterly group-graded resources for age 2-grade 6. Learner resources are unique at each age level.

Good News Bearers-Midweek or after school; binder for creating 26 or more sessions of fun, active Bible learning for students in Grades 3-5 (6-0000-0877-5)

Foundations for forming faithful disciples...

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