

THE CHURCH INTENTIONALLY EVANGELIZING TO DE-CHURCHED, MILLENNIAL
FAMILIES THROUGH THE USE OF THEIR PRESCHOOL TO MAKE THE FAMILY LIFELONG
MEMBERS.

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LITERARY REVIEW

There are several books written about the history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) such as *History of the Wisconsin Synod* by J.P. Koehler. That book dealt with the history of the WELS as a whole and only briefly talked about the history of the WELS grade schools. I have found that Victor Krause's book, *Lutheran Elementary Schools in Action*, and Wayne Schmidt's book, *The Lutheran Parochial School: Dates, Documents, Events, People*, to be most useful in understanding from where the roots of the WELS grade schools grew. They accounted the reasons why Lutherans started their own schools. They even noted the unique opportunity Lutheran pastors had in evangelizing to non-members of their church because non-member families were sending their children to their grade school.

Not only was there opportunity to evangelize through the school when WELS first began their parochial schools, but others have noticed that there are opportunities even today to evangelize through our children educational services. The Early Childhood Ministry (ECM) for the WELS have taken statistics on how many WELS churches offer an early childhood ministry and how many take advantage of these services. They also record how many non-members take advantage of these services. From their records, there is opportunity to evangelize through these early childhood ministries.

Not only does the ECM record those statistics, but the ECM is also a great resource for starting or making a current early childhood ministry at a WELS church even better. After emailing Cindi Holman, who is the director for ECM, requesting for some materials, she responded by giving me the statistics mentioned above, some workshops congregations can do to focus more on their early childhood ministry, and examples of current harvest strategies for bringing in non-members from those early childhood ministries into the church.

Others have given their support for using WELS schools and preschools for outreach. David Valleskey, a former Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary President, wrote several essays stressing the importance of outreach through the school and preschool. President of the WELS, Mark Schroeder, has written an article stressing the importance of the WELS grade school have in the Synod as a whole.

Even though there are materials focusing on how to evangelize through the school, materials that focused on outreach in a church in general are still a good resource to consult. The WELS offers such a resource in their *School of Outreach*. In the *School of Outreach*, it provides workshops and devotions congregations can use to nurture an attitude of outreach in every aspect of that congregation.

Pastor Jonathan Schroeder, pastor at Faith in Sharpsburg, GA, has written an article, “Faith Lutheran Preschool Harvest Strategy,” describing his experiences with using a harvest strategy and what he would suggest. He provides his key principles and an example of his Harvest Strategy timeline.

This paper has taken all those resources and approached the subject of outreach through the school by focusing on how WELS parochial schools around the Milwaukee suburban area were carrying out their own Harvest Strategy. There appeared to be lost opportunities for outreach, by admission of some of those I interviewed. After identifying that there is a need to make church’s harvest strategies more intentional, a solution in how to make harvest strategies more intentional is proposed in view of the experiences of all those who were interviewed.

ABSTRACT

There is a phenomenon occurring in Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod preschools. Millennial parents who have a church background, but are not currently actively involved in a church, are enrolling their young children into WELS preschools. Many have noticed this trend as well. Many principals and pastors are currently trying to use the preschool for evangelism. This paper interviewed eighteen leaders who are either a pastor, a principal, or a chairman of the Board of Education from eight different congregations from the Milwaukee suburban area. Drawing from their experiences, this paper will propose a generic plan for evangelizing to de-churched, millennial families in the school to make them lifelong members.

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WHAT I HAVE OBSERVED

During my vicar year, I served at a church that had a school connected with it. The school offered 3-year-old preschool all the way to eighth grade. What caught my attention was how the school and church can work in a symbiotic relationship. I especially noticed this symbiotic relationship in the preschool and the church. The congregation enrolled their children, therefore supporting the preschool. The preschool in response also enrolled non-members giving the church the opportunity to outreach to non-member families. These families usually consisted of millennial parents who are de-churched. What a great opportunity to evangelize without having to canvass looking for prospects. They were coming to us! God's Word is effective, so there were family converted from the preschool. Churches can capitalize on prospects coming to them, by making an intentional strategy for bridging the whole family from the preschool to become members of the church.

THE ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

As Lutheran German immigrants were moving into the Midwest, they built schools because there were not that many schools built yet. The church saw the need to educate their youth not only in secular matters, but to train their youth in God's Word. To address those needs, the churches built their own schools.¹ Since the church had in mind only to cater to the needs of their own member's children—Lutheran schools were intended only for Lutheran children². This continued for quite some time for several reasons. The Lutheran schools had their roots in Germany and they kept their heritage primarily through worship. The Wisconsin Synod conducted German services into the early 20th century. Lutheran children needed to learn German, and they were not going to learn German in the public schools, but only in their own parochial schools.

The Missouri Synod had very similar beginnings to the Wisconsin Synod in starting schools. Having schools was such a large part of the Missouri Synod identity, that educational programs were mentioned in the 1847 Missouri Synod Constitution. The constitution did not structure how each congregation should educate their youth, but they did expect that the

¹ Krause, 13.

² Les Bayer, "The Non-Lutheran in a Lutheran School," Lutheran Education Association Monograph Series 12 (Fall 1986): 2.

churches would build schools based on the books the constitution designated for learning.³ The members also expected the church to operate schools from the beginning. Back in Germany the schools were under the church's control even though the schools were state sponsored. Because of how schools in Germany were operated, Wayne Schmidt, who has a master's degree in education and his PhD in history, claimed the following.

German Lutherans in America's Midwest held to the view that the church had a responsibility for elementary education even in a new homeland where public schools existed but church and state could not be mixed. The Lutheran parish school was the institution, therefore, in which religious instruction and general elementary education could be combined, with the church having control of the whole process.⁴

Lutherans started schools so the church could be involved in the education, including spiritual education, of their youth as it was done in their home country, Germany.

Even though these Lutheran schools were for educating the youth of the congregation, the Missouri Synod anticipated non-members enrolling in their schools. As a part of the pastor's report to the synodical convention, he was to include the number of school children of members as well as children from non-members.⁵ Schmidt found this particularly interesting as he connected this as part of the Missouri Synod's vision for outreach as he wrote, "The reference to school children of non-members is worthy of note since it demonstrates that the framers of the constitution anticipated that parochial schools of the Synod would very likely reach beyond the confines of the sponsoring parish, a matter of interest to the Synod because of its concern for outreach and extension."⁶ The Missouri Synod had the foresight to see their schools as a part of their church's mission of outreach. This may have attributed to the size of the Missouri Synod today.

Even though Lutheran schools were for Lutheran children only, it did not stop non-members from enrolling their children into these Lutheran schools. Non-members enrolled their children into these Lutheran schools not because the Lutheran schools were so much better than the public schools, but because there were no other schools for their children to attend. When living on the frontier, schools could be miles from each other. For this reason, there were some

³ Schmidt, 55,56.

⁴ Schmidt 55.

⁵ Schmidt, 58.

⁶ Schmidt, 58.

reports early on that the Missouri Synod schools had about 50% enrollment of non-members in their schools.⁷ Despite the large number of non-members that attended Lutheran Schools, there was not much written about trying to evangelize to these non-member families. Perhaps the pastors naturally evangelized to those families. In some places, it was the job of the pastor to teach the children. Those pastors would have ample opportunities to evangelize to the non-member families.

Today, the purpose of Lutheran schools has not changed. Their primary focus is to educate. Lutheran schools focus on teaching the truth of God's Word in every subject throughout the day. Some students are not Christians, and so from hearing God's Word they are being evangelized to. This could be considered a secondary function of Lutheran schools—to evangelize to non-members within it. Cindi Holdman, Director of ECM, responded in this way when asked what the purpose of WELS early childhood centers and grade schools, "While the purpose can vary from congregation to congregation, most are considered part of the congregation's mission to support and encourage their member families in their God-given role and also to reach out to families in the community to provide high quality care and education and to reach out to them with the gospel."⁸ It appears that WELS as a synod acknowledges that there are opportunities for outreach in their schools. The question remains how to outreach in the school intentionally to optimize human efforts.

DEFINING THE THESIS

People use terms in different ways. Therefore, it is necessary to define some of the terms used in the thesis and will be used throughout the rest of this paper. It is for that reason that before continuing, there are some key terms which will be defined.

De-churched

First, de-churched, as I will use it, are those who have heard of Jesus Christ but do not attend a church. This is a broad definition since most people in the United States have heard of Jesus Christ before. Most non-member parents of preschoolers do have a church background from their childhood. Some parents would also say they are members of other denominations,

⁷ Krause, 13.

⁸ Holman, Cindi. Interview by John Schwartz. Email interview. February 18, 2017.

but they are nominal Christians. These families are still considered prospects because they do not actually go to that church, but claim they do because they were members before college. Many young parents who during their college years stopped going to church, are now sending their children to a Christian school.

Millennial

The second term which needs to be defined is millennial. Who are millennials exactly? What are their defining features? There is no reason to bring any presuppositions of what millennials are. Millennial parents are the same as any other parents from any other generation. These parents want what is best for their children and when they are spoken to, they want to be spoken to in truth and sincerity. The biggest difference between millennial parents and their parents is their birth date. Millennials were born between the early 1980s to early 2000s. At the date of publication, millennials are between the ages of thirty-six and eighteen⁹. This group was so large, it cannot be narrowly defined.

Evangelizing Through the Preschool

The next section of the thesis that should be defined is how this evangelizing can be done through the preschool. The reason why evangelizing is focused through preschools and not the grade schools is because non-member parents are typically not sending their children to the grade school, but they are sending them to the preschool. The Task Force on Lutheran Schools in 2013 reported, “most (but not all) agree that early childhood programs are appropriate outreach and evangelism tools, but there is significant debate about the role of the Lutheran elementary school in this work [there emphasis].”¹⁰ Why would the Task Force on Lutheran Schools not see the opportunity to outreach in the preschools? Back in 2013 there were over 10,000 children enrolled in some sort of early childhood ministry.¹¹ Today there are nearly 11,000 children enrolled in some sort of early childhood ministry.¹² Of those 11,000 only 30% are considered WELS

⁹ Technically, millennials were between the ages of thirty-six and twelve. Hopefully, no twelve-year-old is enrolling their three-year-old in preschool. This does mean, however, that there will be millennial parents for another twenty years.

¹⁰ WELS Book of Reports and Memorials (May 2013), 50.

¹¹ Statistics from an interview with Cindi Holman. Full Statistics can be found in Appendix A and B.

¹² Statistics from an interview with Cindi Holman. Full Statistics can be found in Appendix A and B.

members.¹³ That means roughly 70% are non-members! It would seem that non-members are sending their children to WELS preschools not only because they are not only competitive compared to other early childhood care in both tuition and quality, but excel at them. This continues today. It is a blessing that our preschools are of such high quality. That is not to say that WELS grade schools are not of high quality. WELS is also blessed to have a high quality grade schools as well. The reason why there are not the number of prospects in the grade school as there is in the preschool is because of the public schools. Public schools also operate at a high quality and have free tuition. The other cause for not having prospects in the grade school was that, hopefully by that time, they have already become members. Therefore, by Kindergarten, either the children will be attending a public school or the non-member children already became members by then. If there is a church that has a large enrollment of non-member in the grade school, most of the following principles can also be adapted to fit a grade school setting.

Strategic Plan

The purpose of having a strategic plan, is so that the church can have an intentional plan to bridge the prospect families in the preschool to become members of the church. Having a strategy to evangelize is different than having a generic plan for outreach. This plan needs to be written down. If the strategy is not written down, then it will remain an abstract goal and will not get done. By writing down the strategy it will take those abstract goals and will make them concrete. It is a necessary step to make more people, even if it is only the pastor, principal, preschool director, and one or two others closely connected with evangelizing to the preschool, realize and follow through on the strategy. By writing it down, it will hold those involved accountable to follow through on the strategy.

The Whole Family

The thesis includes the whole family for a reason. The common belief is that if the child was taught that Jesus loves him, then that was good enough. It is a wonderful thing for a child to know, sing, and believe “Jesus loves me,” but Jesus’s love does not stop with only the child. How can it be expected of a child to evangelize to their parents when the pastor, teachers, and other congregational members shy away from evangelizing. The child cannot drive his parents to

¹³ Statistics from an interview with Cindi Holman. Full Statistics can be found in Appendix A and B.

church or bring them to Bible Study. It is the parents who take their child to church, Sunday School, and read the Bible to them. It is better to evangelize to the parents because once the parents become a member then they will train their child in God's Word. The best thing for the church to do is to evangelize to both. Have the child learn that "Jesus loves me," but also talk to the parents about Jesus's love in their lives. Then it is not just the child taking the message of Jesus home to the parents, but the parents also taking the message of Jesus home to their child.

Lifelong Member

The last aspect of the thesis that needs discussion is the concept of a lifelong member. What good is it putting in all the work of strategizing a harvest plan, following through and having the whole family become members if they do not stay members? In essence, they went from being nominal members from a church to nominal members of a different church. Either way, they would not be a member of the invisible Christian Church. To help the whole family become involved members of the church, the church will find places for each of them to be involved. Do not consider the family involved just because their child is in the school. After that child has left the school, the family will then have less connection to the church than when their child started preschool.

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT

Christ commanded the apostles and the church in Matthew 28:19,20 "go and make disciples of all nations...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."¹⁴ We want to make disciples and teach those disciples God's commands. It was natural for WELS to build schools to train their young since God specifically commanded parents to train their young in God's Word in Deuteronomy 11:19, "Teach them [the words of God] to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." By building schools WELS was able to make disciples of the next generation by teaching them God's Word.

The primary function of WELS schools was to train their own children. Whereas that function will not cease, WELS schools can take on an extra function in outreach. According to

¹⁴ New International Version, 2011 (all Bible references will use this translation)

the WELS Evangelism School of Outreach, the messenger or the way in which we convey the message changes, but the message does not change. Combining those two parts, the messenger and the message, is their definition of ministry.¹⁵ Paul did whatever he could to accommodate his hearers in bringing them the message described in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Even though Paul would become a slave, a Jew, weak, and all things in order to share the gospel, Paul never changed the gospel message. The message has always been Christ crucified as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

The message was not made up by Paul. The message was a demonstration of the Spirit's power, not from Paul's fancy rhetoric. What did come from Paul was the way in which he presented that message. Paul combined these two, the constant message and the changing messenger, into a ministry as he described in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ (Christ's mission...completed) and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (our mission...on-going): that God was reconciling the world (objective justification) to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (the Message). We are therefore Christ's ambassadors (the messengers), as though God were making his appeal through us.¹⁶

Therefore, Christ's mission was to reconcile sinners to God through Christ. That mission was finished. Our mission is the ministry of reconciliation as Christ's ambassadors. That mission is

¹⁵ School of Outreach, 11.

¹⁶ Emphasis from School of Outreach, 11.

on-going and is changing.¹⁷ The ministry of the church is to go and make disciples of all nations. That will never change. How the church makes disciples is by teaching Christ's commands, God's Word. That too will never change. How the church can share that message of God's Word can change. The preschools in WELS schools are a great avenue in which the church can evangelize to prospects who are coming to the church's facilities. With an intentional strategy, this harvest field can be ripe for harvesting.

Paul truly became all things to all people, and it showed in his own ministry. Paul at first always had a plan on how to evangelize to those there when he entered the city. Typically, his plan was to go to the Synagogue to preach to the Jews. There were times in his ministry where he had to adjust how to present the gospel. A prime example of this would be Paul in Athens as Acts 17:16-34 described. Paul noticed the idols all over the city. Instead of giving his normal speech to the Jews, Paul reasoned with the philosophers there. With an idol with the inscription "to an unknown God," Paul took that opportunity to evangelize who the true God was. Paul changed how he evangelized, never the message, as a result he reached more people.

WHO THIS PAPER IS FOR

This paper is for churches which noticed the need to evangelize in the preschool. If all the families in the preschool are members, there would be no need to evangelize in the preschool. This paper is for those who do notice a need to evangelize to de-churched, millennial families in preschool and want to use their preschool for outreach, but are currently not taking advantage of the preschool as an evangelism tool. This thesis will hopefully help in getting the congregation started on a formal, written strategy to evangelize to de-churched, millennial families. The thesis is also for those who are currently using their preschool as an evangelism tool, but would like to make their preschool into an intentional tool for outreach. This thesis is also for those who do use their preschool as an intentional tool for outreach, but would appreciate a fresh perspective or ideas to make it better.

David Valleskey, former president of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, had many words of wisdom for those who were contemplating whether or not using their preschool as a tool for

¹⁷ School of Outreach, 11.

evangelism. Many congregations saw the preschool as either an evangelism tool or an educational tool. They could really be both as Valleskey described.

Sometimes people pit nurture of the believer and outreach to the unbeliever against each other, as though you have to decide between one or the other. When we see that the mission of the Church is evangelism, proclaiming the gospel to believer and unbeliever alike, we quickly understand that there is no conflict between the two. The only tension that might arise is in determining how much time and energy, how much people power, how many dollars and other resources to devote to each.¹⁸

Just as this paper is for certain people, the paper is also not for certain people. This paper is not for those who were looking for a silver bullet to solve all of ministry problems. By having a formal evangelism plan does not mean that 100% of non-member families will become members. It also does not mean that church attendance or membership will skyrocket. It also does not mean that the school will be enrolled to the maximum.

The Task Force on Lutheran Schools also realized that there were some improper motivations for using a preschool for evangelism. They listed five improper motivations for using a preschool for evangelism.

- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by financial considerations.
- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by declining school enrollment.
- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by declining church membership.
- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if it is not intentionally part of the congregation's overall outreach and evangelism plans.
- We are not ready to use our school as an outreach tool if we are driven by anything other than the desire to teach Christ and him crucified.

These are the wrong reasons for the church to use its preschool for evangelism.

This paper is also not for those who are looking for support for starting a preschool at one's church. This author cannot say whether starting a preschool for the sole purpose of evangelizing to de-churched, millennials families would be wrong or right in any particular area. This paper focuses on those churches who already have preschools, who have noticed a need to evangelize to de-churched, millennial families in there preschool, and who want to have an intentional strategy to evangelize to those families.

¹⁸ Valleskey, *Outreach and Our Lutheran Elementary Schools and Pre-schools*, 3.

THE INTERVIEWS

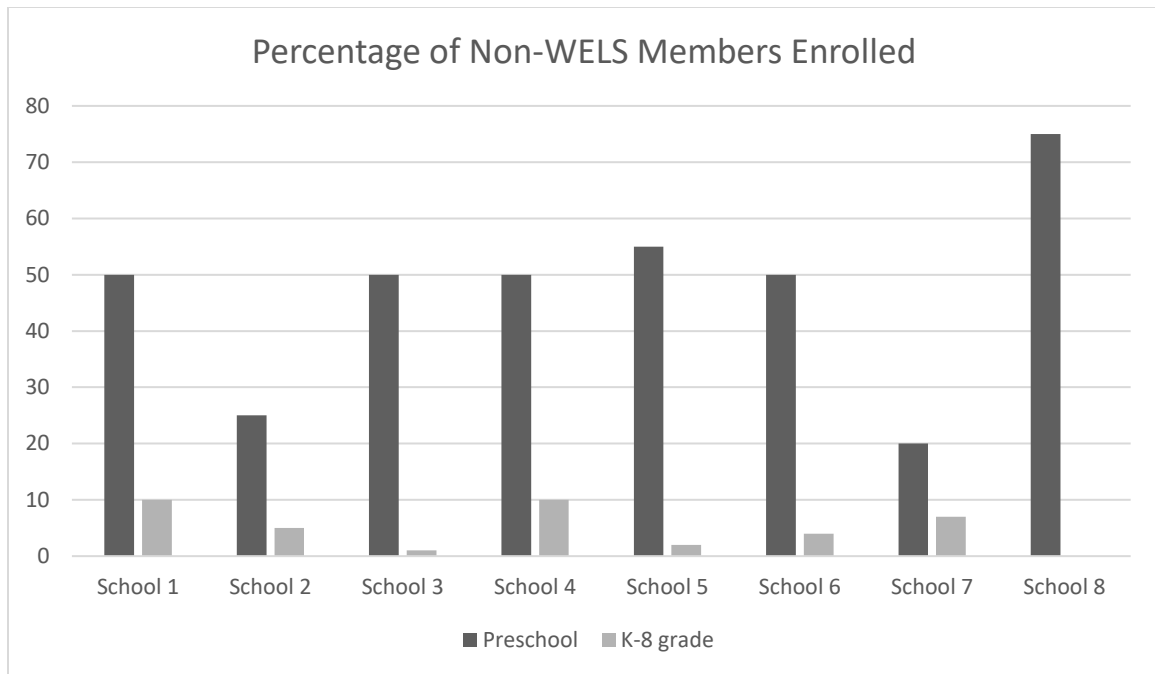
In researching for the thesis, it was key to interview several churches who have a preschool to confirm and support the proposed thesis. The churches who were surveyed were in the suburban Milwaukee area. Most of the interviews were conducted in person, one was conducted over skype. Three churches had their pastor, principal, and the chairman of Board of Education interviewed. Four churches had their pastor and principal interviewed. One church had only their principal interviewed. The reason for interviewing both the pastor, principal, and in some instances the chairman of Board of Education was to learn if both the church and the school realized the opportunity they had in their preschool to evangelize and to what extent each realized this. This paper will now go through each question of the interview¹⁹ and give any insights that were gleaned. For this paper, the churches and interviewees will remain anonymous so this author and those reading this paper will not be tempted to sin against the 8th Commandment.

What is the Demographic of the Families Enrolled in Your School?

The purpose of this first question was to find out who, if anyone, knew how many prospects were in their school. The first step to making an intentional plan for evangelizing in the school is realizing the opportunity to do so. I speculated that there would be more prospect families in the preschool than there would be in the grade school. That speculation was confirmed by the data collected as indicated on the graph below.²⁰

¹⁹ Questions asked during the interviews can be seen in Appendix C.

²⁰ One of the schools who had 50% non-member enrolled in preschool had a 75% non-member enrollment in their infant/toddler care. There was no data for K-8th grade enrollment for School 8.



It should be noted that there was a noticeable difference between the answers the principals gave and between the pastors and the chairman for Board of Education. Three of the seven pastors gave the same data as the principal. Two of the pastors gave the enrollment for the grade school only. One pastor seemed to give the enrollment for both the preschool and grade school combined. One pastor did not know of any children in the school that were unchurched and would be considered as a prospect. He then said that the principal should have a better understanding if there was anyone who would be considered a prospect. There were two chairmen of the Board of Education that knew the percentage of non-members in both preschool and grade school. There was one chairman of the Board of Education that knew of just the grade school enrollment percentage.

Admittedly, the question could have been better worded. In hopes of not leading the interviewee to specific answers, the wording of this question might have been too vague. The question was not asking about non-WELS members or actively churched but unchurched. Some do not view nominal Christians as a prospect, but as explained earlier, they are prospects.

There seemed to be fair communication between the school and pastor in respects to school enrollment. Most at least knew what the grade school enrollment of non-members were. It was the school pastor who was interviewed, but he might not have been the evangelism pastor. Should the school pastor be responsible for knowing how many prospects are in the school? That

question is debatable. It depended on the structure of the harvest strategy in place to bridge those non-member families from the school to the church.

The Mission Statement of Your School

Part of the purpose of the second question of the interview was to find out if the school had a written mission statement and what was that mission statement. The main reason for this question was to lead into the following question which was, “What is the mission of your school?” Mission statements, in essence, summarize the focus of the school. Anything the school does should help support their mission statement.

All eight schools had a mission statement. Six of the schools had a specific mission statement for their school. All six of those mission statements could be summarized in this way, to assist parents in the training of their children both in God’s Word and academically. Two of the schools had the same mission statement as their church. The school naturally fulfilled the Christian education role of the church’s mission.

The purpose of the two-part question was to see if any school had a mission statement that included evangelizing to prospects at the school. The school’s mission statements often included an element of evangelizing, but it was always through equipping the children with God’s Word so the children could evangelize when they became adults. None of these schools had in their mission statement that they would witness to prospects within the schools. This meant that none of the schools saw the prospects in their school as a large enough focus of their school to include it in their mission statement. For several reasons, it makes sense for these schools not to include evangelizing to the prospects in their school as a part of their mission statement. By looking at the ratio of non-members to members in the school, there was an overwhelming majority of members in the grade school. It would make more sense if the preschool had a separate mission and wanted to include evangelizing to non-member families in their mission statement. Just because they could, does not mean it would be wise to do so. Non-member parents probably would be scared away if they saw that part of the school’s mission statement was to convert them to your religion. The main purpose of Lutheran Schools was the same as they were when they first started. They are to train the youth of the church in both academics and, more importantly, in God’s Word. It was only proper for these schools to have a mission statement that reflected that purpose.

It was enlightening to hear that two of the schools had the same mission statement as the church did. That is a wonderful idea because it makes the school and church more unified in their mission if they share the same mission. It shows more clearly that the school is functioning as an arm of the congregation in fulfilling the congregation's mission. It also allows the school to function in a variety of ways while still abiding to its mission statement. For instance, every church's mission would include evangelizing to those who were not Christian. If the school has the same mission as the church, then evangelizing to non-member in the preschool would not be outside of the school's mission.

Mission to the Parents

This question tied closely with the previous question. My original assumption was that the mission statement of the school would only focus on the children and not the parents. That assumption was wrong.

Every mission statement did focus on the children, but it also included assisting the parents in raising their child. Three pastors and one principal included training the parents to be godly parents in the mission to the parents. One pastor admitted that recently he realized that there should be a mission to the parents.

Even though the original assumption, which assumed that the school mission did not include the parents, was wrong, the assumed principle was correct. The school typically does not see the parents as part of the mission of the school, but only training the children. It would be better if both the church and school considered the parents as part of the ministry mission. It would allow the church and school to evangelize to the parents who were non-members and to continue training parents who are members in God's Word with the hopeful result of assisting them in becoming lifelong members in the church.

The School as a Part of the Congregation's Mission

This agree or disagree question served to check if the school was over stepping its boundaries in the overall ministry of the church by taking lead over the church instead of being directed by the church. It is the congregation, as the church, who was charged by God to carry out God's mission. The congregation started the school to serve its mission. Over time that distinction may have eroded to the point where the school and the congregation became at odds

with each other. Schools need to understand that they are under the umbrella of the congregation's mission. They exist to carry out the congregation's mission.

All eighteen interviewees agreed with the statement, "The school is a part of the congregation's mission." That is wonderful because they all understood that the school was there to carry out the congregation's mission of educating their youth in God's Word. Several even understood that the school and the congregation were one in mission which extended even to mission work in the school. Half of the pastors who were interviewed expressed the difficulties of balancing the school ministry with other ministries the congregation could be doing. One principal admitted that the school was the heartbeat of the congregation and was second only to God.

The one concern this question did unearth, was the temptation to make the school not just under the umbrella of the congregation's mission, but to make it into the whole umbrella. It is easy for a congregation to become so focus on the mission of the school that it neglects other tools and opportunities at its disposal.

I do realize the irony that his thesis is promoting using the school even more for evangelism, when half the schools I interviewed may already be taking up the majority of the church's ministry. By the end, this thesis will show how to reduce the time and expenses used for ministry in the school while maximizing its effectiveness. With a formal, strategic, written plan in place for evangelizing to non-members in the preschool, the congregation should be able to reduce the time and energy it originally took and become more effective in evangelizing to these families.

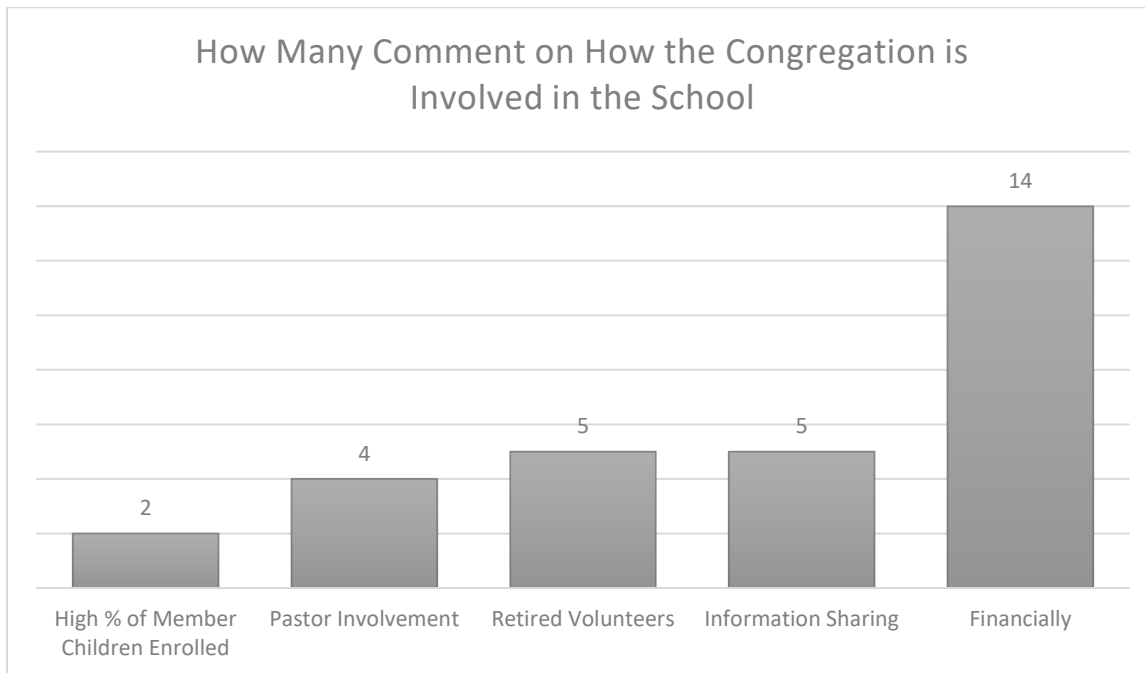
Tactics that the Congregation Uses to Show the School is a Part of the Congregation's Mission

If the school was under the congregation's mission, then the congregation should show that the school was indeed a part of its mission and not separate from each other. This question served to find out how congregations were currently showing the school that it was a part of its mission.

In my experience, I have observed that it appeared the school would reach out its hand to help the congregation with its mission. Some examples are singing in church, having the upper grades canvass, or move chairs for a congregational potluck. Rarely did I see the congregation

extending its hand to help with the school’s mission. The main visible way the congregation did help the school was having the pastor teach catechism to the upper grades.

Only responses which were given by more than one person were represented in the graph below.²¹ This does not represent that only two churches have a high percentage of the congregational children enrolled in the school. It does show however, that only two people thought of it to mention it during the interview.



This question could be misleading. Without further explanation, the question, “What tactics are currently in place that shows the school is a part of the congregation’s mission,” could be understood as either, what does the school do for the congregation, or what does the congregation do for the school. Because of the lack of clarity, it may have led some interviewees to answer in ways that the school showed support instead of the other way around, even after verbal clarification. The other problem with this question was that by no means, was this supposed to be an exhaustive list of ways the congregation showed its support. It does show how these efforts of the congregation in showing that the school was a part of the congregation’s mission were being perceived.

²¹ The category for Pastor Involvement only represents the responses that included the pastor doing more in the school than just teaching Catechism.

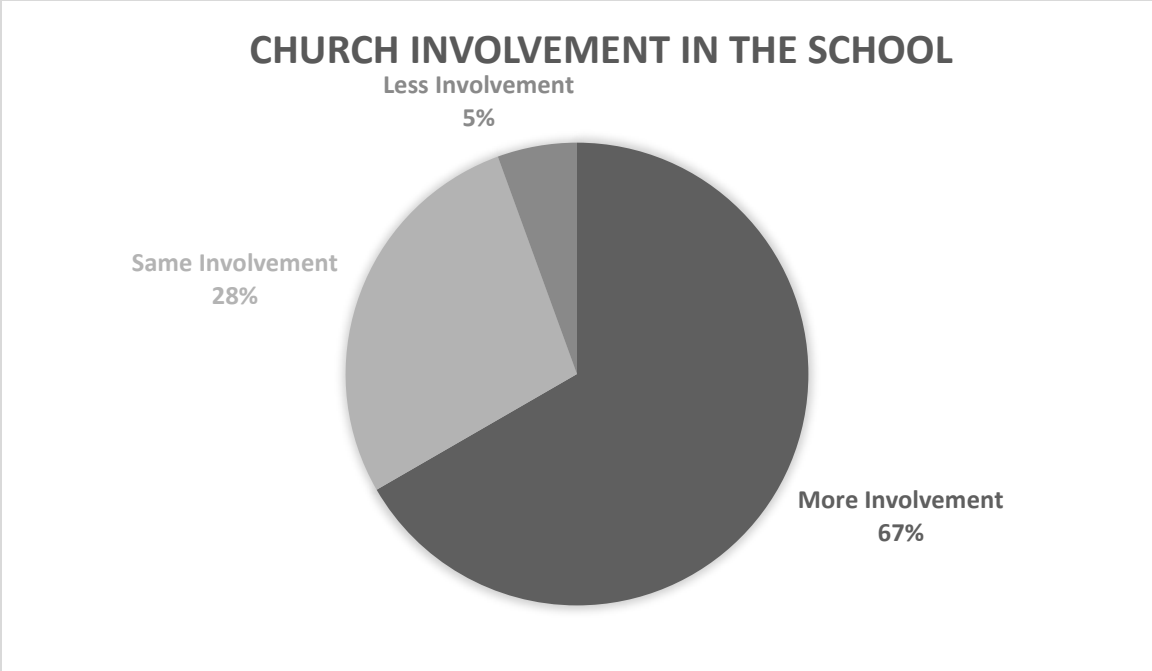
According to the data, the church helping to finance the school was the largest perceived way the congregation was showing the school was a part of the mission. This brought up the question of how much should the congregation finance the school? Should the congregation pay 0%, 50%, 75%, or even 100%? Should that percentage be different for members compared to non-members, and should the preschool have a different percentage help than the grade school? Different places do it differently, and neither are wrong. This paper is not concern on how much the congregation helps in financing the school. What should be considered is how it would be perceived by the congregation and the school. If the congregation does not help at all, the school may feel that it is not a part of the congregation mission, and that would be a problem.

Hopefully congregations do have a presence in the school by helping to carry out the school's mission. The presence of the congregation would accomplish several positive things. It would show support to the school's faculty, students, and parents that the school is an extension of the church. If the non-member families saw the congregation in the school, it could help bridge those prospect families to the church.

Idea of Church's Role in School

The previous question addressed what the church was currently doing in the school. This question addressed how would the interviewee would want the church involved in the school. Another way of phrasing this question would be "if you could control how the church is involved in the school, what would that look like?" The responses could be broken down to three categories, should there be more involvement, the same, or even less involvement.

Twelve of eighteen interviewees responded by wanting more church involvement in the school. Five of the interviewees responded that they would not change the involvement of their church in the school. There was one interviewee who wanted the church to be less involved in the school. This information is shown in the graph below.

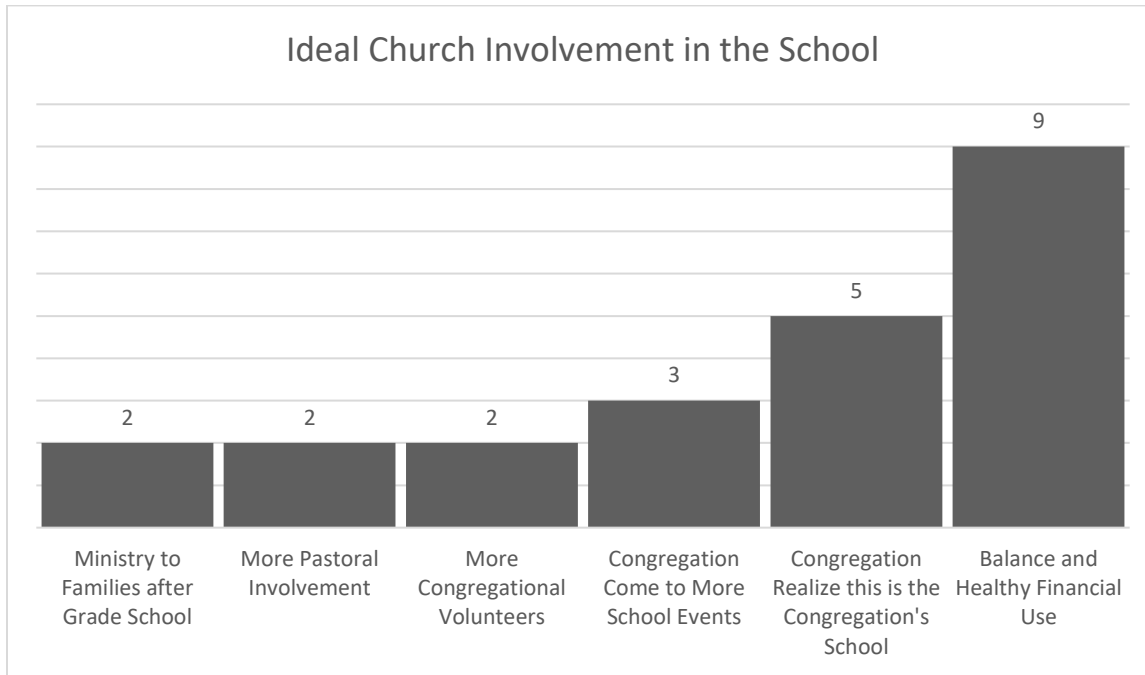


The interviewee, who responded that the church should be less involved with the school, serves where the church helps financially with the school and has congregational volunteers helping regularly at the school. With the church helping so much in the school, the church should be careful not to neglect other ministries it could be doing. Of the five who responded back that they do not want to change the involvement of the church in the school, three were pastors and two were principals. It was encouraging to see that not just pastors nor just the principals not wanting to change the church involvement.

If only pastors responded in this way, it would show that there is a greater need for church involvement without the pastor realizing it. If only principals responded in this way, it would show that the school felt that the church is overstepping its boundaries and is controlling the school too much. The fact that there was just as many pastors and principals not wanting change shows that they were on the same page.

Two thirds of the interviewees wanted the church involved more. They gave suggestions how they would want the church involved from more pastoral involvement to better unity in mission with the church and school. The chart below presented that information. Only suggestions that were given by two or more people were recorded. When the interviewee did not want the church's role to change, their responses from the previous question were added to the ideal role of the church to have in the school. The rationale of adding their previous responses was

that if they wanted no change, then what they said previously was their idea view of the church's role in the school.



This information was not supposed to be an exhaustive list. I would assume all eighteen interviewees would want healthy financial help to the school, not just nine. The information above does show what was perceived as important for the church to be involved in the school. Unity between the church and school is important. The three categories, More Pastoral Involvement, More Congregational Volunteers, and Congregation Come to More School Events, could be combined under one category as More Church Involvement or Presence. That new category would be the second highest ideal involvement. It would appear the schools just want to be supported more in time and not just financially.

The Church Considers Non-member School Families as Prospects

This question was a simple yes or no question. The interviewee did not have to respond any further than a yes or no.

All eighteen interviewees said yes. Not all simply said yes though, but some expounded. One interviewee admitted that the congregation did view non-member school families as prospects, but there have been missed opportunities. The same interviewee mention that the teachers recognized this, but did not know what the rest of the congregation thought. Two others

commented that not only did the church recognize that non-member school families were prospects, but evangelizing to these parents started in the preschool.

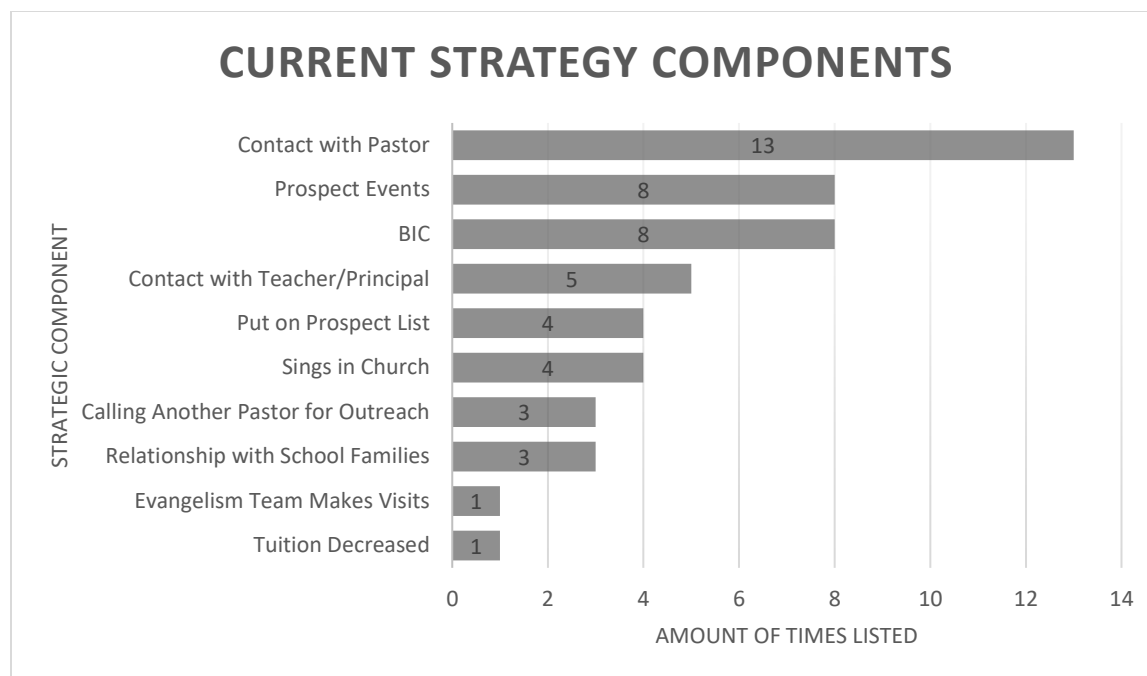
This question served to be the foundation for the next question. This question made sure the church recognized that non-member families in the school were prospects which they did. It is good that they did because there is a difference between recognizing an opportunity, this question, and intentionally taking advantage of that opportunity, the next question. Before taking advantage of that opportunity, the church needs to recognize it first.

The Formal Strategy in Place

This question was the peak of the interview as it addressed the thesis of how a formal, written, intentional plan could be beneficial as the congregation evangelized to non-member school families in the preschool. There were several questions asked in this section. The first was if there was a formal strategy in place. The second questions was what was that strategy. Lastly, who came up with that plan.

Whereas all eight churches had a strategy in place, only five of the eight churches had a formal written strategy in place. One interviewee commented that a written plan seemed too cold. He did not want to force evangelism, but waited for opportunities and took advantage of them as they came. His called worker counterpart commented that he wanted a more intentional plan for evangelizing to non-members in the school.

Each school has a different mission plan, though many share similar components. All of the responses given are listed below. This data reflects the responses given, so even though only five interviewees gave the response that the teacher and/or the principal had contact with prospects did not mean that the other schools did not have teacher interaction with prospects. Every school had their teacher in contact with the prospect families in his classroom. What the data below does show was that only five interviewees thought it was important enough in their strategic plan to mention the contact with the teacher and/or principal. This applies to each strategic component.



Even though the above is not an exhaustive list of each component of each school’s strategic plan, it does give a variety of different components a strategic plan might have. It also shows which are perceived as more essential in order to evangelize to prospects in the school. The biggest perceived essential component of a strategic plan was the pastor having contact with prospects. This contact included the pastor being visible and mingling while parents while they were picking up their children to the pastor being at different events where prospects attended and any time the pastor had a chance to visit with prospects. Having the pastor make contact with school prospects makes a lot of sense. The pastor is the face of the church. He will also be the one shepherding the prospect once he becomes a member. Having pastoral involvement is such a big perceived need that at the time of the interviews, there were three of the eight congregations either looking into calling, currently calling, or just called another pastor whose responsibilities would include evangelizing to non-member school families.

BIC (Bible Information Class) is tied for second as the greatest perceived value in a strategic plan. Of the eight who responded with BIC, five were pastors, two were chairmen of Board of Education, and one was a principal. BIC appeared to be valued more as a part of the strategic plan by the pastors and chairmen of Board of Education than by the principals. This makes sense since pastors are the ones who would typically lead BIC and prospects typically need to go through a BIC before becoming members. BIC is an important step in any strategic plan, but just as important are the steps leading up to BIC which cannot be neglected.

Prospect events were perceived as a major part of a strategic plan. Prospect events include, but are not limited to, trunk or treat, grandparent day, dad or mom day, preschool graduation, Easter or Christmas for kids, VBS, and fall festival. The purpose of these events is to create the opportunity for the pastor, or any member, to make a connection with prospects and start relationships with them. These events tend to be on the church property, such as outside or in the school, but not in the sanctuary. This allows the family to be on the church property without being intimidated by entering the sanctuary. Once prospects felt more comfortable being on the church property and having a relationship with the pastor and/or a relationship with a member, prospects were less intimidated entering the sanctuary and more likely to attend church.

Closely related to prospect events are the times the school children sing in church. Having the children sing in church pushes the parents to attend church themselves. The problem with using this as a component in a strategic plan for evangelizing was the lack of interaction with the prospects. There is enough happening Sunday morning for the pastor to keep track of, that it would be near impossible for him to make any solid contact with prospects. The benefit of having the children sing in church, is that the whole family would hear God's Word that morning. That is a huge benefit that should not be overlooked, because conversion only happens through the Word of God.

It is surprising that only four interviewees mentioned putting non-members from the school in their prospect lists. This is a crucial first step of a strategic plan that needs to be intentionally done or it may not be done. The number could be low because many could take that component for granted. Unless this was formally part of the strategic plan, putting these prospects on the prospect list could be overlooked and never happened. Then these non-member families would be lost in the cracks. Another possibility is that the prospect list could be so large that it has become unmanageable to use. In that case, the prospect list is not being used well and the hot prospects could be suffering for it.

Only one person mentioned a reduction of tuition for members compared to non-members. Even though only one mentioned it, many WELS schools follow this practice. The benefit of reducing tuition for members is that it is an incentive for non-members to become members. The negative side of reducing tuition for members is when non-members become members solely for the reason of receiving a reduced tuition price. It is easy for them to become nominal members then, since they were only members for the reduced tuition price. I am not

recommending for church to begin or stop helping to pay for tuition for members and/or non-members. I recommend that it would be done well and for the right reasons.

These next two strategic planning components were not common, but extremely valuable and should be considered while devising a strategic plan. Relationship with school families meant that the school families who were members developed relationships with non-member school families. This is a wonderful component for several reasons. One reason is that it reduces the work of the pastor. For example, if one pastor could develop a strong relationship with one prospect family a month, ten families who are members could develop a strong relationship with ten prospects, one each, for a month. Since non-members already know that the pastor has an ulterior motive for talking with them, pastors would fight an uphill battle evangelizing to them. Non-member parents' guards are down more when talking with other parents from the school. This also helps members to witness their faith in their lives to non-members in the school.

The other uncommon, but valuable component is having an evangelism team make visits. This places the responsibility more on the congregation than the pastor. More evangelizing then could be done as demonstrated above with the parents. Also, if the pastor accepted a call away, there will be trained members to continue evangelizing even though the pastor may be absent. This component requires extra time initially in the form of finding and training the evangelism team, but will be worth it if done well.

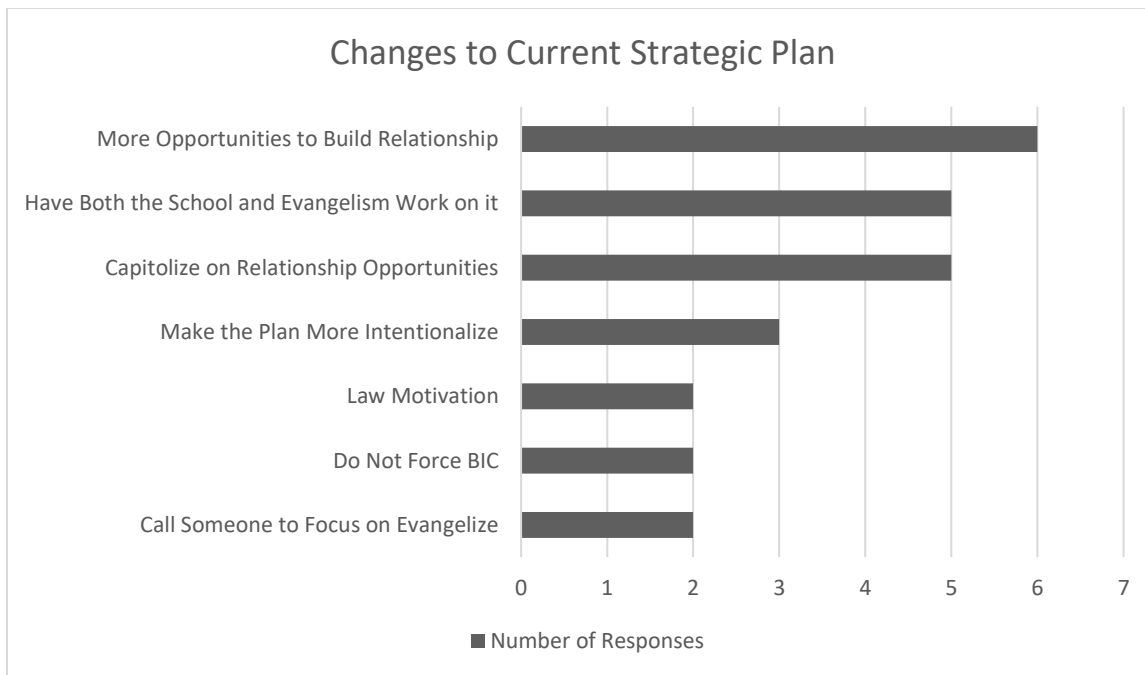
The last component to this question was to find out from where did their strategic plan originate. The place from which the strategic plan originate is important because it shows how the plan is carried out. If it originates with the pastor, then the congregation looks to the pastor to carry it out. The same applies if the principal is the originator of the plan. Even if the Board of Education is the one to devise the strategic plan, the congregation would look to the school to follow through with the strategic plan.

The responses are as followed. Two interviewees said the strategic plan originated with the school. Two others said the pastor. One said the Board of Education. Another said the WELSSA accreditation team. One more said the Evangelism Board. The last one said the Board of Education, principal, and the pastor were all involved in developing the plan. Two interviewees admitted to not knowing where the strategic plan originated. This would leave eight who did not answer the question.

The problem with this question was that it was at the end of two other rather long questions. Therefore, this question was unintentionally skipped at times. From the data that was collected, it would appear that strategic plans to evangelize to non-members in the school have a wide variety of origins. Strategic plans from the congregation, the Evangelism Board, work just as well as those developed by the pastor or principal.

Changes to the Strategic Plan

This was a follow-up question to the previous questions. This served to give the interviewee the opportunity to express changes they wanted in their current strategic plan. The suggestions are as followed below on the graph.



The first striking thing about the responses is the emphasis on the pastor forming a relationship with the prospects. The two highest suggested changes are to create more opportunities and to capitalize on those opportunities to build relationships with prospects. One suggested creating a coffee shop atmosphere in the entryway of the school where the pastor could visit naturally with parents. The interviewees who wanted more opportunities were already hosting events. By adding more opportunities though, they hoped to increase the chances for effective evangelizing.

Just as high as a response is for there to be more unity in the school and church to work on evangelizing together. One wanted less emphasis placed on the school. Another wanted

member families to evangelize more to non-member families. All five of these interviewees did not want the plan to completely fall on the school. They wanted more congregational participation in the plan.

Three interviewees expressed that they wanted their strategic plan more intentional. Having a strategic plan and following it are not the same thing, but two different things. One keeps it in the abstract. The other puts it into practice. One way to make the plan more intentional is to write it down. Once the plan is in place, it needs to be followed. Those who are a part of the plan need to be held accountable in following through with the plan to help them follow the plan.

Two interviewees did not want the BIC forced onto non-members. They felt because of the length of BIC it would intimidate prospects. The other felt that BIC was forced too early in the strategic plan. Where he served, non-members get a reduced price on tuition after completing BIC. He would rather want the motivation for BIC be for membership training and not a coupon for school. These opinions came from principals. It is a wonderful blessing to have a blunt principal to give constructive, objective criticism to their co-worker in the ministry, the pastor.

Two more wanted to call another pastor to focus on evangelizing to non-members in the school. They observed that the amount of work and time needed to effectively evangelize to these families in the school and do it well required another full-time pastor. This would not be their only focus, but one of his focuses.

Two interviewees wanted to use more law motivation to evangelize to prospects. Having a reduce price after attending BIC or another bait and switch tactic was what was meant by law motivation. Prospects would not be motivated by Christ's love to come to BIC, church, or any other time they could hear God's Word, so they need to be motivated by earthly gains. It is true, no unbeliever comes to church for the right reason. This would take that statement to the next step. They want to intentionally have people hear God's Word for the wrong reasons. This would work, but I would challenge that we strive for gospel motivation.

The data above showed that it took time and work to evangelize to non-member families in the school. It is more time and work than the current pastor and principal has as made evident by the wanting of another pastor to do the work, and wanting to capitalize and increase the number of opportunities the pastor has to make relationships with prospects. Some want to pass

some of the responsibility from the school to the church, because there is so much work in evangelizing.

The Evangelism Window in the School

This question hoped to pin down how long the typical church has in evangelizing to non-members in the school and when is the normal time for non-members to become members. One chairman of Board of Education did not answer due to not knowing. One interviewee said the majority of non-members are converted within three to five years. The rest, sixteen interviewees, noticed that there is only about a two-year window, and that is in the preschool. By the time the child entered Kindergarten, the family had either become a member or enrolled their child in public school. The window for evangelizing is those first two years while the child is enrolled in the preschool.

The statistics from the ECM also indicates that the optimized time to evangelize in the school is that two-year window while the child is in preschool. As mentioned earlier, about 70% of the early childhood ministries are not WELS members. Of the 11,000 who are enrolled in early childhood ministries, almost 9,000 are enrolled in 3 or 4-year-old preschool.²² WELS grade schools by contrast enroll about 70% WELS members.²³ The time to reach non-members is in the preschool.

Knowing the window the church has to evangelize helps to focus the time and efforts available to evangelize to where they could be best used. If a school is to be used by the church as a bridge to connect de-churched, millennial families to the church, then the church should focus on using the preschool and not the grade school as that bridge which connects de-churched, millennial families to the church. The grade school should continue focusing on its original purpose of training the youth of the congregation in God's Word.

The Key Factor

The purpose behind this question was to discover what is the perceived key factor in evangelizing to non-members in the school. If there is one aspect that should be focused on, what would that be.

²² Statistics from an interview with Cindi Holman. Full Statistics can be found in Appendix A and B.

²³ Statistics from an interview with Cindi Holman. Full Statistics can be found in Appendix A and B.

Every interviewee mentioned the same thing. A few even extremely emphasized this aspect as the key factor. The key factor is relationships. De-churched, millennial families want to have some kind of relationship. Whether it is with the pastor, principal, teacher, or other school families, they want to have a friend at church to make them feel more comfortable.

It is good for the prospect to have a relationship with the pastor, since the pastor should have some relationship with all the sheep entrusted to him to better serve them. Having said that, this means that the pastor needs to have many relationships. The reality is that the pastor might not have enough time to have the strongest relationship with each prospect. The other problem with focusing too much on the pastor making the relationship is prospects focusing too much on being a disciple of the pastor and not a member of the congregation.

Non-member families from the school naturally have a relationship with their child's teacher. The teacher could play a vital role in connecting that prospect family to the church. It would be unfair to put the majority of the responsibility on the teacher though. Their call is to teach and should not be expected to take lead in evangelizing to the family. This does not mean the teacher should play absolutely no role, but rather that their role in evangelizing would be letting their faith shine like any member of the congregation would do.

If it is too much work for the pastor alone to foster relationships with prospects and it should not be expected from the teachers, then whose responsibility is it to foster these relationships in order to evangelizing more effectively to these de-churched millennial families in the school? Congregational members can take the lead. There is enough of them to keep the work from becoming too overwhelming for the pastor alone. This would also foster the idea that when prospects became members they are members of the congregation. There are several ways in which the congregation could be involved. One way is to have a parent mentor program in the school. Each non-member family from the school would be paired up with a family who is a member and have their child in the same grade. The mentor family could help answer school questions and procedures. They would also personally invite and encourage non-members to attend the prospect events and church events. They would also intentionally build a relationship with them so the prospect family would have made at least one strong relationship with a member of the church. Having the Evangelism Committee or Board planning and running prospect events is another way of taking some of the responsibility off of the pastor. One more way is to have members volunteer at the school. This would serve a two-fold purpose. It would

show that the congregation does view the school as their school, and it would also be another bridge non-member school families would have when going to church.

There is one more key factor that needs to be addressed in evangelizing to de-churched, millennials in the school. Whatever the school or church does, it needs to be with excellence. That comment, in one form or another, was made by eleven different interviewees. The school should strive for excellence in teaching, having a welcoming atmosphere, and any other task they are given. The pastor should strive for excellence in worship, especially when he knows a large number of prospects are coming to worship. Make sure the best organist is playing. Make sure the hymn selection are well loved hymns that will be sung loudly. Take extra care in preparing the sermon that day. Make sure everything in that one hour is done excellently. Worship should always be done well, but having prospects visit would give one more reason to make sure worship is done well.

The Key Person

The previous question sought to find the key thing in evangelizing to non-member school families. This question is slightly different as it sought to find the key person in evangelizing to non-member school families. If one person had to be pointed out as the lead person in evangelizing to non-member school families, who would that person be. Ten interviewees, despite being asked who the key person, singular, was, responded that it is a team effort with the pastor, school staff, and congregation. Two of those ten responded by saying that the congregation should take lead, but should be supported by the called worker staff. Among those who did answer with an individual key person, six interviewees pointed to the teaching staff as the key person. Four of those interviewees, one chairman of Board of Education and three pastors, admitted that even though it was the teaching staff taking lead in evangelizing in the school, it should be the pastor who should be taking lead. Two interviewees pointed to the pastor as the key person in evangelizing.

It is encouraging not to see the pastors pointing to the principals and the principals pointing to the pastors. They are, for the most part, instead on the same page seeing evangelizing as a group effort that includes the pastor, teaching staff, and congregation.

IMPLEMENTING THESE IDEAS AT YOUR CHURCH

The above interviews were to give some information of how WELS congregations are currently using their preschools as tools for evangelizing. There are many good principles that are gleaned from these interviews. How those principles apply will differ from congregation to congregation. The below is what those principles that were gleaned above could look like when applied, but it is ultimately up to each church to figure out how those principles could be applied by its own congregation. It would be unwise to completely copy the following strategic plan point by point.

The Strategic Meeting

The strategic meeting is a very important step that cannot be overlooked, nor can it be short-changed. Before armies go into war, generals strategize to give the army the best chance to win. Before opening the doors to preschool, or before hosting the first prospect event, the leaders in evangelizing to non-members in the preschool need to have a strategic meeting to develop a strategy to evangelize. If this meeting is not taking place, then either it is one person doing all the work or several people are doing different things without conversing. If the former is happening, then there are miss opportunities happening, since a whole congregation can get more done than one man. If the latter is happening, then resources are being wasted and not being used to the best of their abilities. Both of these problems are fixed with having a strategic meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to make an intentional plan to evangelize to de-churched, millennial families through the use of the preschool to make them lifelong members.

When to Have the Strategic Meeting

Schedule this meeting for the beginning part of summer or even before the current school year ends. Do not wait till the end of summer to hold this meeting! There are many benefits for having the meeting early in summer. The previous school year and the successes and failures of evangelizing are still fresh in the mind, but far enough away to be objective on how well each prospect event ran. People will not be as overwhelmed during the meeting if it is held in the early summer. If the meeting is in the late summer, then the business of preparing for school would take priority and the meeting will not be pleasant or worse, not successful. If the meeting is held later in summer, it might be cancelled and then there will be no strategy in place for another year.

The final, and perhaps the biggest, reason to schedule the meeting in the early summer is to give the Evangelism Board or Committee time to implement the strategy that will be devised in this meeting. When scheduling this meeting, make sure to block off a couple of hours for this meeting. In the School of WELS outreach, it says to plan a day or two of meetings to devise a strategy plan.²⁴ That would be for strategizing for how a congregation would plan for outreach for every aspect of the church. Hopefully planning for evangelizing to preschool families can be done in one morning, but it may take longer. Each subsequent year, schedule another strategy meeting. Each year the strategy can be adapted and made better and better. At the very least, the strategy should be evaluated.

Who is at the Strategic Meeting

Those invited to the meeting include the school pastor and the outreach pastor. The school pastor should participate in the meeting because he is a visible leader in the school. The faculty will look to him as an example. He can use his rapport with the students and parents to help evangelize to them. The congregation also looks to him as a visible leader. If he is not helping out with school matters, they will wonder, why should we? The outreach pastor is also invited to be there since the strategy is for evangelizing to prospects. If he is not helping with evangelizing, then the congregation will wonder again, why should we help? The principal is also invited to be at the meeting. He is tasked with leading the school. Anything that is done in the school, he should be aware of it. He is also a great resource in education and leadership. His opinions are valuable. The preschool director or the preschool teachers are also invited to attend the meeting. They are invited to attend because they are the front-line evangelist to these non-member families. They also have the most experience in dealing with the families to which this strategy is planning to evangelize. They are the ones who will be carrying out this plan on a daily basis and needs to be a part of their ministry philosophy. Finally, the chairman, and/or several members, of the Evangelism Board or Committee are invited to attend the meeting. Ultimately, the responsibility of evangelizing to these de-churched, millennial families belongs to the church. The school will naturally, as an extension of the church, provide help, but the congregation should be taking responsibility. President Mark Schroeder also agreed that the congregation

²⁴ School of WELS Outreach, 23.

should take ownership of evangelizing in the congregation by evident of three of his theses he presented in a 2013 meeting to WELS principals.

Christian education--of all types--is an integral part of the ongoing mission of the church.

As an integral part of the mission of the church, Christian education is also an integral part of the life and work of every Lutheran congregation. Avoid characterizing schools as “ministries” unto themselves, rather emphasize that schools are a part of the congregation’s one ministry.

Lutheran schools must be clearly and consciously linked to the mission of the local congregation. Congregational “ownership” of the school is vital not only among those who have children but also among those who do not.²⁵

By having the Evangelism team there, the congregation is held responsible to evangelize. The Evangelism team will also be the organizer for the prospect events. They need to be there to know what they are doing and to give input.

Example of a Strategic Plan

The strategic plan can be divided into five parts. Before starting to plan, the meeting²⁶ will start with a devotion. God is the reason, the motivation, and the power behind any outreach efforts. It is best to study His Word together before planning. The pastor may make his own devotion. I would recommend using the devotion from “Positioning Lutheran Schools for Outreach.” Then continue on with devising the strategic plan. First, assign prospect parents to mentor parents. Second, create opportunities for pastor to interact with prospect families. Third, host prospect events to give the congregation opportunity to let their light shine. Fourth, is to introduce God’s Word to the parents. Fifth, plug the new family into congregational life. By following these five steps, it will give the congregation opportunity to evangelize to de-churched, millennial families which allows the Holy Spirit to work through the Word. Once they have become members, it is important to get them involved in the congregation.

Step One: Assign Mentors

The first step is to assign prospect parents in the preschool to mentor parents. This task is done by the pastor and the principal and/or the preschool director. The task of the mentor parents

²⁵ <http://blogs.mlc-wels.edu/wels-educator/2013/06/28/theses-for-discussion-preserving-and-enhancing-the-ministry-of-our-lutheran-schools/>

²⁶ An example of an agenda for this meeting can be found as Appendix D.

is to be the parent who will go out of their way to be a friendly face to the prospect family. The mentor parents will make an effort to get to know and build a relationship with their prospect family. They will also invite prospect families to the prospect events as well as attend them themselves and then make an effort to visit with their prospect family. They will also be the parent who can help the prospect family with any questions they might have that is school related. The mentor parents are members of the congregation. They may need to be trained by the pastor on how to witness with a 'come, see' attitude like Philip had with Nathaniel in John 1:46 and letting the light of Jesus shine in their everyday life as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:16. Which parents are assigned to which parents is up to the pastor and principal and/or the preschool director based on the ability of the member parent and the need of the prospect family. This step needs to be discussed in the strategic meeting though so all parties know this is being done. The other reason to plan this step is to hold the pastor and principal and/or the preschool director responsible for getting it done.

Step Two: Planning Opportunities

The second step is to create the best opportunities for the pastor to interact with prospect families. It is important for the pastor to develop a relationship with these families. If the parents do not trust or respect the pastor, they are far less likely to attend church, let alone a BIC with the pastor. The pastor does not need to create the strongest relationship with these families, but he does need to know them. Some opportunities for the pastor to interact with prospect families include, but are not limited to, welcoming parents in the morning, saying good-bye to the families when the children are picked up, having a devotion with the children, and attending prospect events, which is a very large category.

The benefit for discussing this task in the strategic meeting becomes apparent in the subsequent years' meetings. There is a group who can give feedback with which opportunities are working well and should be developed further and which ones should be scrapped.

Step Three: Planning Prospect Events

The third step to the strategic plan is planning the prospect events. If those attending the strategic planning meeting were generals, then in the first two steps they were planning skirmishes, and this step they are planning the battlefield for the main battles. By choosing the

right battlefield gives significant advantages. By planning the correct prospect events, it gives the congregation significant advantages in evangelizing to non-member school families. At this point of planning, a general progression of prospect events and ideas of prospect events should be given. This meeting is making the bones of this step, the Evangelism Board or Committee will flesh this step out later. The general progression should be able to make those who are uneasy about the worship area and lead them to feel comfortable being in church. An example of what not to do would be to have the first prospect event in the church or the children sing in church. Instead have the prospect families get use to the facilities and ease their way into church. A good example of how this is done is the harvest strategy from Faith in Sharpsburg, GA.²⁷

A simple progression would be to have a Harvest Fest in the gymnasium; have a special preschool Christmas service, less church people and more preschool families than a typical worship service; have the preschoolers sing for a midweek Lenten service, still less people than a typical Sunday; then have the preschool sing for Easter, by now they have been in church several times and are comfortable in this space. It would also be wise to add more prospect events in between those above to increase the opportunities for the pastor and other members interacting with these prospect families.

The possibilities for prospect events are endless. It is not the job of this meeting to plan every last detail, but to give direction to the Evangelism team so they can make it their own, and by extension, make it the congregation's work. There is a temptation to make the preschool teachers do all the work for these prospect events. Their opinions and advice are highly valuable in leading these prospect event, but this is how the congregation can be involved in evangelizing to non-member school families. Allow the congregation to take ownership of this part of ministry under the leadership of its called workers.

Those in the Evangelism Board or Committee at the strategic meeting can take the proposed outline and suggestions from this meeting to the next Evangelism meeting. There, they can start planning for prospect events. They should continue to seek advice from the preschool director and work with the preschool director, but the leg work should be done by the congregation. This includes enlisting volunteers to help run the prospect events. It will then become important that the Evangelism team looks for volunteers and not the school faculty as to help the congregation realize this is their mission, not the faculties alone.

²⁷ Their planned prospect events can be found under Appendix E.

Step Four: Introducing God's Word

Hopefully, through these prospect events, members will have an opportunity to witness their faith by their actions and make prospect families curious at what the church teaches. That is the opportune time to implement step four, taking the prospect through BIC. Prospects, however, do not naturally ask to be in a BIC. BIC should be offered several times a year, at specific times. By setting a specific date for BIC, BIC becomes an event that needs to be intentionally advertised and signed up for or their opportunity to take it will be lost. Pastors should be flexible in teaching BIC, but if it is offered whenever, what is stopping the prospect from pushing off BIC to a later date. Therefore, set a date to start a few BICs and advertise them to the preschool families. Have mentor parents mention it to their prospect parents. Better yet, have the mentor parents join the prospect parents in BIC.

Should BIC be forced or enticed on the parents or not? Neither is wrong to do. By forcing or enticing non-members to attend BIC, it guarantees that those prospects will hear God's Word and be instructed in it at least once. Whereas that is a wonderful thing, the drawback to forcing or enticing non-member to attend BIC is that they do not hear God's Word for the right reason. Instead, they are attending BIC as a person who would attend those times share presentations. Say, "No" and you get the prize for free. Then again, no unbeliever comes to hear God's Word for the right reason. What if BIC was offered, but not forced or enticed? The hope of this strategic plan is to have BIC offered multiple times, and let the prospect attend BIC when they feel comfortable. Hopefully from all the encouragement from the pastor and other families in the school, each prospect would want to attend BIC. "Hopefully" is the key word. It is not as much of a guarantee that they will attend BIC as forcing or enticing them to attend BIC. Whichever way is chosen, it is important for the group in the strategic planning meeting to come to a consensus and be united in carrying it out.

Step Five: How to Retain New Members

The fifth step is similar to the third as the strategic planning meeting establishes the principles for this step, but allows another group to implement this step. The fifth step is after the prospect has become a member, how does the church keep them as a member. The point of

evangelizing de-churched, millennial families is not to eventually make them de-churched again, but with another church.

It is important to retain new members as members. New members are likely to drop out membership in the first five years if they have made less than three new friends in the first year, have not become involved in at least one small group in the first year, and have not contributed to the congregation in a meaningful way within the first two years.²⁸ This topic alone can be a separate thesis, but here is one suggestion. Plug them into congregational life. Valleskey commented, “It’s interesting how quickly ‘your’ church becomes ‘my’ church when people become involved in the life and work of the congregation.”²⁹ New members have skills too. Ask them what their skills are, and encourage them to use them in the church. Ask them directly to use their skill in helping the church. Have new members take ownership of their church too. If they become connected to the congregation in a different way than just the school, then they will not become disconnected from the congregation once their children graduate from the grade school. To have new members plug into congregational life can happen in several ways such as having a new member service in church, a reception after the service where the new member is the guest of honor, getting them involved in existing groups, getting them enrolled in small groups for Bible study and fellowship, or find roles and tasks for them to do around the church.³⁰

The final piece of advice is whatever you do, do it well for the glory of God. Everyone, not just millennials, knows when something is done poorly. No one wants to be a part of something that is done poorly. Therefore, support the teachers so they can teach with excellence. Enable the school to do its best. Run the strategic meeting with purpose and care. Host each prospect event as the best one ever. Do worship well, especially when prospects are there. Preach by having the Gospel predominate. Encourage the musicians to use their skills to God’s glory. Teach BIC and then revamp it to make it better each time. Find a place in the congregation for the new member with care and love. Finally, pray for the ministry being done at your church. All these things are not done for our glory, but God’s glory as Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— even as I try

²⁸ School of Outreach, 167.

²⁹ Valleskey, *Outreach and Our Lutheran Elementary Schools and Pre-schools*, 27

³⁰ School of Outreach, 24.

to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.”

CONCLUSION

Even though the school’s original purpose was not to evangelize unbelievers, there is a phenomenon happening in many of our WELS preschools where de-churched, millennial parents are enrolling their children in WELS preschools. God is blessing our Synod’s outreach effort by having prospects come to us, instead of us going to them. As with anything God has given us, we are charged to manage it to the best of our abilities.

I want to say thank you to all the pastors, principals, and chairmen of Board of Education I interviewed. Because of their information, it has given me a general picture of how WELS churches are using their preschools in evangelizing. It has helped me understand what to emulate and what to avoid. Hopefully the strategic plan example shows how an intentional plan can make sure evangelizing does happen by holding those involved accountable. Hopefully the strategic plan example also shows how the emphasis does not need to be on school staff, but could be on the congregation itself as it carries out Jesus’s great commission.

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Appendix A

Statistics for WELS ECM 2016-2017

Certainly all the blessings that come from the efforts to share the gospel with young children and their families is the work of the Holy Spirit. The following stats are gathered to help us recognize and thank God for the blessings he has provided and also to help us determine areas of focus as we serve young children and their families.

- Lutheran schools and early childhood ministries have operated in the WELS for over 150 years.
- 405 (**202 part of an LES, 203 stand-alone**) Early Childhood Ministries. 193 also report having a childcare.
- 10,952 children enrolled

Year	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
	9567	9823	9600	10,019	10,717	10,423	10,694	10,595	10,911	10,952

- Enrollment by age:
 - Infants 289
 - One year olds 364
 - Two year olds 664
 - Three year olds 3844
 - Four year olds 5105
 - Five year olds 576
 - Over 5 year olds 110

- Over 500 congregations support an ECM (There are 1270 WELS congregations)
- In 2016, 10 congregations contacted CLS considering opening a new ECM, 17 considering expanding or revitalizing an ECM.
- 72 congregations have reported a Mommy and Me program.
- WELS has early childhood ministries in 30 states plus Antigua, St. Lucia, and Grenada
- In 2015-2016, of those who had a connection with an ECM:
 - 297 children were baptized
 - 44 adults were baptized
 - 274 adults were confirmed and
 - 605 adults attended a Bible Information Class

Enrollment by District

Birth-K4, Stand alone and with LES both

WELS District	ECM Students	Number of ECM
<i>Arizona-California</i>	590	22
<i>Dakota-Montana</i>	245	11
<i>Michigan</i>	950	41
<i>Minnesota</i>	1480	61
<i>Nebraska</i>	750	27
<i>North Atlantic</i>	125	5
<i>Northern Wisconsin</i>	1472	54
<i>Pacific Northwest</i>	461	15
<i>South Atlantic</i>	1140	32
<i>South Central</i>	242	7
<i>Southeastern Wisconsin</i>	2296	76
<i>Western Wisconsin</i>	1201	53
<i>Largest</i>	158	
<i>Average</i>	27	

Enrollment/Church Membership Composition

WELS Member from Governing Congregation(s)	WELS Member from Other WELS/ELS Congregations	Members of Other Christian Congregations	Non-Christian	No Church Affiliation or Membership (Mission Prospects)
2,650 (24.20%)	658 (6.01%)	4,548(41.53%)	389 (3.55%)	2,707 (24.72%)

Appendix B



WELS School Statistics 2016-17

These statistics are a snapshot of the WELS school system. They represent information gathered with an online form completed by school personnel. The statistics are only as accurate as the information that was reported. In some instances, data from previous year was used for schools that failed to complete the statistics form for 2016. (Please note that in previous years, multi-site schools were counted as multiple schools. They are now counted as one unit.)

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School Type	Number of Schools	Students Enrolled	Avg Enrolled per School
Early Childhood Ministries (ECM)	392 201 part of LES 191 free standing	10,754	27.4 largest- 158 smallest-1
Lutheran Elementary Schools (LES)	301	24,335	80.8 largest- 734 smallest-2
Lutheran High Schools (LHS)	25	5,320	212.8 largest- 780 smallest-3
Preparatory High Schools (PHS)	2	645	322.5 largest- 427 smallest- 218
WELS SCHOOL SYSTEM TOTALS	519	41,054	

ENROLLMENTS BY DISTRICT

WELS Districts	ECM	# schools	LES	# schools	LHS	# schools	LPS	MLS
Arizona-California	590	21	1,468	20	341	4	N/C	N/C
Dakota-Montana	245	11	331	5	130	1	N/C	N/C
Michigan	913	39	1,723	38	183	2	N/C	N/C
Minnesota	1,414	59	2,589	36	739	3	N/C	N/C
Nebraska	750	27	737	16	150	2	N/C	N/C
North Atlantic	125	5	135	2	0	0	N/C	N/C
Northern Wisconsin	1,448	53	3,910	45	1,091	3	N/C	N/C
Pacific Northwest	461	15	563	9	91	1	N/C	N/C
South Atlantic	1,083	28	1,519	16	221	1	N/C	N/C
South Central	242	7	357	7	3	1	N/C	N/C
Southeastern Wisconsin	2,296	76	7,631	62	1,676	4	N/C	N/C
Western Wisconsin	1,187	51	3,620	45	695	3	N/C	N/C
Totals:	10,754	392	24,583	301	5,320	25		

International Students <i>(Number already included in the total above.)</i>	0	0	0	0	435	21	8	14	

*N/C – This statistic was not collected from PHS

STUDENT ENROLLMENT GROWTH / DECLINE – 10 YEARS

School Type	2007 2008	2008 2009	2009 2010	2010 2011	2011 2012	2012 2013	2013 2014	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017
ECM	9,567	9,823	9,600	10,019	10,717	10,423	10,694	10,595	10,911	10,754
LES	25,712	25,289	24,597	24,300	24,644	24,254	24,245	24,453	24,410	24,335
LHS	5,847	5,816	5,510	5,577	5,303	5,123	5,141	5,093	5,174	5,320
PHS	554	529	558	558	583	668	682	675	643	645

LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GROUPINGS BY K-8 ENROLLMENT

Enrollment Range	0-50 Students	51-100 Students	101-150 Students	151-200 Students	201-250 Students	251-300+ Students
Schools That Size	122 (38.85%) Smallest-2	114 (36.31%)	40 (12.74%)	25 (7.96%)	9 (2.87%)	4 (1.27%) Largest-734

LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL GROUPINGS BY ENROLLMENT (PHS NOT INCLUDED)

Enrollment Range	0-99 Students	100-199 Students	200-299 Students	300-399 Students	400-499 Students	500+ Students
Schools That Size	9 (36.00%) Smallest-3	6 (24.00%)	4 (16.00%)	1 (4.00%)	3 (12.00%)	2 (8.00%) Largest-780

ENROLLMENT / CHURCH MEMBERSHIP COMPOSITION

School Type	WELS Member from Governing Congregation(s)	WELS Member from Other WELS/ELS Congregations	Members of Other Christian Congregations	NonChristian	No Church Affiliation or Membership (Mission Prospects)
ECM	2,631 (24.47%)	644 (5.99%)	4,434 (41.23%)	386 (3.59%)	2,659 (24.73%)
LES	15,238 (62.62%)	1,904 (7.82%)	4,723 (19.41%)	225 (0.92%)	2,245 (9.23%)
LHS Domestic	3,729 (76.34%)	149 (3.05%)	803 (16.44%)	44 (0.90%)	160 (3.28%)
LHS International	57 (13.10%)	26 (5.98%)	44 (10.11%)	31 (7.13%)	277 (63.68%)

PHS Domestic	623 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
PHS International	9 (40.91%)	0 (0.00%)	5 (22.73%)	0 (0.00%)	8 (36.36%)

COST PER STUDENT AND TUITION CHARGED

School Type	Average Cost Per Student	Average Tuition Charged Per Student	# Schools Charging Tuition
ECM	Tuition covers expenses: 231 no - 175 yes	See ECM Tuition Below	359
			349
			361
LES	\$5,026 high \$24,500 - low \$300	\$1,772 Members of Governing WELS Congregation \$2,679 Members of other WELS/ELS Congregations \$3,286 Non-WELS Members	234
			247
			269
LHS	\$10,295 high \$17,370 - low \$300	\$6,089 Members of Governing WELS Congregation \$7,026 Members of other WELS/ELS Congregations \$7,468 Non-WELS Members	25
			25
			25

ECM AVERAGE MONTHLY TUITION CHARGED BY SESSION TYPE

		Members of Governing WELS Congregation	Members of Other WELS/ELS Congregations	Non-WELS members
2 days per week	Full Day Session	\$335.29	\$325.83	\$339.51
	Half Day Session	\$173.23	\$164.16	\$178.96
3 days per week	Full Day Session	\$394.29	\$381.77	\$398.36
	Half Day Session	\$225.29	\$220.33	\$235.08
4 days per week	Full Day Session	\$413.67	\$441.06	\$443.80
	Half Day Session	\$223.35	\$224.82	\$232.01
5 days per week	Full Day Session	\$535.53	\$547.95	\$631.45
	Half Day Session	\$347.86	\$342.31	\$382.34

NUMBER OF CALLED TEACHERS CURRENTLY SERVING

ECM	LES	LHS	Total
423	1,805	477	2,705

Number of forms not returned: ECM – 64 (45 free standing); LES – 26

APPENDIX C

John Schwartz
Senior Thesis Interview Questions

Interviewer: John M. Schwartz
___/___/2016

Date:

Interviewee: _____ Positions: _____
service: _____

Years of

“It is the intent of the interviewer to use the words of the interviewee in the kindest possible way. The interviewer will send a copy of his paper to each interviewee before public publication to make sure their supplied content has their permission to be published.”

1. What is the demographic of the families who are enrolling their children into your school?
What are the ages of the parents and their children?

Are they members or nonmembers?

Are they churched or unchurched?

Do they have a church background at all?

2. Do you have a mission statement for your school?

What is the mission of your school?

3. Does the school have a mission to the parents? If so, what is that mission?

4. A/D The school is a part of the congregation's mission?

5. What tactics are currently in place that shows the school is a part of the congregation's mission?

What role would you want the church to have in the school?

6. Does the church consider nonmember school families as prospect to whom they can evangelize?
7. If so, is there a formal strategy in place to connect those nonmember school families from school to church? What strategy is in place and who is involved in carrying out that plan? (Who came up with the plan? If there is no plan, why is there not?)
8. What would you tweak or change to make the above plan better, or what strategy would you have to connect nonmember school families to your church?
9. How many/percentage of nonmember families from the school become members after 1,2,3,5,8 years?
10. What do you see as the key factor(s) in bringing in nonmember school families into church?
11. Who do you see as the key person in bringing in nonmember school families into church?

APPENDIX D

Strategic Planning Meeting for Evangelizing in the Preschool

Devotion

Matching Mentors

Prospect Family A

Prospect Family B

Prospect Family C

Prospect Family D

Prospect Family E

Prospect Family F

Prospect Family G

Pastor Opportunities

Pastor Doing...	Time Duration	Day
Example Activity	7:00 am-7:30 am	Monday, Wednesday, Friday

Prospect Events

Suggest Date	Suggested Event	Suggested Location

Advertising BIC

BIC	Advertise #1	Advertise #2	Advertise #3	Advertise #4	Advertise #5
Fall Date					
Winter Date					
Spring Date					

This year, Pastor _____ will revise Lesson _____.

APPENDIX E

Experience	Time frame	Goal
Preschool Tour	February-July	Meet the director; signup for school.
Orientation Night	August	Meet the staff, the pastor
Party: Fall/Halloween	October	Invite to Fall Festival
Worship: Fall Festival	November	First church event
Adult Instruction Class (Fall)	November	Enroll any visitors from Fall Festival
Party: Christmas	December	Invite to Christmas Eve
Worship: Christmas Eve	December 24	Church event, nothing to do with kids
Adult Instruction Class (Winter)	January	Enroll any visitors from Christmas Eve
Party: Easter	Before Easter	Invite to Easter Sunday
Worship: Easter Sunday	Easter	Big push church event
Adult Instruction Class (Spring)	April/May	Enroll any visitors from Easter
Party: End of Year	End of May	Invite to summer camps, final L/G message to everyone
Follow-up Visits	June-Aug	Home visits with any prospects not returning to program in the fall