



# OUTREACH STRATEGIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD MINISTRY

WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools

*We will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the  
LORD, his power, and the  
wonders he has done.*

Psalm 78:4

# Outreach Strategies for Early Childhood Ministry

*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 28:19



When considering the Great Commission, we often think of missionaries far from home in countries and cultures vastly different from our own.

For several years, WELS has been quietly doing mission work in a far different setting than pictured above. WELS congregations operate over 400 early childhood ministries (ECM) such as preschools and childcare centers in 36 states plus Antigua, St. Lucia, and Grenada. In these preschools and childcare centers over 500 WELS ECM teachers and directors share the love of Jesus with over 10,000 children and their families every day. Many of these schools have been formed to intentionally reach out to their community with the Gospel. We asked these missionaries to share their work and ideas with us. Our intention was to gather and share outreach strategies with our early childhood ministries so they might share the Gospel more effectively.

The results of the survey were both inspiring and for the most part, surprisingly simple. We often feel we need a clever plan or ingenious program but our findings showed quite the opposite. Most of the strategies fit under three significant categories.

1. **Committed to the Word:** First and most importantly an outreach ministry has a congregation and staff that are deeply committed to being in the Word and have an intentional outreach focus. These two concepts naturally go hand in hand. The more we are students of the Word, the more the Holy Spirit works a stronger faith in our hearts and our eagerness to share the Good News becomes something we do as a natural fruit of that faith.

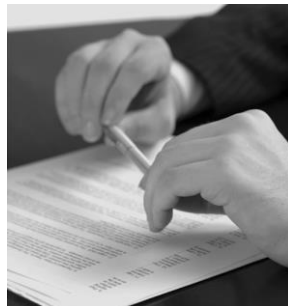
2. **Relationships:** Realtors often talk about location, location, location. While location of our schools is important, even more important are relationships, relationships, relationships. It takes time and effort and is one of the keys to outreach. It is crucial to have a purposeful plan to get to know not just the children, but the families and the communities we serve. It is most often as simple as taking the time to have frequent and meaningful conversations.

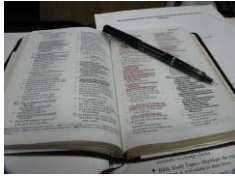
3. **The Pastor's Role:** The third concept that appeared over and over was the pastor's involvement in the school. This involvement was not in administrative tasks but rather that the pastor is intentionally available on a regular basis to build relationships with families in a friendly, natural way. They greet the families as they drop off or pick up their children each day.

The pastor visits the classroom from time to time and reads a story or shares a Bible story. The pastor makes a home visit on families just to get to know them and find out how the school is meeting the needs of their child and their family. “There is so much ministry we can do when we walk out of our office and talk to parents and teachers.” (Pastor Matt Brown, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Clarksville, TN)

As you look over the list, we have provided a simple key that might help you to sort out some of the ideas listed. We would encourage you to go through this list with your staff, your director, your principal (where applicable) and your pastor. We encourage you to be honest and bold for the sake of the Gospel with which we are entrusted. Hopefully you will find some strategies that will present a new concept you can either use or adapt for your ministry. We have grouped the suggestions received into the three categories listed above.

- Key: A. We are already using this strategy or something similar.
- B. We are using this strategy but it needs some fine tuning.
- C. We need to consider this strategy.
- D. We are planning to implement this strategy.





## Part One: Committed to the Word

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*  
2 Peter 3:18

An outreach ministry has a congregation and staff that are committed to being in the Word and have a united outreach focus (which naturally results from being rooted in the Word).

Being a constant student of the Word is imperative when we seek to share the Gospel. The Holy Spirit through faith compels us to share this Gospel message. It is easy to slip into the busy-ness of what we do and neglect our most important resource, the Word. When a congregation makes Bible study one of their most important focuses, the congregation is growing in love and faith for their Savior and will naturally encourage, support and share in the spreading of the message of the Gospel. Following is a list of suggestions that fit under this theme.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Our congregation is deeply committed to studying and growing in the Word.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Our faculty and staff are deeply committed to studying and growing in the Word.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Our congregation has a clear Mission and Vision statement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Our ECM has a clear Mission and Vision statement.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The members of our congregation are committed to the mission of sharing the Word and have a spirit of outreach that is intentional.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Our church and school work together in this mission.

Unity of mission and coordination of efforts is crucial to outreach. (One person summed it up by saying, “Anything less will bring people to the door, but will not invite them inside.”)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Our staff is involved in our congregation as a member, not just a member of the staff.

Being an integral part of the congregational life naturally helps to bring people not just to church, but to a congregation that can support and encourage one another in faith.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Our congregation has an evangelism committee that makes phone calls and/or home visits on new families to the school.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Our staff and congregation view the school as a ministry not just to the children in the classroom or center but to the whole family.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. The name of the school or center clearly reflects that the facility is connected to a church.

It is important to know your area and community when considering this concept. The intent is to communicate that you are a Christian organization available to serve both the educational and spiritual needs of the children and their families.

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. Our congregation/ECM has a communication/promotion committee that works to develop interrelated logos, identity marketing, brochures, printed balloons for events, ads for the local newspaper, technology use, etc.

It is helpful to have a group for which this is their primary focus. Seek out those in your congregation that may have marketing expertise that can assist in using your resources most effectively. (Contact the Commission on Lutheran Schools [CLS] for more information regarding promotional materials.)

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. Home visits include a discussion about the purpose of the school and the basics about faith in Jesus.

Consider including a brief overview about Jesus to be presented to the child with the parents present.

\_\_\_\_\_ 13. Christ Light lessons are provided to the parents.

Children can be natural witnesses to their families. Providing parents with the copies of the Christ Light lessons provides a great opportunity for the children to share what they learned. Take a few minutes at the home visit or first open house to go over the sheets and the different ways that the parents can use them. (Hints as simple as reading the story aloud to the child at bedtime may seem obvious to the teacher but not the parent.)

\_\_\_\_\_ 14. Our congregation uses *Faith Stepping Stones* with families of the congregation and ECM. (Contact Dan Nommensen, WLCFS, at 888-685-9522 for information.)



## Part Two: Relationships

*Love each other as I have loved you.*

John 15:12

Relationships, relationships, relationships. Building relationships with the families we serve takes time and effort but is one of the keys to outreach.

Christ so clearly modeled the importance of relationship building by his interaction with his disciples, the people in the crowds, his friendships with people like Mary, Martha and Lazarus and his words from the cross to his mother, Mary and his disciple, John. Relationship building is critical to our ability to share the Gospel. An authentic, caring relationship with the families we serve provides the opportunity to share Christ's message of grace with both the children and their families.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Our early childhood ministry has a clearly written and implemented harvest strategy.

Each day families come to our center and our goal is to share the gospel with them. We invite them to events and to worship. A harvest strategy provides an intentional plan to be proactive and prepared for the opportunities that are provided throughout the year to build relationships with each family.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Our principal or director makes a home visit with a family when they first inquire about the school/center.

A home visit by the principal/director before a family has enrolled lays the foundation and begins to establish a warm, caring relationship. In this visit the principal/director can share the mission of the school, the strengths of the school, and provide the parents an opportunity to share their child's strengths and goals for their child. (Contact the Commission on Lutheran Schools for copies of the book *Positioning Lutheran Schools for Outreach* by Jim Brandt and Steve Granberg)

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Home visits are made by the classroom teacher.

Home visits by the classroom teacher are a long standing tradition in most of our Lutheran elementary schools and early childhood ministries. The blessings of laying the foundation of the relationship one on one with the families impacts the entire school year.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. The parents and children are invited to visit the classroom with the teacher before the school year begins.

This helps to make the child and the parent feel more comfortable in the school surroundings.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Our ECM has a high quality program.

It has been said that if we are putting Jesus name on what we are doing, it can be no less than our best. A high quality program can draw people to the school. High quality also naturally encourages advertising by word of mouth. A parent sharing their enthusiasm with other parents is a highly effective and cost-free form of advertisement. The program should include the following:

- A. A high quality, research based curriculum
- B. Sound, Biblical based discipline and management.
- C. Secure/safe environment and procedures.
- D. Opportunities and encouragement for all staff for professional and spiritual growth including classes and conferences that pertain to early childhood education.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Our ECM has completed the Self-Study in *Building Blocks*.

(Contact the Commission on Lutheran Schools for more information.)

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Our ECM is state licensed.

The process of state licensure seeks to ensure a quality program for early childhood. The standards set by state licensure should be the minimum standards by which our centers operate. Having state licensure can provide parents with confidence in the program.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Our ECM is accredited.

The purpose of accreditation is evaluation and improvement of a school or center's program. The process involves significant and systematic analysis of the current program. For more information on accreditation, contact the Commission on Lutheran Schools or the accreditation program in your state. Again, this can provide a confidence in those in the community that the program is high quality.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Our principal or director carefully balances their time with the children, office tasks, and parent relationships.

Having a specific plan helps to avoid neglecting any of the above responsibilities.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. Our ECM advertises to the community and seeks ways to be a part of the community.

Consider the following:

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Have yearly open houses and/or round-ups that give the community

opportunity to see your program in action.

\_\_\_\_\_ B. Invite the community to any special events at the school such as plays, concerts, special worship services, a live Nativity at Christmas, carnivals, speakers, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_ C. Have a float in a local parade or a booth at community events or fairs.

\_\_\_\_\_ D. Have high quality promotional materials available for distribution at any of the above events. (Brochures, videos, etc.) High quality tells at first glance that what you are doing is important and done well. (Contact the Commission on Lutheran Schools for more information regarding promotional materials.)

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. Our ECM seeks to build a family atmosphere with all the school families.

Intentionally pursue ways to build the relationship between the elementary school parents and the EC parents.

\_\_\_\_\_ A. Pair new families with LES families. The LES families can invite them to special events, join with them at fellowships, set up play dates, etc. Connecting them with one family or parent that they recognize can help those who are new to feel more welcome and part of the school family.

\_\_\_\_\_ B. Organize Family nights for the church and school families together. The members of the congregation and families of the ECM join for an afternoon or evening of activities or have a speaker on parent or school related topics. Consider serving a meal for busy families. Provide childcare when necessary.

Note: One school does a game night twice a year for the entire family. School families and the entire congregation are invited. It is an evening of board games and/or outside games (volleyball, croquet, etc.) that the whole family can enjoy.

\_\_\_\_\_ C. Organize parent nights with child care and refreshments. The pastor or principal can lead a Bible study and include a lesson on parenting topics.

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. Our ECM provides the parents with opportunities to be involved.

\_\_\_\_\_ A. Welcome and encourage parent volunteers in the classroom or chaperoning field trips. This is a great time for them to see the program and to get to know you better.

\_\_\_\_\_ B. Host parent forums where parents can come with questions and/or EC staff generates questions that can be discussed in small groups. The meeting would include a devotion or short Bible study. Provide childcare.



\_\_\_\_\_ C. Provide parents with information regarding community resources for children and families. Occasional mention of resources in weekly letters can be used. One school keeps a binder with brochures and contact information for various community organizations.

\_\_\_\_\_ 13. Our ECM seeks out ways to connect the ECM with the Lutheran elementary school (when applicable).

Invite the older students to help with seasonal projects, EC students can attend chapel with an older student as their Chapel Buddy, EC students participate in the Children's Christmas service, joint field trips with the Kindergarten, joint skit/plays/concerts with the Kindergarten, etc. These activities bring students and families together and provide another opportunity for relationship building.

\_\_\_\_\_ 14. Our ECM celebrates special days for parents, grandparents, guardians

\_\_\_\_\_ A. Donuts for Dads/Grandfathers or Muffins for Moms/Grandmothers. Invite the parents and/or grandparents to a special snack time with their children. Include a special story or Bible story time with the activity.

\_\_\_\_\_ B. Craft days with parents or grandparents. Invite the parents or grandparents to help with a special craft or project that they can work on with their child.

\_\_\_\_\_ C. Consider including chapel with either of the suggestions listed above so that parents can attend worship with their child. A chapel service can seem less overwhelming to a new family and can give them a taste of what worship is like at your congregation.

\_\_\_\_\_ D. One school has quarterly parent/child activities for their classroom or a joint activity with Kindergarten. Their activities include the following themes:

*"Fall in Love with Books"* They provide refreshments, information and book lists from the local library, a story teller, and simple book related activities. The pastor shares a devotion focusing on the blessings of reading and especially the blessing of being able to read the Word.

*"O Come, Emmanuel"* The parents and children make ornaments for a school Christmas tree. They also make a card to send to missionaries. The pastor shares a devotion on Advent including the Advent wreath and suggestions for family devotions. Time to sing carols is part of the devotion.

*"Parents-The First and Best Teacher"* This meeting provides parents with encouragement for appropriate activities that stimulate and develop

learning and the love of learning in their child. Included could be the importance of reading aloud to children, information on how children learn through play, suggestions for toys that encourage learning, etc. Include some suggestions for children's Bibles that are appropriate for the age of their child.

*"Swap Night"* Parents share their favorite 30 minute meals, bring outgrown clothes to swap, etc. Included in the get-together are suggestions for family devotion books that are appropriate for the age of the children.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Our principal, director, teachers and staff intentionally find the time for lots of conversation and listening with the families in the ECM.

Through that relationship you can identify the "de-churched" (those who have identified a church home but seem sporadic in their attendance at that church) or those who are un-churched.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Our faculty and staff make a conscious effort to personally invite your EC families to church and/or Bible study.

Pray for the Lord to provide the opportunity and then keep your eyes open to act on that opportunity.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Our ECM and congregation include all school families in the data base of the church so the families receive all church related publications and invitations such as newsletters, information about synod news, mission work, etc.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Our ECM faculty makes a point of highlighting church activities and worship/Bible study details in the weekly school newsletters.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. When a school family faces a crisis or challenge, our ECM faculty and staff provide appropriate support and encouragement.

The faculty and staff may refer the family to lay evangelists, the pastor or Christian counseling. When appropriate, finding practical support such as meals, transportation to school for the children and child care can be a demonstration of the love and care for all families.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Our ECM faculty knows their community and its needs and seeks to meet the needs of the families they serve reflecting Christ's love.

One congregation provides suppers for the immigrants in the area. Several congregations provide English Language classes for their community.

\_\_\_\_\_ 21. Our students in the ECM sing in church.

Consider hosting a simple brunch or refreshments for the families of the children. This gives the school families and the congregation an opportunity to get to know each other and feel welcome.

\_\_\_\_\_ 22. Our ECM intentionally seeks to get to know the community by being aware of local issues. (Consider serving on local ECE boards and committees.)





## Part Three: The Pastor and Principal's Role

*Serve one another in love.*  
Galatians 5:13

Pastor and principal involvement: The pastor and principal (if connected with an LES) are intentionally available on a regular basis to build relationships with families in a friendly, natural way.

While this list may be shorter than the others, it is by no means less important. It really ties in with the second section on building relationships. This section focuses on the pastor (and principal) intentionally being available and visible as much as possible so that the families can get to know him. This relationship can help open the door to sharing the Gospel with the children and their families.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Our pastor and principal understands his vital role in the ECM as a mission field within the congregation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Our pastor and principal look for ways to serve the faculty, the families and the children spiritually.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Our pastor and/or principal greet the children and parents in the morning and/or afternoon as often as possible.

It is a simple way to establish a relationship in an authentic way.

At one center, the pastor works from the front desk of the ECM 1-2 days each week. This provides many opportunities for the pastor to interact with the families.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Our pastor makes a home visit with each family.

A simple conversation starting with questions such as “How are we doing?” or “What has your child learned?” can naturally lead to discussions about baptism and spiritual matters. The DVD “Evangelism Toolbox” from the WELS Commission on Evangelism has an entire DVD on early childhood ministry. Contact the WELS Commission on Evangelism or Northwestern Publishing House for more information.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Our pastor makes a brief presentation during the orientation night.

This presentation can include the connection between the church and preschool, opportunities to get to know more about the church teachings and activities of the congregation.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Our pastor provides a series of Bible information classes that look at some of the basic teachings of the Bible. The parents can then have the option to continue on in a more in-depth Bible information class.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Our pastor and/or principal have a Bible study specifically for the EC parents.

One option might be the materials that are available to have parent Bible lessons that coordinate with Christ Light.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Our pastor occasionally teaches the Bible lesson to the children.

The children get to know the pastor and see him as “their pastor”. The pastor has the opportunity to get to know the children.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Our pastor and principal attend special events hosted by the ECM.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. Our pastor functions as a conduit between the ECM and the congregation.

Our pastor seeks to understand how the congregation and leadership view the ECM.

Our pastor seeks to understand how the ECM views the congregation.

Our pastor seeks to find ways to build and encourage that understanding.

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. Our pastor shares ECM anecdotal stories with leadership and members of the congregation. He invites them to volunteer or support the ECM in other ways.

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. Our pastor is an advocate for the staff and ministry. He seeks to understand the challenges of licensing, teaching, staffing and general administration of the ministry.

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May the Lord bless our efforts as we seek to carry out his work and will with the families he brings to us.

May the Holy Spirit work faith in the hearts of people so that we can share eternity with those we serve in our communities, our congregations, our schools, and our early childhood ministries.

**To Him be the Glory!**

## Part Four: Plan of Action

Use the chart below to help develop a plan to incorporate some of these strategies.

### Short Term Goals

In order of priority list three to five strategies that our ministry plans to incorporate within the next year and the target dates.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Long Term Goals

In order of priority list three to five strategies that our ministry plans to incorporate within the next five years and the target dates.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_