

telling the next generation

Utilizing our schools for outreach

Things We've Learned...

Following are some things we've learned from many of the congregations/schools/early childhood ministries that have attended a Telling the Next Generation workshop. We would encourage you to consider these as you move forward in considering ways to connect families with the Means of Grace. Use what works or adapt these as they fit your context.

May the Lord bless your efforts!

Relationships

Recognizing that this may seem like obvious, relationship building something that needs intentional focus. It's important to have a plan and at the same time be authentic and sincere. The key is caring about the children and families that are served. As we consider the grace the Lord has showered on us, we look to respond by reflecting that grace to those around us. Each individual, each soul is important.

One of the key thoughts we hear over and over is that it's not about a specific strategy or program.

- "We don't have a blanket strategy that is one-size-fits-all. We make a concerted effort to build relationships with each individual and family who enrolls their child."
- "We celebrate that the children enrolled are all brought to know Jesus as their Savior by the work of the Holy Spirit though the Word that we share with them every day."
- The children hear the Word every day. One congregation shared, "We focus on building relationships with the parents."
- "It's the relationship/heart connection that matters most. When our non-member/unchurched families feel/experience/hear our care, there's a better chance they will become curious about what matters to us and what happens within our ministry. There is no 'magic formula' to 'bring 'em in.'. It's simply being present with individual souls. Knowing names, knowing family situations, knowing blessings and challenges that each individual faces, being curious, being warm, being sincere. Letting family member know they are seen and loved by us, and they are seen and loved by their Savior."
- "Hallway ministry—introducing parents to each other at pick up and drop off."

Everyone Has a Role

- Summer playdates in our classrooms, prior to the school year. Member and non-member families get to meet each other and get familiar with the environment.
- The more people (members, staff, leaders) who know the plan (your harvest strategy) and why this plan exists, the more likely it is that you will find blessings in your efforts.
- Consider it as giving anyone and everyone an opportunity to be a part of the mission work your congregation is doing through your school/early childhood ministry. You have a mission field walking through your doors each day!
- Identifying individual gifts in others and then extending a personal, specific invitation for them to serve in a particular way can be far more successful than a group/blanket invitation.
- Coordinate your efforts with other ministry teams such as the evangelism team, the greeters for worship, the leadership team, etc.
- Be sure to prepare your congregation for visitors for Sunday morning. Share with them that they may have an opportunity to welcome people to worship. Talk about welcoming practices such as inviting them to sit in their pew, assisting them with the worship materials, sharing where things are such as a parent's room, restrooms, etc.

Prospect List Management

Purpose: Organizing and using the information received when a family inquires about your school/ECM or enrolls. When people inquire about your school/ECM or attend an event, what do you do with that information? It's critical to have a system in place that continues to reach out and connect with those contacts. It's important to consider the following:

- Identify someone as the keeper of the data. Use a purchased system, a spreadsheet, or whatever system works best for your team.
- Create a written plan for the kinds of follow-up that will take place including a phone call to check in, email or other means of invitation for congregation and school events, seasonal cards/invitations, etc.
- What kind of ongoing communication takes place and who will send it?
- Include a team for these efforts. Some people are great at phone calls, home visits. Some are great at email/cards. Empower people specific to their gifts and availability. Include the pastor and principal/director but don't leave it just to them.

Sharing the Mission

Our schools/ECMs have at their core, sharing the gospel with those they serve. Our schools/ECMs often have families from the community who enroll their children. They may have a variety of reasons for considering your school/ECM. Often families come because they've heard you have a quality program/school and a good reputation in the community. They don't always enroll because they are seeking spiritual training for their child. We want families to know who we are and what we believe and teach. Following are a few ways that schools/ECMs have done so.

- Pre-Enrollment
 - Meet with pastor and principal/director to learn more about the religious identity of the school
 - 90-minute meeting scheduled with 1-4 parents
 - Share God's Great Exchange and talk sticky points related to a family's current religious viewpoint
 - Establishes purpose of the school/ECM and the desired outcome of a closer relationship with Jesus
- Highlight the purpose of your school during first contacts with prospective parents. Feature it during your school building tour. Include a tour of the church and an introduction to the pastor.
- Back to School Night: The idea is to approach what would normally be a full Bible Information Class in steps rather than asking parents to attend a 12-18 week class. This walks along with them in smaller steps rather than a commitment that could be overwhelming.
 - The pastor/principal share a brief summary of the basic teachings of the Bible as we teach.
 - The families are invited to an overview class (one-time event) that goes into a bit more depth.
 - This one-time class includes an invitation to a short series (2-4 meetings) that goes into more depth.
 - The families are invited to continue and complete a path to membership series.
- One congregation provides a four session Bible Information Class. The classes are on sin, grace, faith, and works. Once they complete the course, they have the option of continuing the course to pursue membership. Members are encouraged to sign up for at least the first 4 classes to integrate with school/ECM families. (For their first series, they had 4 new families and 15 member families.)
- Another congregation has a two-session class to explain the foundational truths that their children will be hearing in school. The pastor encourages and invites them to learn about their role as parents and the blessing of baptism.
 - The same congregation has four Sunday morning Devotional Services throughout the year in which the children sing in church and a brief sermonette is shared with the

families. It lasts less than 30 minutes but they've had a high percentage of families attend. Many stay for Sunday School.

- Shortly after school begins: Meeting with pastor and principal/director
 - This meeting is communicated as part of the enrollment process.
 - Shortly after the year begins, all new families are scheduled for a meeting with the pastor and principal/director
 - Pastor: He shares—Who we are. What we teach. We are here to serve and support your family.
 - Principal/Director: He/she shares practical/logistical information about the school/ECM.
- Fall home visit by the pastor
 - Several weeks after school/ECM starts, the pastor reaches out to each family to set a time for him to make a home visit.
 - The purpose/goal is simply
 - A friendly visit just to meet them
 - To ask how things are going. Ask how the first few weeks have been and if there is anything that would be helpful for our school/ECM to know to serve your family well.
 - To share ways that we can serve the family.
 - There isn't a specific agenda but rather just a way for the family to get to know the pastor and the pastor to get to know the family.

Pastor/Principal/Director Relationships

One of the goals of these three individuals is to get to know each family member and create a warm, welcoming culture. Following are ways that others have shared that are simple, natural/authentic ways to establish and build that culture.

- The pastor and principal/director meet/greet at drop-off and pick up. Having at least one of them present each day can be very beneficial.
- Each of them attends school/ECM events. The principal attends ECM events. The director attends LES events. The pastor attends as many of these as possible. Their role is to meet and greet people and help make everyone feel welcome.
- Regular pastoral presence and involvement with the families is vital to integrating new families into the school and church family.
- Determine procedures for the pastor and principal/director and staff to share information regarding spiritual needs for families.
 - Consider a Spiritual Life Survey. (A sample is provided at the end of this document.) It is important that when families complete the survey, that the information is reviewed and

a response is provided. It is important to have resources (materials, classes, etc.) set to go so that if someone wants more information about baptism, there is something to provide and someone is responsible to make sure they get that information as soon as possible.

- There is an intentional plan for the pastor/principal/director to get to know the names of all the family members. It is significant to everyone when they are referred to by name. It contributes significantly to the welcoming culture.
 - Some use family photos.
 - Some are good at just being present at events and conscientious about learning and retaining names.
- The pastor, principal, and director meet on a regular basis and review their ministry goals, both short term and long term.

Mentor Families

Being a new family at a school can be overwhelming and for some, a challenge to get to know others. This concept provides another family that can be their mentors to invite them to events, share upcoming calendar items, be the ones the new family can ask questions of. Offering to meet a new family at an event or in church and sit with them can make a big difference in the comfort level for some families.

- Families are carefully paired that may have children the same age and/or shared interests- something that connects them from the start.
- New families (member or non-member) are provided a host/mentor family.
- Host/mentor family intentionally reaches out to get to know the new family.
- Host/mentor family invites new family to events and offers to attend with them.
- Host/mentor family invites new family to church events, worship, Bible study, etc.
- Host/mentor family occasionally reaches out to see how the new family is doing and checking for any support they need, questions they have, etc.
- [Identify families](#) that represent the various facets of the school and provide ways for prospects to contact those families to learn more about the ECM/School ministry.

Cross-Ministry Events

Part of creating a culture of welcome is to find ways to connect the school/ECM families with the church, the church families with the school families, the member families and the non-member families.

The goal is to help families see that this is a congregation/school/ECM that can be a home for their family.

- School/ECM families are welcome, invited, and encouraged to attend congregational activities.
- Congregational members are invited, welcomed, and encouraged to attend school/ECM activities. Be sure to share with the congregational families that they get to be part of the group that welcomes guests into their church home for this event.
- Some activities are intentionally planned to include both groups. (EX. Family Game Night)
- Music, Mommies, and More style classes for 2s and 3s create opportunities for connection to the school and church family.

Family Support/Celebrations

We want all families to know that we care about them beyond the education we are providing for their child. We care about their families and want them to always feel welcome.

- Non-member families are provided the same support/celebration as for a congregational member
 - Cards at the time of the birth or adoption of a child.
 - Cards at the time of a significant event (Ex. New home)
 - Meals when a new baby is born/adopted
 - Meals when there is someone in the family has significant health issues
 - Cards at the time of the death of a family member

Communicating the Ministry to the Congregation

Congregations provide significant support for a school and early childhood ministry. It's important to share information about the school/ECM events, blessings, opportunities, and areas of focus. This helps them to see the ways that God is blessing their support for Christian education through the school/ECM. It's an opportunity to thank the congregation and also share ways that they can be included in the work.

- Consider a “WELS Connection” type of communication that can be shared after/before worship and on the website.
- Share encouraging ministry stories of children/families enrolled.
- Share positive stories of events of the school/ECM.
- Share areas of focus that the staff are addressing (Ex. Curriculum study)
- Staff members take turns as greeters for each of the worship services (Congregation members have an opportunity to see and get to know the staff.)
- Staff members view themselves as members of the congregation as well as staff of the ministry. (Ex. Attending congregational events whenever possible.)

Family Events/Resources

The purpose and goal of events is to build relationships within the school/ECM. They can also be opportunities for learning for the families and fun for the children.

- KEY: It is important that each event has an identified purpose and goal. Some possibilities are:
 - Relationship building. Who are you seeking to connect? Member school families and new families? Congregation families and school/ECM families? School/ECM families with leadership? Make that clear to all those involved in planning and carrying out the event.
 - Connection/invitation to a church event. Is there a special service coming that can be highlighted? Is there a new Bible class just for parents starting? Is there a new session of Mommies and Me starting soon that they can share? Is there a congregational event coming such as a special fellowship that you can invite them to?
 - Does the event highlight the culture and/or high quality of your school/ECM. (Academic Fairs for example.) Can you encourage school families to invite their families and friends or others from the community? If so, are you ready to welcome them and have a way to share information about your school/ECM with visitors?
- When planning parent nights on a given topic, consider asking the families what they are interested in. Gather a list of topics early in the year that parents have suggested and then plan the events accordingly.
- Family Game Night: This can be an enjoyable, relaxed afternoon or evening with simple planning that includes activities and a simple meal or refreshments.
 - This event can be as simple as a variety of board games, card games, bags, volleyball, etc.
 - This event could be indoor or outdoor (or both).
 - This can be a great opportunity for school/ECM families and congregational members to spend time together.
 - A simple meal or light refreshments can be included.

- Seasonal:
 - O Come, Emmanuel
 - This can be a family event with children and parents/guardians together.
 - Provide simple crafts such as ornament making or creating cards that can be sent to shut-ins, nursing homes, military, missionaries.
 - Close the event with a short devotion by the pastor/principal on what Advent is, a brief explanation of the advent wreath, and a carol sing.
 - A light meal or refreshments can be included.
- Book Nights—these are often for younger children but can include older children as assistants for the younger children.
 - Many schools include some variation on a literacy evening such as the following:
 - Bedtime stories-the teacher or a guest reader share a few stories read aloud.
 - This can be a theme night such as Seuss or other popular authors.
 - Can include a brief bedtime devotion and prayer. (This is a great way to model a devotion and bedtime prayers for families.)
 - Often everyone is invited to wear their favorite pajamas.
 - A light, bedtime snack can be included.
- *Forward In Christ* Parent Resources: Parent Conversations
 - www.forwardinchrist.net/parents
 - Downloadable and shareable articles for parents on a variety of topics.
 - Can be shared as a printed resource or link.
- [WELS Family Devotions](#) - A scripture reading, devotional message, and leveled questions for different aged children are features of these devotions. Three devotions are provided per week and there is even an audio recording of the devotion.
- Back to School Ice Cream Social
 - Provide an opportunity for families to meet each other after the first week or two of school
 - Teachers spend their time introducing people and fostering connections between the families. Teachers should NOT spend the night talking to each other. The focus is on building connections with and among the families
- Many schools/ECMs have summer camps for the community such as a soccer camp. One school does a basketball league for ages 5 through 12. It runs several weeks just prior to the enrollment season in their area. They make sure that their promotional banners are prominent and also that they get information about the upcoming enrollment.

Community Events

These events are a great way to let the community know about your ministry and to be a part of the community. It's important to have an intentional goal and plan.

- Determine the goal of your ministry’s participation in the event. Is it to get to know more organizations and members of the community? Is it to share information about your school/ECM? Is it to gather information from prospective families? Is it to be part of a community service project?
- Consider the event and any areas that may be great additions to the event. What could draw people to interact with your group. Often a simple table with school/ECM information doesn’t always draw attention.
 - One school set up a tent for nursing mothers during a large family event in the community. This was a new idea at this event that was well received.
 - Does someone in your congregation make amazing BBQ that would draw people? Or are there some great bakers who could provide something not offered?
 - Is there a children’s activity that no one else is doing that you could offer? Face-painting, games, etc.
- Once the goals are determined, create a plan so that those goals are met.
- After the event, be sure to follow-up with any new contacts.
- After the event, meet to assess how well the goals were met and any adaptation needed for future community events.
- Are there community service projects that your team can participate in? River clean-up? Food/clothing drives?

Communication

Most organizations will identify communication as an area they continue to work to improve. Communicating with families is vital for many reasons. We want families to be well-informed about their child while at their school/early childhood ministry. We strive to have a strong relationship where parents and teachers are working together in ways that are best for the child.

In addition, a strong communication plan provides opportunities to help all families feel welcome to events and congregational activities including worship and Bible study. Following is a list of communication suggestions.

- Church service times and dates are regularly included in newsletters. (One teacher shared that they were asked by a non-member if you had to be a member to attend church. We want everyone to know that all are welcome.)
- Families are encouraged to attend weekly chapel. Parents can sit with their child, or the child sit with their parents.
- Children are given their own Bible when they enroll.
- Send home church worship theme postcards every new sermon series theme with a handwritten note.

- Relationships are at the heart of everything. One congregation shared the following:
 - From the day we first meet parents who are inquiring about our preschool, we promote the idea that it is a “family package.” Preschool is great—but we also have Sunday School and worship each week. We also offer free pastoral counseling (which many parents actually use regularly.)
- Because of the emphasis on relationship-building, the director is often asked questions about loving discipline and even coping as a parent of a small child. She has many opportunities to bring the conversation back to Jesus and the Gospel in these counseling sessions.
- A formal marketing plan: This plan included updating/redesigning our website, social media pages, and classroom sites. Because of this plan, we’re putting biblical principles, bible passages, our mission statement & vision, examples of our school/church family sharing Christ’s love, our Christian values, and worship opportunities in front of our families’ eyes.

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

Psalm 78:4

Spiritual Life Survey

One early childhood ministry includes a Spiritual Life Survey in their enrollment forms. Their enrollment uses an online form. The following questions could be made into an online, fillable form or survey using tools such as Google Forms.

One of the things this director stressed is that they work to be ready to respond to the answers provided below. If a parent identifies that they are interested in learning more about baptism, they make sure that someone contacts that family as soon as possible. If they inquire about learning more about what their child is learning in school about God and the Bible, they reach out with an invitation.

- Are your children baptized?
 - Are you interested in learning more about baptism or having your children baptized?
- Do you attend church?
 - How frequently? (one week/month, twice/month, three times/month, every sunday, rarely, on holidays, etc.)
 - What is the name of your church?
- Do you read the Bible as a family?
- Do you pray as a family?
- Do you talk about God at home?
- Do you watch Bible videos at home?
- Do you listen to Christian songs at home?
- Are you interested in learning more about praying and reading the Bible at home with your family?
- Are you interested in learning more about what your children are being taught about God and the Bible?
- Are you interested in receiving communication from Divine Savior Church?