

INTENTIONAL EVANGELISM IN THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL

I taught in Lutheran schools for 25 years and am presently a Family Minister at my church. Following are the ways in which I implemented intentional outreach among the unchurched and member families that needed support and strengthening in active membership.

- 1) A home visit to all the students before school begins in the fall
 - a. Essential for beginning a personal relationship with the family
This takes time and mileage, I once traveled 100 miles in one day to visit my families in rural areas, three of the families were unchurched and it meant so much to them that I came to meet their family in their home.
 - b. Provides lots of information about family life, neighborhood, how far they travel to church, school, sometimes an indicator of income, needs, interests, gifts they can share, etc.
 - c. When parents refuse to have you come to the home (which can but rarely happened to me) that is also information about the family that can give you insights for the year to come

- 2) Weekly newsletter home
 - a. one pager – easy to read
 - b. Include brief comments about the Bible story of the week or the spiritual theme, what their child is learning spiritually that week. Include comments (again, brief) of how that applies to parents, adults.
Example: This week (preschool level) the children are learning about a man who wanted to be baptized. One of Jesus helpers explained to him that baptism is a way to become a child of God. I have asked your child to ask you if he/she is baptized and to share pictures or items from the baptism and tell about that day or if your child is not baptized talk about why they haven't been baptized. For those who are interested in learning more about baptism, please feel free to ask about it. You might want to meet with Pastor _____ and ask about baptizing your child. (In my school the children and parents had already met the Pastor by this time. And in a couple of cases, this resulted in the baptism of the adults as well.)

- 3) Pastoral presence in the school
 - a. A must! The pastor needs to be in the hallways in the morning, greeting and introducing himself, learning names of children and adults. The pastor can 'conveniently' be around at dismissal time when parents are standing in the hallway waiting for kids.
 - b. Pastors do chapel services so kids know them...invite parents to chapel
Let parents sit with kids in chapel if they want them to
 - c. This is tougher in an association school...but must be done! The pastors

could take turns, pastors can choose to have lunch with the kids a couple of times a month, come to games (even if their own kids aren't playing) ...the kids who know them love to see them and then the unchurched kids want to meet and get to know them too!

- d. A pastor who is present at the beginning of the day is available for personal prayer if there is a tragedy, illness, etc. announced (which usually comes to light at the beginning of the day when kids are dropped off) this can lead to permission for a pastoral visit in the home or hospital
 - e. If teachers approach pastors in August and ask them to work with you and make an effort to give the pastor names of unchurched and unbaptized families they will usually be delighted to do some of the above.
- 4) Schedule children to sing in church, not just the junior choir, but classrooms as well so all the kids get that experience. Parents come to hear the kids sing, meet the pastor and other people, sign a visitor card, etc. Teachers watch for and introduce school families to congregation members, think of households that may have something in common and introduce accordingly. Church members want to see these families and know they come to church.
 - 5) When a family signs a visitor card or even if they don't, (you have their address already) the pastor should call that week or the next week in their home. The kids know the pastor if the school has been doing # 3 above and will be excited that he has come and the parents are more welcoming because of that. Of course, a card or phone call should also be made by someone in the congregation. When you greet the parents, child at school the next week, tell them how wonderful it was to have them at worship, etc.
 - 6) Invite unchurched families to all events at the church with comments or information as to how the event is beneficial to them.
 - 7) The church and school together sponsor special events like Harvest Fests, Spring Picnics, that are designed for families with children and are inclusive of all ages, households (single, etc.). It is important that church and school families are included at the same event, so families don't just get to know the school families but people in the congregation as well.
 - 8) Parent's Night Out is one way to serve your unchurched families and get them into the building another way. Youth can do child care with one or two adults around and parents get free child care while they have a date night. This sends the message that the church cares about families.
 - 9) Parent teacher conference
 - a. Always begin with prayer.
 - b. After you have talked about progress, school concerns, ask parents if they have a church home or if they practice a faith life in their home. They will tell you because you are the teacher of their child and often they will tell you why.

If they don't have a church home, or are looking, or seem to not know what to do, have your churches brochure ready to hand out and sincerely invite them to worship. Mention an upcoming event and why their family would enjoy coming. Have flyers ready in the building to share with parents.

- 10) The school must have informal areas of welcome available where parents can sit or gather before and after school. Equip these areas with Christ-centered magazines, devotional materials appropriate for children and parents, such as Little Visits With Jesus or My Devotions, Focus on the Family, or Connections, or copies of articles from Home Base issues which can be downloaded online from LCMS. Create a check out library of books and videos for families, parenting, tracts about family challenges, so parents can take them home for free and bring them back when they are done. Often this opened doors for me as a teacher. A parent would ask me about something they read and that gave me a conversational opportunity to share my faith and why I worship and pray, etc. This means you need to be available to talk to parents after school and not rushing off to another activity or task. Jesus took time for those who were present with Him in the moment. Your school may need to talk about allowing more time after school for visiting with parents instead of going to faculty meeting or sports right away.
- 11) Purposely introduce strong church families in your classroom with the unchurched families that might be in the same neighborhood, have something in common by career or hobby, interest, etc. Listen for needs of your unchurched families and match them up with others who can help them like looking for classes at the Y, or need for a new mechanic, etc. Out reach means just that, reach out intentionally to serve needs which builds relationships of gratitude and opens the door for church families to share their faith. When unchurched families attend your church, they will already know others that care about them.
- 12) Practice creative worship in your classroom. When kids love worship they take it home with them, especially the little ones. My parents always told me that their kids 'sing around the house all the time now'. Parents love happy kids and will want to know more about where this happiness comes from.
- 13) In the spring, be sure the unchurched get special invitations to Vacation Bible School, Bible Camp, etc. Do this before school is out, so they connect it to the relationship they have with the school. Follow up in the summer with a phone call to see if they are registered, either with your VBS director or with the family themselves.
- 14) For the upper grades, encourage and lead your church students to invite the unchurched to their youth activities. Friendship evangelism is the most effective method.
- 15) Sponsor parenting classes, finance classes, and the like at your church and invite school families to attend. Provide free child care if possible. Learning

together builds relationships among the parents which leads to conversation which leads to faith sharing. Have Christian counseling info available for families in crisis.

- 16) Make up “Gospel Boxes” to send home with all the families throughout the school year. This is a plastic (Sterlite or Rubbermaid) box that holds a Bible, a Bible, a prayer book and or devotion book for appropriate ages of children in the home, maybe a candle in a small holder, materials for the child and parent to do together such as a word puzzle that they can do and keep. The family uses it for one or two weeks and sends it back to school returning the Bible, devotion book, etc. where you replenish it with the disposable materials and give it to the next family. This is to encourage family devotions in the home and often brings up questions as well that provide opportunities for faith conversations.
- 17) At Advent and Lent, send home seasonal activity ideas for families to do that share information about these seasons, Christian practices such as Advent wreaths and the like. When the children learn about these in school, they like to share them at home. Lead the children to teach their parents about these special times of year. You might have Advent day at school and the parents visit and make advent wreaths to take home. Explain Lent in your newsletter so unchurched parents know it is more than ‘giving something up for 6 weeks’. Send home special invitations to Advent and Lenten worship, Holy Week, and Easter activities for the unchurched. Sometimes they work on Sundays and helping them learn that they are midweek worship opportunities or other options can encourage them to attend.
- 17) Send home words to songs the kids learn at chapel or in your classroom so the whole family can sing them. Young children sing what they learn and God’s Word can make its way into the heart of an adult through them.
- 18) Display children’s art, writing, in the church as well as the school so parents come to know that the church and school are one, are interested in all the kids do, that they are interested in the whole child. This increases the congregation’s tie with the school as well and thus with new families.
- 19) Increase the family friendly activities your church does on Sunday and invite the unchurched families to be a part of that. Mother’s Day recognition, family ushering, Decade Birthday Day, Missionary visits, service projects (unchurched people want to know that the church cares about the needy/poor and actually does something about it). As a teacher, look for these families on Sunday. I waited in the narthex most Sundays until just before church started so if one of my families came, I was there to greet, help, welcome, etc.
- 20) Last but not least, spend time in intentional prayer for each unchurched family. Ask God to provide specific opportunity for you to share your faith. Ask God to open their hearts to the Gospel the children bring home from school. Ask God for a loving,

caring heart that shines with the love of Jesus, so these families see Him in all that you do.

I have taught at both association and single congregation schools and have taught nearly every grade from preschool to 8th grade. At one congregation, I had the privilege of helping them start a preschool ministry. God richly blessed our congregation; in 9 years, 19 preschool families joined the congregation, some from other faiths, some were new to the Christian faith. There were many baptisms, some at our church, some for children who then either moved away or continued in their own faith churches. A key factor was the working together with the pastor and congregation. If schools are an arm of the church, they have to be connected, tissue, bone, joint, skin, the works☺!

Linda Dybwad, Director of Family Ministry
Zion Lutheran Church, Tacoma WA
lldybwad@comcast.net