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Fall 2011 ▾

Letters ▾

Features ▾

Networks ▾

Resources ▾

Conferences

LEA Home



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We Wish to See Jesus

Why and How to Keep Christ in Christian Education

by Thomas A. Nummela

So these [men] came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

JOHN 12:21 (ESV)

Time has become an increasingly precious commodity, hasn't it? Parents struggle to manage busy family schedules. Corporate managers sacrifice promotions and pay raises for increased access to family time. Student athletes experience burn-out in their favorite sports in junior high. Volunteers are scarce in churches and community service organizations. Families are forced to make choices between soccer or baseball tournaments and participation in church and Sunday School. And Sunday School teachers find themselves hard pressed for sufficient preparation time to effectively use the one precious hour they have each week to impact the lives of their students. There just never seems to be enough time!



wish to see Jesus!”

Churches—both at the leadership level and among the general membership—want successful Sunday Schools. Faced with scarce resources—finances, personnel, and participants—we need to make thoughtful decisions about how we invest those resources in education. Consider this sound strategy: focus on the one thing that is essential and enduring. By all means, and in all your efforts, keep Christ in Christian education. Jesus, and the salvation that comes only through faith in Him, is what makes Sunday School unique among the activities clamoring for time and attention from the families of your congregation. They come with the same expectation that those Greeks had, who sought out the disciples during the week of the Passover in AD 33: “We

Avoid the Glitzy Stuff

Some Sunday Schools seem to forget the basics when facing a downturn in attendance and increased competition for the time and attention of their members. A popular trend these days suggests we must adopt the latest, greatest new thing in Sunday School in order to compete. Some churches invest hours and dollars in adopting and adapting a new model, brainstorming a catchy title, or shopping for a new visually appealing and fun curriculum.

These steps are not completely useless. Investing time, money, and thinking can bring about improvement. But Sunday School is not ultimately about entertainment and appearance. The new model will quickly become the old model. The new name may not appeal to some and confuse others. The fun new curriculum from that Baptist or non-denominational publishing house will not point students to Jesus as Savior or teach a spiritual life that flows from the waters of Baptism and is nourished by the Sacrament of the Altar. Instead of a balance of Law and Gospel, it will offer moralism and heterodox theology. A far better approach is to spend time and money to improve the core.

Promote the Core Stuff

Do you want a powerful Sunday School? One that shows Jesus to those who attend? I see two basics that deserve attention and a

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Do you consider your Sunday school successful? Why?

How do your volunteer Sunday school teachers feel about Sunday school?

What can you do to provide value to their roles?

Which curriculum resources do you use to assist teaching? Does each lesson focus on Jesus Christ?

What adaptations to the resources do you need to make to tailor it for your specific Sunday school?



Other articles you might be interested in this issue of **Shaping theFuture:**

Gospel Response by [Dr. George Guidera](#) (Feature)

Research in the Schools by [Kim Marxhausen](#) (Feature)

The Best of Times by [Gail Holzer](#) (ETnet)

number of supporting areas to address.

A Christ-centered curriculum is a must. The material that you place into the hands of volunteer teachers—and, eventually, into the minds, hearts, and hands of students—should be nothing less than fully Lutheran and focused on Jesus. Yes, I've heard that weak theology can be corrected by careful revision by skilled leaders and teachers. I suspect this is often an excuse to defend a bad curriculum choice. Such revision, if it can be done, is time-consuming and the skills required by the volunteers involved will require even more time, which, as we've said, is precious. How much wiser to start with a curriculum that is solid, that shares Christ in every lesson, not as a moral example to follow (Law) but as the only source of forgiveness, life, and salvation (Gospel)! These Christ-connections are equally as important in lessons taught using the Old Testament as the New. And since God shares this good news of salvation only through His Word and Sacraments, it makes sense that a good curriculum will also point the learners to God's grace in Baptism and the Lord's Supper at every opportunity.



Every curriculum will require adaptation. The local combination of teacher, students, facilities, and extra resources cannot be fully anticipated by the publisher. Sunday School leaders and teachers will find, however, that adapting activities in material with a solid theological core is easier than attempting to alter that theological core.

Invest fully in your volunteer staff. These folks are the key link between the curriculum and the students of whatever age. Enlist them with care; you will want the best available, not just a warm body. It will work better to contact them individually and personally than through mass mailings or notes in the bulletin. Be honest and accurate about what is required (and adjust the workload if it is too much for your volunteer); no one will write you a blank check on their limited supply of time. Promise success, and then deliver on your promise through good materials, proper orientation, training, and follow-up once they are in the classroom.



Provide instruction that meets their needs, focusing on active training. It may be helpful to offer a booklet, helpful article, or magazine—such as *Teachers Interaction* from Concordia Publishing House—but you will never know whether such resources are actually read or how helpful they are unless you have some active contact with the teachers through meetings, training classes, or one-on-one sessions in person or by phone.

Remind them of the high purpose they have undertaken—to show their students Jesus!—and affirm them frequently, privately, and publicly.

Then tend to the other improvements your Sunday School needs. Review the facilities and arrange for necessary upgrades, such as paint, floor polish, better furniture, plentiful resources, and technology. Make regular, repeated, personal invitations to each family that does not yet participate in Sunday School.

Arrange for follow-up on visitors, new enrollees, and absentees.

If you invest in your “current model” Sunday School to the same degree that you might invest in a “new model,” you will likely see the same improvements. And if you cannot see, or describe to others, how the efforts required will help children who “wish to see Jesus,” rethink them. God will bless your effort to help teach God's children His Word.

Thomas A. Nummela is a DCE who has served for 20 years as editor for Sunday School, and for 15 years as editor of Teachers Interaction magazine for Concordia Publishing House. He blogs weekly.

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 Lutheran Education Association 7400 Augusta Street, River Forest, IL 60305-1499 Phone: 708-209-3343
 Web site: www.lea.org E-mail: lea@lea.org

Executive Director: Jonathan C. Laabs, Ed.D.
Director of Publications and Communications: Ed Grube, LL.D.
Executive Assistant: [Kathy Slupik](#)
Editor: [Jill Zempel](#)
Art Director: [Kathryn Brewer](#)

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