

Evangelism Template for Lutheran Early Childhood Programs

Through our Lutheran Early Childhood Centers, God is bringing a “mission field” to the doorstep of our Lutheran churches. Our churches are challenged to build “missional communities” where leaders see unchurched students/families as a “mission field.” **Intentional** outreach is vital and is a **shared responsibility** between the congregation and Early Childhood Center. ECC impact lives eternally. God has a plan for every ECC – a divine plan to bring the gospel to our community families – to reach out with care, education and grace to children and their families who do not know Jesus.

The Indiana District Early Childhood Cabinet has outlined some outreach possibilities.* The pastor, board, congregation and early childhood staff need to **work cooperatively to identify specific strategies/activities** that will enable the church to form relationships with young children and their families and touch these individuals with the love of Jesus.

Create an intentional evangelism plan for your early childhood program. Choose options from all categories: community focus (goal: to bring the community onto the church property giving them an opportunity to feel comfortable and help them get to know school/church staff); pastor, early childhood staff, congregation, and board. There is a role for everyone. Develop a one-year plan, a two-year plan, a three-year plan, etc. adding additional strategies/activities each year. Then, **prayerfully and diligently “work your plan.”** God is faithful and will bless your efforts as the ECC and the church work together in ministry.

*We thank the many schools/congregations that shared ideas with us.

Community Outreach:

- Schedule food trucks – open this opportunity to the community; have staff on hand to meet with and interact with families
- Open the church/school facility for use by community groups at no charge – neighborhood associations, cub scouts/girl scouts, Little League, etc.
- Host Trunk or Treat
- Hold Movie Nights – early childhood families, congregational families, and the community
- Offer a story-time utilizing librarians from the community – story, snack, craft
- Conduct a Bike Rodeo – police officer, helmet give-away (check with local hospitals or take advantage of Thrivent dollars), obstacle course, popsicles

- Utilize facility for painting nights, Zumba, yoga, etc.
- Host a community carnival
- Open events you already hold to the community
- Offer a free once a week JAM (Jesus and Me) session – one hour for 2's and parents

Pastor:

- Attend preschool orientation. Invite parents to attend church and Sunday school (distribute information about the church). Encourage parents to contact you and other staff at any time. “We’re here to serve you.”
- Carry the message of the ECC as a “mission field” to the congregation
- Be visible (drop-off/pick-up, on the playground, in the classrooms, etc.)
- Attend ECC events (prayer, short family-friendly message, offer of support, etc.)
- Lead chapel
- “Work the list” of unchurched (make personal contacts, follow-up)
- Meet regularly with the center director
- Build relationships. Help families see the church as a friendly, comfortable place
- Pray for EC families by name – include names each week in the bulletin and congregational prayers
- Distribute a booklet on the Christian faith to every school family (simple Gospel message, easily understood)
- Invite school parents to attend chapel services and become involved in chapel projects
- Hold Advent and Lenten services at noon/late afternoon with simple lunch/supper
- Provide pastoral care whenever an opportunity exists
- Invite preschool parents to congregational events

Early Childhood Staff (directors, teachers, teacher assistants):

- Build relationships:
 - Conduct home visits
 - Communicate often (emails, phone calls, texts, notes, website, Shutterfly photos, etc.)
 - Be visible
 - Greet families
 - Be approachable
 - Take time
 - Participate in congregational activities

- Communicate with the pastor/congregation:
 - Share names of unchurched families
 - Share family needs
 - Involve children in ministry (singing, contributions to food banks, sending cards to shut-ins, visiting nursing homes, etc.)
- Intentionally reach out to families:
 - Send weekly Family Letters (“One in Christ”)
 - Invite families to church, Sunday school, VBS and congregational events
 - Share Bible verses, prayers, finger plays, songs in class newsletters
 - Send tangible reminders of a particular lesson (empty plastic egg – empty tomb with a copy of the Easter story)
 - Use Bible bags – with a Bible story and props
- Schedule chapel at the end of the preschool day; have children sing; invite families to attend
- Other:
 - Display photos of children and their families in the narthex or fellowship hall
 - Invite the congregation to pray for preschool families
 - Display children’s art work
 - Share updates and activities in the church newsletter
 - Display photos and documentation of EC activities
 - *Personally* request “help:” building a sandbox or cubbies, assisting with a special project, reading to children/interacting with children once a week, etc.
 - Seek out opportunities for engagement:
 - Coffee/tea at drop-off time (someone – congregational member/board member – to greet families and get to know them, ask about prayer requests) OR a “take-away” cup with attached message, “We care for your child and for YOU.” Do you have any prayer requests? (prayer request box on display.)
 - Family dinner after ECC programs

Congregation and Board:

- Pray (ECC ministry, staff, specific school families).
- Assimilate ECC families:
 - Attend EC events
 - Personally distribute gift bags during the first week of school (drop-off/pick-up). Include small gifts and treats for the children plus a church brochure and invitation to worship

- Identify congregational “Prayer Angels” (adopt a child – prayer, cards, notes, small gifts, invitations, etc.) Plan several “get-togethers” for the children and their Prayer Angels during school hours.
- Conduct “Preschool Sundays” – Be on hand to greet, welcome, recognize/introduce families, children’s message, reception/lunch.)
- Host a back-to-school popsicle event – take photos of families, give away little gift bags, etc.
- Make worship “family-friendly:”
 - Have children’s bulletins
 - Assemble children’s activity bags
 - Follow-up with families who attend worship (“front-porch visits” – at homes -- greeting families with a small bag of home-made bread/cookies and information about the church’s ministry)
- Advent:
 - Send home an Advent calendar and “prayer cube” (with a prayer printed on each side of the cube). Include directions for using the calendar and prayer cube. List special Advent and Christmas service times.
 - Schedule an Advent Fun Night. Make a Christmas craft together. Serve cookies and punch. Send home Advent and Christmas service times.
 - Offer a Parents’ Morning Out on a Saturday in December to allow parents time to shop for Christmas.
- Christmas:
 - Invite preschool families to join a congregational Christmas Family Fun Night.
 - Go caroling to shut-ins – 3:00 p.m
 - Serve supper – 5:00 p.m
 - Give each family a gingerbread house to decorate together
 - Provide other family-friendly activities
 - Distribute a Christmas gift bag with a Christmas ornament and a Christmas story book. Present these at the children’s Christmas program. Again, include a church brochure with special service times.
- Easter: Distribute gift bags that include an Easter story book.
- “Tag” a family-friendly event on to each of the times preschool children sing in church:
 - September: Plan a Harvest Fest – hayrides, pumpkin carving, games, devotions and supper

- January: Schedule children to sing during National Lutheran Schools Week. Have a Teacher Appreciation lunch and encourage both church and preschool families to attend.
- April: Invite children to participate in the procession of the palms. Have an Easter egg hunt following the service. Have another Family Fun Day – serve pizza. Provide a variety of activities for children and their parents.
- Support the ECC:
 - Supply donations (“Giving Tree”).
 - Provide classroom assistance (just “stop by” and interact, read, volunteer)
 - Provide financial support
 - Build early childhood costs into the congregational budget
 - Use 5th Sunday envelopes – funds go directly to the early childhood program

Evangelism Plan – Year #1

You may want to compile a listing of all evangelistic “supports” now in place. Go from there. Use the following template or a similar instrument to track evangelism goals:

Activity	Who’s Responsible?	When?
Home Visits	Teachers	August
Wkly. Family Faith Letters	Teachers	Wkly. beginning Sept.
Display photos of children	Teachers	September
Schedule worship involvements	Teachers	3x/year
Conduct chapel	Pastor	Weekly
Greet parents at drop off/pick up	Pastor	3x/week
Pray for preschool families in church services	Pastor	Weekly
Attend preschool events (brief devo, pray, offer of support)	Pastor	As scheduled
Distribute gift bags	Board/Congregation	First week of school
Schedule a family Advent supper/event	Board/Congregation	December
Invite local groups to use church facility	Board	Contacts – Sept.; implementation