



Spiritual Nurture in the Lutheran Early Childhood Classroom:
LEA Training Modules for EC Consultants, Administrators & Educators
By Cheryl Haun, EdS, 2022

Lutheran Education Association is preparing a series of training modules that will focus on the practical application of the Christian faith in the Lutheran early childhood classroom. The goal of all ECE programs in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is to introduce young children and their families to the faith, expanding the Kingdom and bringing glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus specifically tells His disciples (and us) to let the children come! The children have arrived, and we need to equip ourselves to reveal God’s amazing plan of salvation to everyone in ways that are *applicable, accessible, and authentic!*

The training modules will equip early childhood directors with practical strategies to promote the integration of the Christian faith into classroom environments, curricular experiences, and the homes of the school families. The modules will not replace the colloquy program or attendance in Lutheran church membership classes, as we highly recommend these processes for directors and teachers who are not Lutheran trained or a member of the Lutheran church. The modules present what could be considered best practice in teaching the faith in the early childhood environment with the goal of implementing teaching practices that encourage a growing, vital faith for the young learners. A gracious grant from the LCMS Northern Illinois District is supporting the work and initial launch of this professional development opportunity for consultants/directors in late spring or early summer. The following modules, specific to spiritual nurture, are being curated by a team of eight early childhood specialists. Descriptions of the five modules follow.

Module 1: The Climate and Culture of the Lutheran Early Childhood Classroom

Dr. Annette Anschutz, Professor, Concordia University Nebraska & Lisa Aring, Director at St. John’s Child Development Center, Seward, Neb.

Do our classrooms reflect a Gospel-centered learning in an environment where teachers are intentional about how they develop & grow relationships, as the Holy Spirit brings each child to faith? (Rathmann, 2016). How do we plan for ECE environments, routines, schedules, and conversations that nurture children and families in the faith, while supporting children’s learning?

Module 2: Telling His Story: The Children Hear God’s Story with Wonder & Awe

Andrea Lohman, Early Childhood Educator at Zion Lutheran in St. Charles, Mo.

Do we tell His Story with wonder & awe serving as a conduit for the “work of God’s Spirit to grasp the heart of the child?” Simple props allow children to “enter” The Story through “doing”. We allow children to “wonder and question” and to think out loud (Stonehouse & May, 2010, pp.86). We want to know our students well, keep “play” in the learning, connect faith to their real world, set goals for faith lessons, and give children opportunity to reflect and talk about their developing faith stories (Bernard Bull, 2016).

Module 3: Authentic Reflections of Children's Understandings of Faith & Bible Stories

Cheryl Haun, Missouri District Consultant; CUNE Adjunct Professor

Teaching the faith is about so much more than a lesson, a prayer, and a song. Faith integration allows children to “understand God’s love as it is modeled, as they feel God’s love in relationships and share God’s love with others” (Marxhausen, 2016). Child authored artifacts of God’s Story reflect their understanding of God’s unconditional love for them and their role as a child of God.

Module 4: Seasons & Celebrations of the Church Year

Bev Gruenwald, EC Director, St. Paul's, Des Peres, Mo. &

Lisa Larson Teacher & Campus Manager at CCLS, St. Louis, Mo.

“The rhythms and seasons of the church year keep us rooted in our Christian heritage and are an important part of our spiritual growth and faith development. How do we teach this to our littlest members?” (Danyew, 2011–2021). The church year is so much more than Advent and Lent. The seasons of the church year reveal God’s promises and His plan for salvation and forgiveness that is ours in Jesus. The colors, symbols, music, and worship connect God’s children to their faith history and redemptive work of Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior.

Module 5: Family Connections & Communications

Dian Schlichtmann, Teacher/Director at St. Paul Lutheran School, Stevens Point, Wis.; EC Consultant, Northern Wisconsin District &

Tracie Douglas, Teacher/Director at Our Shepherd Lutheran School in Avon, Ind.

Are we supplanting or supporting families? Parents benefit when a faith community becomes a place to share and learn from one another—a place of helpful insights and resources, and a safe place to grow family faith. How do we share stories of faith with families? Are we astute in knowing how our families connect with our classroom experiences? Are our children equipped to take their Stories home?

We give thanks for this amazing opportunity to grow together in faith! This is our mission, this is what we do. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus specifically tells His disciples (and us) to let the children come! In 2 Thessalonians, verses 15–17, Saint Paul gives us direction and encouragement: “So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word”.

It is our prayer that the strategies throughout the modules will allow for engaging faith-learning and deeper understandings of faith development in our early childhood classrooms.

Works Cited

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