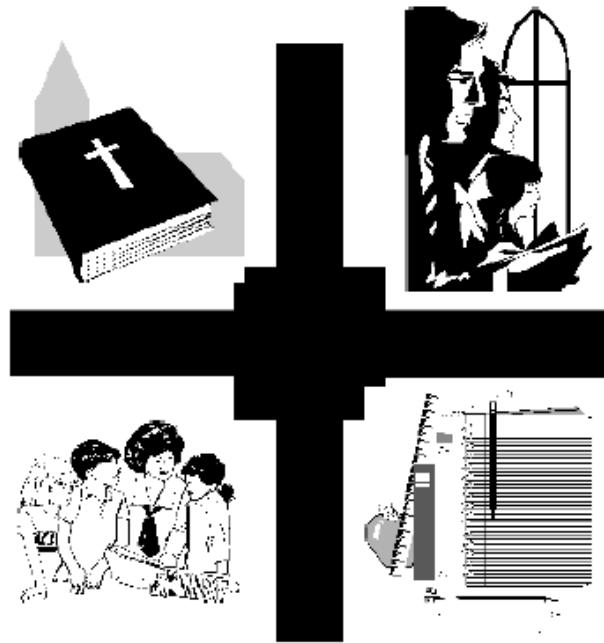




Ministry of the Congregation

A Self Study of Ministry and Relationships
For Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Schools and Early Childhood Center Programs



A Recognition Program administered by
The Evangelical Lutheran Education Association
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Ministry of the Congregation

A Self-Study of Ministry and Relationships
For Evangelical Lutheran Church in America School Ministry Programs

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Ministry of the Congregation

A Self-Study of Elementary School and Early Childhood Education Center Ministry Programs and Congregation Relationships

Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28: 19

As a congregation you operate or support many unique ministries, which reflect this central mission of the church. The elementary school or early childhood education center in your congregation provides a tremendous opportunity to reach out to families in the community as well as in the congregation. The children enrolled in your program are a precious gift from God.

This resource is designed to assist congregations in appreciating the opportunities and gifts present in their school ministry program. Through this process the congregation and school ministry will work to review and evaluate their current relationship as well as establishing a future relationship to work towards together.

School ministry programs evolve over years of dedicated service by school and congregational leaders. To begin the process of self-study ask yourself the question of why did your program begin?

- A few parents in the church wanted to start it.
- A couple of folks in the church wanted something to do during the week.
- Elementary school teachers with families were looking for a part time job.
- Parents in the congregation or neighborhood asked for an ECE program.
- The congregation saw this as an attempt to reach out to the community.
- The congregation saw this as a way of generating some additional income.
- The congregation had an understanding of the development of children.
- The congregation opened it as a vital arm of ministry and evangelism.

Whatever the reason the congregation's school ministry program started, it is now important to discover why the congregation continues to operate the program today. Together the congregation and school ministry need to look at how the program relates to the mission and operation of the congregation and its current purpose for outreach ministry. This resource helps everyone involved to take a fresh look at how the program operates within the context of the congregation.

Who Uses this Resource?

Initially the school ministry administrator and Pastor should review and discuss the material presented in this document. A study team then needs to be identified to lead the process. In addition to the administrator and Pastor, the team might include but not be limited to the school board or advisory committee and the congregation council. Once the study team is identified

the administrator and Pastor will present the document to the team to review the five topics for consideration.

Included is an opening devotion, which can be used at the meeting when this process is presented (page 11).

How Much Time Will This Take?

The study team will determine the length of time needed to accomplish the necessary work in the five different areas. Since the five areas have an inter-related nature the recommended approach would be to take a more global approach to this assessment of your ministry. You can however design a program of self-study that is best for your congregation, school and situation.

- Ministry and Mission
- Spiritual Formation
- Governance
- Administration
- Finance

Answering the questions of “why did we begin this ministry and where are we now” should not take long. However, designing options for “where you want to go from here and how you will get there” will most likely take more than a meeting or two. When you have identified your plan for improvement of your relationships and program, you will need to set a timeline and budget to implement the necessary changes. The amount of time needed to effect those changes you would like to see will be made based on the current situation of the congregation and schools ministry program.

Does This Resource Have All The Answers?

There may be more questions raised initially when going through this process than answers. The answers of what is best for your congregation and school ministry program lie within your congregation. There are included, however, suggestions, which illustrate what some of your answers for the future, might look like. The question that remains constant in our work is “What is God calling us to be in this place now and in the future?” Three key questions accompany each section:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- What do we need to do to get there?

Worksheets on pages 13 & 14 assist the group in addressing these questions and making plans.

What Do We Do With Our Results?

Celebrate! Celebrate your special ministry to children and their families through your school ministry program (page 12). Send your Letter of Completion (page 17) to ELEA to receive a “Certificate of Completion.” Share with the congregation how you are affirming your program,

grasping the opportunities and cherishing the gift of children by enriching the relationship of the school ministry program and its congregational partner.

We encourage congregations to move from this self-study to Early Childhood Accreditation or the Elementary School Accreditation upon completion. Although it is not required, Accreditation will lead you to a standards-based self-evaluation of your program which looks at a vast array of staff, curriculum, and governance standards.

Ministry of the Congregation is a wonderful beginning point for allowing the congregation and its school ministry program to evaluate and strengthen their relationship, and is also a prerequisite for ELEA accreditation.

Please complete and return the Letter of Completion on Page 17 of this document to Evangelical Lutheran Education Association. If you would like to proceed to the Accreditation process, please contact us at 1-800-500-7644 or visit our web site at www.eleanational.org.

Put into place a regular process for self-review and evaluation. Use this program of self-study to reevaluate the relationship of the school ministry and congregation every few years or when major changes happen in either the congregation or school. Change often puts stress on relationships even within a congregation's ministries. Continued review of that relationship will keep it healthy and strong for the children and families that are involved in the program. Our efforts for excellence have rewards—but also are unceasing. The opportunities your congregation has through the school ministry program and the blessings of the children in your care are also unceasing.

Mission and Ministry

Lutherans believe educating and nurturing young children are ways of fulfilling our baptismal promise and our great commission to teach. By building Christ-centered, positive, trusting relationships, we nurture the spiritual growth of children and strengthen families.

A schools ministry program brings the congregation into the lives of people in the community. But beyond social outreach these programs help us bring the Word to life. They help build a spiritual and devotional center for the un-churched, offering baptism and a church home to those seeking renewal.

It is important for the Congregation and the schools ministry program to share a common understanding of ministry. The congregation should have a seamless relationship with the school ministry program recognizing that the ministry is being carried out in the name of the congregation.

The Congregation and school ministry program can tangibly show and live out their unity of mission and ministry in a variety of ways.

- 1. *The Congregation Mission Statement includes the school ministry program.***
The congregation develops programs and organizations to carry out its mission. The congregation should look to its school ministry program as an important and integral ministry in helping the congregation accomplish its mission. The mission of the congregation determines the school ministry program's purpose and its Christian distinctiveness.
- 2. *The school ministry program has a Mission Statement, which reflects the congregation's concept of ministry.***
- 3. *Letters of welcome are sent from the pastor(s) to all school ministry households.***
These may be sent directly from the congregation office or as part of a welcome packet which may be sent by the school ministry program.
- 4. *Intentional invitations to congregational life events/worship are made to all families involved in the congregation's school ministry.***
Include school ministry families as part of the family of the congregation. Invite school families to participate in Sunday school, regular worship, special seasonal worship opportunities (i.e. Christmas, Holy Week) church picnics and other fellowship activities initiated by the congregation. Invitation may be made through flyers, newsletters, phone calls, personal contact or other methods used by the congregation to promote church activities.
- 5. *Congregation Annual Report***
Include a written report from the school ministry administrator reviewing the activities of the year and affirmation of the congregation's involvement.
- 6. *Articles about the school ministry program*** regularly are included in the Congregation's publications (eg. Newsletters, Sunday service folders). These publications should also be made available or sent to school ministry families. List the

school ministry administrator on the Sunday service folder along with other congregational leadership staff.

7. ***The congregation and school ministry program use the same letterhead or include each other prominently on their stationary.***
8. ***School ministry staff are “called” by vocation to nurture the faith formation in agreement with the “whole child” concept.***

9. ***The congregation annually installs new school ministry staff and renews its commitment to returning school ministries staff.***

This can be done at a Sunday morning worship service affirming the work of the staff as ministry on behalf of the congregation. The congregation may also choose to use this as an opportunity to affirm the work of Sunday school teachers as well as all other school teachers (public and private) who are members of the congregation.

10. ***The congregation’s school ministry leadership meets regularly with the pastor and program church staff.***

The old adage “if you aren’t up on something - you’re down on it” can be very true. Open lines of regular communication among all congregation staff creates strong relationships, encourages team building and affirms unity of mission and purpose. These regular meetings also help to avoid such problems as building use conflicts.

QUESTIONS

Where are we now?

Where do we want to be?

What do we need to do to get there?

Spiritual Formation

I remember meeting Ms. Ferguson in Florida. She begins each day with four year olds engaged in prayer. She invites them to go into their “heart places.” Corey tugged on her sleeve - “Ms. Ferguson - I don’t know who this Jesus is.” Several weeks later in the middle of prayer - Corey blurted out, “Can we get to that heart place thing? Jesus has been waiting way too long for me.”

The route to faith is not a superhighway. Spiritual journeys tend to be roundabout trips with more than their share of detours, bumps and even running out of gas. Because each person takes a different route, handing out maps is not an option. It is more a matter of walking along together, pointing out the general direction, answering questions, being there to lean on. Children want to know. A parent once told me about their 3 year old who, when she thought she was out of their hearing, whispered to her new baby sister, “Tell me what God is like. I’m beginning to forget.”

How do we touch hearts with the Gospel? When Jesus touched the children, he probably noticed their runny noses and their stained shirts. But, he didn’t waste time on any “Clean up first, then I’ll give you a hug.” Children at a young age want to know “Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?” The child’s insatiable hunger for meaning and for love can be filled completely by God who gives meaning and is love. A congregation should have a big ear, reverently inclined toward the child. Who we give children is just as important as what we give them. Children are bombarded with all kinds of positive and negative messages from day one. As a community we need to share grace with children from day one.

The Gospel is shared in structured settings as well as the most unexpected moments. Among the visible marks and accents of a school ministry program intentional about spiritual formation and development include:

1. ***Daily prayer***
2. ***Daily Bible story time***
3. ***Chapel - weekly***
4. ***Deliberate intentional inclusion of school ministry community in the life of the congregation.***
5. ***Pastoral leadership and shepherding of the school ministry community.***
6. ***Modeling a faith formed community.***

QUESTIONS

Where are we now?

Where do we want to be?

What do we need to do to get there?

Governance

The school ministry program is one of a variety of ministry programs provided by the congregation. But unlike Sunday school, Vacation Bible School and youth programs, there are many other organizational, policy, administrative and financial issues that need to be addressed in a focused and intentional manner by the Congregation.

It is important for the governance relationship to be clearly defined with adequate flexibility to meet changing needs and situations. The congregation is ultimately responsible for the operation of the school ministry program and should organize its governance to fulfill that task.

- 1. *The corporate status of the school ministry program should be clear.***
Most congregational school ministry programs are not separately incorporated from the congregation. It is generally unnecessary to go through the effort and expense to do so. However, in special cases when a congregation chooses to separately incorporate the program it should be a non-profit corporation owned and operated by the congregation.
- 2. *An established Board or committee with church members has the primary responsibility of the school ministry program.***
Congregations have different traditions on organizing committees. Regardless of what the group is called, it should focus on the school ministry program. It is helpful to include the pastor as an advisory member to this committee. Guidelines for the role and responsibilities of the school ministry board or advisory committee are detailed in the *Early Childhood Board Manual*, available as a download from www.eleanational.org.
- 3. *Member of Board/committee has a voting seat on congregation council.***
Given the ministry, policy and financial discussions and decisions made by the council and school ministry committee it is very important to have at least one person involved as a voting member of both groups. This is most easily accomplished by assigning an elected member of the council to a position on the school ministry committee.
- 4. *An organizational chart of governance includes the school ministry program..***
Where does the school ministry committee fit in? An organizational chart helps to show to whom this group is accountable. It can also show where the school ministry administrator fits into the day to day administrative governance.
- 5. *The administrator attends church council meeting.***
The school ministry administrator is a leader in the congregation. The director's attendance and involvement with the council maintains a high level of understanding of the direction and mission of the congregation. It is a good time for the administrator to present a written and verbal report on the activities of the school ministry program as well as respond to questions.

QUESTIONS

Where are we now?

Where do we want to be?

What do we need to do to get there?

Administration

The Congregation and school ministry program are mutually responsible for a quality program. They also share in the responsibility for children's safety and responsible management responsive to the needs of families and the congregation.

1. ***The leaders of both the school ministry program and the congregation should understand and accept their responsibilities to insure high quality developmentally appropriate programs for children.***

2. ***Specific appreciation, attention and action is given to the following areas:***
 - a. Legal responsibilities (licensing, liability insurance, etc.)
 - b. Salary and Benefits - The congregation must seek to treat staff with justice and equity in this area. (Compensation Guidelines are available as a download from www.eleanational.org.)
 - c. Safe and secure environment. The children who occupy the congregation's building deserve this. Families expect this.

3. ***Mutual responsibility of environment.***

Arrangements for shared equipment, space and supplies need to be clearly written and annually reviewed for their effective support of ministry. The process of discussing these issues often has results in personal understandings, which reach beyond the written agreements. The agreements are particularly helpful when there is a change in leadership of the school ministry program, Sunday school or other groups, which are involved in space and equipment usage. Having the understanding that all programs are an integral part of the congregation's ministry makes this exercise very productive.

ADDITIONAL READING

Evaluation Instrument for Buildings and Grounds - page 15

QUESTIONS

Where are we now?

Where do we want to be?

What do we need to do to get there?

Finance

The school ministry program involves significant income and expenses. It should not exist to generate income to supplement the overall congregation budget. The congregation through its stewardship and school ministry program through sound fiscal planning will operate responsibly.

1. ***The annual budget reflects sound and ethical fiscal responsibility.***

The school ministry administrator and the school ministry committee/board should first draft the annual budget of the school ministry program. The budget is then presented to the council and thereafter to the congregation as part of the congregation's budget.

2. ***The annual budget will reflect program priorities to clearly reflect the mission statement.***

A budget tells a story of what the school ministry program and congregation feel is important. Maintaining an acceptable teacher/child ratio, for example, has an effect on tuition income, which primarily supports teacher and staff salaries. Teacher and staff salaries and benefits should not be limited unjustly. Budgeting low salaries and no benefits does not reflect how important these persons are to the ministry and mission of the congregation. If a congregation wishes to keep tuition low in order to welcome a broader spectrum of families, it should not subsidize the budget by virtue of low salaries and the absence of benefits. The congregation may choose to provide financial support for families in need of assistance. This can be done through such methods as special funds or a line item in the congregation's budget.

3. ***There are regular meetings with the school ministry administrator and church financial personnel***

to discuss tuition/fees, salary/benefits, congregation finance support and third source funding. The administrator is on the "front lines" of the school ministry program. Keeping open communication with the treasurer, bookkeeper or the congregation finance manager is essential.

ADDITIONAL READING

Compensation Guide

(Available on line at www.eleanational.org – click on "Printable ELCA Resources")

QUESTIONS

Where are we now?

Where do we want to be?

What do we need to do to get there?

EVERYONE WINS

An opening devotion for the Mission and Ministry Team.
"Let the Children come to me . . . " Matthew 19:14

These words of Jesus have provided many of us a heart-warming story to tell children. Others have expressed the story with brush and paint. There is, however, much more to it. Jesus was actually teaching the disciples, parents and other onlookers. He was providing an example of how we should care for and nurture young children. This continues for us today, but in a different way. Within the church setting, it can be an exciting and fulfilling journey of mission and ministry to young children and their families. How can we accomplish this?

Welcome them

- Provide a place within the building.
- Provide materials with which children can interact.
- Provide a staff of nurturing adults.

Incorporate them

- Include the families in congregational programs.
- Witness God's love to the children and their families.
- Encourage members to provide gifts and time as stewards of the program.

Nurture them

- Provide a safe and secure environment.
- Show love and respect to all children.
- Use appropriate guidance techniques with the children.
- Provide multicultural experiences so children learn acceptance of others.
- Use developmentally appropriate activities as a basis for learning.

Send Them

- Send them on their way as independent children who have a foundation ready to build upon as they continue their journey becoming who God intends them to be.

Leader As we struggle with Mission and Ministry,
ALL Empower us Jesus to be more like you.

Leader As we continue to welcome children by providing for their needs,
ALL Empower us Jesus to be more like you.

Leader As we plan for incorporation of school ministry programs and families,
ALL Empower us Jesus to be more like you.

Leader As we nurture children so they can develop into persons you intend them to be.
ALL Empower us Jesus to be more like you.

Leader As we send children on their way with your love and blessings,
ALL Empower us Jesus to be more like you.

LEADER As we are empowered to carry out this ministry,
ALL Everyone WINS! Thank you Jesus!

Written by: Mary Fetter - Director, St. John's Lutheran Child Care Center, Austin, TX

CELEBRATION UPON COMPLETION OF SELF STUDY OF MINISTRY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Gathering Song: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands"

Leader: We gather as children of God.

All: We celebrate as God's Family.

Leader: We gather to give thanks for the gifts you have given to our school ministry and congregation leaders.

All: We celebrate one another's gifts.

Leader: We rejoice in our ministry together and give thanks for all who work to make our school ministry a special place for children. Today we say thank you for giving us loving friends in this church who care for children, who teach children, who care for children, who learn with children, and who worship with children at Church.

All: We celebrate the joy of learning and growing at Church.

Leader: We have gathered today to recognize the work that has been done to satisfactorily complete our Self Study of Ministry and Relationships.

All: We thank you, God, for your presence in our lives.

Leader: Reads the "Citation of Completion" issued by the ELCA.

**Prayer: Thank you, God, for children in our midst.
Thank you, God, for leaders in our church and school.
Thank you, God, for your daily presence in our lives. Amen**

Closing Song "Children of the Heavenly Father"

Written by: Marilyn Stalheim, Director, Westwood Early Childhood Center, St. Louis Park, MN

THREE QUESTIONS

TOPIC: _____

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO GET THERE?

ACTION PLAN

What needs to be done?	Who will do it?	Ending date	What resources are needed?

Resources include: volunteers, donated goods, donated services, and financial support

*For more information about starting or strengthening a Lutheran Early Childhood Education Center,
Elementary or Secondary School contact:
Evangelical Lutheran Education Association
500 N. Estrella Parkway, Suite B2, Box 601
Goodyear, AZ 85338
www.eleanational.org 800-500-7644*

Evaluation Instrument for Building and Grounds

1. OUTDOOR ENTRANCES

What to look for:

Signs _____

ECE Center Name _____

Doorways _____

Clean Glass _____

Safe Stairways _____

Doors and Locks _____

Mats/Safety Strips _____

2. LOBBY OR ENTRANCE

What to Look For:

Flowers/Plants/Shrubs _____

Art Pieces _____

Signs _____

Reception Chairs _____

Lamps/Lighting _____

Displays _____

Pictures _____

Floor Surfaces _____

Mats/Safety Strips _____

Space for young children _____

3. HALLWAYS

What to look for:

Lighting _____

Wall Surface _____

Floor Covering _____

Cubbies _____

Color _____

Width _____

Fire Extinguishers _____

Displays _____

Traffic _____

Doorways _____

Noise _____

Ceilings _____

Storage _____

4. OFFICE SPACE

What to look for:

Décor _____

Furnishings _____

Privacy _____

Noise Level _____

Clutter _____

Professional image _____

Traffic _____

Size _____

Location _____

Files/Storage _____

5. CLASSROOM(S)

What to look for:

Décor _____

Space Use _____

Displays _____

Equipment _____

Storage _____

Table Tops _____

Flooring _____

Lighting _____

Clutter _____

Window Coverings _____

Size _____

Image _____

Clean windows _____

Ventilation _____

6. STORAGE SPACES

What to look for:

Adequate _____

Location _____

Junk/Clutter _____

Supervised _____

Safe/Legal _____

Inventory _____

Secure _____

7. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM (where applicable)

What to look for:

- Appealing _____
- Functional _____
- Odor _____
- Sanitary _____
- Storage _____
- Equipment _____
- Table/Chairs _____
- Multiple Uses _____
- Care Guidelines _____
- Traffic _____
- Entrances _____
- Lighting _____
- Seating _____
- Fire Extinguishers _____

8. REST ROOMS

What to look for:

- Sanitary _____
- Odors _____
- Graffiti _____
- Supervision _____
- Secure _____
- Codes _____
- Mirrors _____
- Ventilation _____
- Lighting _____
- Handicapped _____
- Fixtures _____
- Adequate Number _____
- Locations _____

9. MECHANICAL ROOMS (where applicable)

What to look for:

- Safe _____
- Codes _____
- Secure _____
- Emergency Procedures _____
- Maintenance Schedule _____
- Storage/Clutter _____
- Phone Numbers _____
 _____ Fire _____ Emergency
 _____ Repair Service
- Inspection Schedule _____
- Fire Drills _____
- Insurance _____
- Ventilation _____
- Fire Alarms _____
- Fire Extinguishers _____
- Vandal Proof _____

10. SCHOOL GROUNDS

What to look for:

- Building Exterior _____
- Landscaping and space use _____
- Parking Lot(s)/Drives _____
- Storage _____
- Sidewalks, walkways, curb safety _____

11. PLAYGROUND

What to look for:

- Location _____
- Equipment _____
- Safety _____
- Security _____
- All Season Use _____

Letter of Completion

The Ministry of the Congregation Recognition Program is administered by
The Evangelical Lutheran Education Association
a ministry of the Congregational & Synodical Mission unit of the ELCA

Elementary School or Early Childhood Education Center, Mailing Address

and

Congregation Name, Mailing Address

Have completed the Self Study of Ministry and Relationship

Pastor

Date

Early Childhood Director

Please send Certificate of Completion to:

Mail this Letter of Completion to:

Gayle Denny
Evangelical Lutheran Education Association
500 North Estrella Parkway, Suite B2, Box 601
Goodyear, AZ 85338
800-500-7644

OR you may submit this form by fax at 623-882-8770.