

# PRESCHOOL CHAPEL LEADS TO SUNDAY CHAPEL

by Linda Chambers, Director of Memorial Chapel School  
in St. Augustine, FL



I attended the Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly in 2022 as a voting member from my congregation, Memorial Lutheran Church in St. Augustine, Florida. During the synod assembly, a video was shown to us from Presiding Bishop Eaton, which challenged us to become "radically relevant." I was overjoyed to hear these words come from Chicago, and began praying about this for my church. As the director of our church weekday ministry, an early childhood education center called Chapel School, and director of our congregation's Family Ministry, I understood that being "radically relevant" could transform the meaning of the word FAMILY in our church. I've never understood why our weekday families were never embraced like our "Sunday" families in church - and I was determined to elevate the role of weekday families in our congregation. I started by showing the video to our church leadership team, and conversations were started. Those conversations led to serious discussions about why our Chapel School families attend church when intentionally invited for events, but don't visit again. These serious discussions led to the creation of a new worship option, designed for families with children of all ages, called "Sunday Chapel."

Sunday Chapel is both rooted in tradition and radically relevant. I lead the service (I am a layperson), and our Pastor comes in at the end for Holy Communion. Our middle and high school youth are the greeters, the musicians, and the communion assistants. Children who attend take turns being acolytes. Together we create the Intercessory Prayers by discussing who needs prayer each week in the church, the world, and among God's people (and it's always very different). We sing together, and everyone gets up and dances along. We learn about the Bible using "Holy Moly" materials from Sparkhouse. We commune each week with all the children gathered around the altar, and pray the Lord's Prayer. Sunday Chapel is fast-paced, interactive, lasts approximately 45 minutes, there are usually toddlers walking around, and kids are encouraged to speak out from their seats as we put together prayers and I ask questions about the story we just learned about. After worship the majority of our families stay for fellowship in the church hall and help their children make crafts from our Holy Moly story.

We have baptized 16 children since January 1st. Our attendance has been as high as 149 on Palm Sunday - 90 on God's Work, Our Hands Sunday - to 24 last week. There seems to be many variables at play with attendance including social media, personal texts from me, and messaging through our Chapel School - along with holidays, school schedules, and the weather. There is a core group of families that have been attending from the start, and they have become more active in the life of our church. We now have an active Family Ministry Committee which has led to the creation of a new Youth-FULL group for elementary age students. We had our first meeting last week and 18 kids showed up!