

Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church

Family Ministry Workshop

February 9, 2013

Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church conducted a family ministry workshop on February 9, 2013. Jim Blockus facilitated the workshop, which had 19 attendees. As an introduction, Jim reviewed Calvary's mission statement and the responsibilities of the Board of Education and the Board for Youth. Following this review, Jim discussed the challenges of family ministry from children through young adults.

Each participant was assigned to one of three specific discussion breakout groups. The breakout groups were Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, and Young Adult Ministry. The facilitator of the Children's Ministry group was Christine Kraus; the facilitator of the Youth Ministry group was Jane Neagley; and the facilitator of the Young Adult Ministry group was Stephanie Yerger.

Each breakout group was assigned a series of questions. The questions focused on where Calvary is now, how each group is assimilated into the life of the congregation, and what needs to be done to ensure continued assimilation in the future, as well as what plans need to be developed to move forward. Each breakout group facilitator was tasked to provide a written report that serves as the basis for this report.

I. Children's Ministry (birth through Grade 6)

a. Overview of the program and what works well

In its discussions, this group reviewed the Sunday School and early childhood programs at Calvary. For the Sunday School program, the group highlighted what is going well. The key areas include the use of the curriculum, which provides Biblical literacy, God's plan for salvation, worship connections, catechetical connections, teaching about the Sacraments, and how all these apply to daily life. The group also discussed the efficacy of the closing time, which provides an opportunity for interaction with children from other age groups, and serves as a time to teach hymns, discuss the Church Year, and celebrate Baptismal birthdays.

The Board of Education also ensures Christian stewardship is embedded in its educational programs. Some of the ways this is done include designating a deliberate mission organization for support, which is discussed during Sunday School closing times, identifying ways in which students can provide "hands on" mission partnering and support, and providing ongoing instruction and discussions on why Christians give and serve others. The mission projects and related instruction/discussion help to teach our children to share their blessings and the love of Christ with others. To help children further

understand the importance of giving, they are provided with offering envelopes to bring their gifts during Divine Service.

In addition to encouraging families to bring their children to the altar for a blessing during the Eucharist, families are also supported through the “Cradle Roll,” a Synod sponsored program, which provides Christian education material for parents to use. As stated above, Baptismal birthdays are celebrated during the Sunday School closing. From the time the child is enrolled in the “Cradle Roll” through high school graduation, the child’s Baptism is recognized in the newsletter, and a card commemorating the anniversary is mailed to the child.

Other things that are done well for this age group include “buddying up” the high school youth with the elementary youth during the closing, doing a group opening on the Sundays of Advent, preparing Christmas and Easter cards for shut-ins, and periodically allowing the high school youth to serve as “teachers’ aids.” When students reach third grade, they are provided a Bible, presented by the pastor to the parents, who then provide the Bible to the student. The Board of Education also provides the devotionals *Happy Times* and *My Devotions*.

b. What can be improved upon and built up

Ensuring personal contact with the families is an area in which the Board of Education can improve. We currently provide a Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) gift at the Baptism of the children, and we include them in the “Cradle Roll.” But our weaknesses include not providing or affirming information about Calvary for new families, nor providing sufficient information about LCEF and how the fund has benefited Calvary in the past. We have not consistently published the names of the newly baptized in the bulletin on the day of Baptism.

We also, not just board members and teachers, need to ensure deliberate contact with the families, whether through greeting them, following up by phone call or visit, and speaking with the families and the children on a regular basis. We also need to encourage participation and show families we welcome them. We inaccurately portray the “cry room” as the “quiet room,” as if children who are active should not be seen or heard. The “cry room” is a resource if parents so choose, not a requirement to isolate any child from the Divine Service. Ushers should also let families know they can sit closer to the front of the church, even with little children.

c. What we could add

We need to consider adding “snippets” of information on children, youth, and families in the Sunday bulletin. We should also consider having families bring the elements to the altar from time-to-time. We are going to ask the Board of Deacons to consider this practice.

For many years, we did weekly children’s sermons, which discussed the readings, the upcoming sermon, or the season/feast day. The elimination of that practice gives the impression that children are not important. We are going to ask the Board of Deacons to consider resuming this practice, even if the

practice occurs only twice per month. We recognize that there are some Sundays when the children's attendance may be very limited, but we feel it is necessary to promote future participation in the Body of Christ.

As our numbers have diminished, we have let the opportunity for children to participate in Advent/Christmas programs during Divine Service go by the wayside. The past several years, we have not had deliberate student participation in Lenten, Holy Week, and Easter activities. Vacation Bible School has fallen as one of our activities. As a board, we will explore ways to reintroduce these things, and we will discuss participation by the Sunday School students in Lenten, Holy Week, and Easter activities, to include multi-generational family participation (such as speech choirs, etc.). An Advent consideration is choosing families to light the Advent wreath on the Sundays of Advent.

We will consider several other additional family activities. Among these is a community outreach event for the neighborhood, such as a "trunk or treat" party, Harvest Party or festival, Sunday School picnic, Easter egg hunt, Oktoberfest picnic, or a talent show. We would also like to explore recreational events such as family game nights, providing service opportunities such as cleaning up for an elderly or shut-in member, or other community service activity (pregnancy center service, etc.).

We also need to increase our outreach. We have a changing and growing neighborhood. With the Board for Evangelism, we would like to do a joint, door-to-door neighborhood canvas, providing an invitation to attend services, and providing literature about Calvary. The Board for Evangelism used to coordinate a Friendship Sunday event for the parish and the Sunday School. We propose a return to that event.

Within the church building, we would like to use displays showing pictures, activities, and artwork of our students. For mid-week services, a shift to focus on our families' participation in these and other related activities might prove beneficial to Calvary's in-reach ministry. Lastly, in conjunction with the Board of Deacons and the pastor, we would like to promote the use of family oriented devotions in the home.

II. Youth Ministry (Grades 7 – 12)

The Youth breakout group opened its session discussing how Calvary's mission statement is being applied to the Youth. The group also discussed opportunities for youth participation in worship and Sunday School.

Some positive things that happen are opening activities with prayer and spending more time together. Some positive things to add include sending cards to sick and shut-in members, volunteering at a nursing home or children's hospital, and assisting with the clothing closet.

Some new things to involve the youth in the life of the congregation include shadowing or interviewing members, helping with the Sunday School closing, and setting up youth led trips for the congregation such as a trip to the Lutheran Museum in Gettysburg. The group also discussed new ways

of communicating. One of the ways to communicate includes a youth blog on the internet. The new youth chair has established a blog, and the blog is updated several times per week.

Regarding future plans, the Board for Youth will be developing a plan to prepare to attend the next National Youth Gathering or regional Higher Things event. Planning for attending and planning for funding for these events has been based on a 3-year planning cycle in the past. Additionally, there will be more youth eligible for youth group participation in the next 5 – 10 years. The Board for Youth will be looking at ways to prepare for the next “wave” of students.

III. Young Adults (Graduation through 30)

The Young Adults breakout group began with discussing personal situations in which children that grew up at Calvary lost touch with the church when they entered young adulthood. The discussion focused on situations such as sporadic attendance and attending other churches after marriage. Brett Witmer discussed the reasons he continues to attend church as a young adult. He stated his background was formed in childhood, his own research about LCMS teachings, and other research. This discussion led into exploring ways to develop our young adult membership and keep them active.

Personal contact is a theme that underscored much of the session. The group discussed the importance of face-to-face contact as being one of the major initiators of active involvement rather than simply a note in the bulletin or *Calvary Comment*. Increasing personal contact and face-to-face contact are important elements of integrating and assimilating young adults into the various activities and groups formed outside the worship life of the church.

The group also identified a need to keep in contact with members who are attending college or who serve in the armed forces. One idea is to provide opportunities for individuals to send “care” packages to these members and include notes of encouragement or friendship. Calvary should also provide the *Calvary Comment* and/or hyperlinks to the publication and the bulletin. This communication plan should include the lectionary for each Sunday to assist in promoting personal study by these members.

The group identified time may be an impediment to involvement by young adults. Some may want to serve, but they do not want to commit to positions that would be time-consuming. Opportunities for service include continued service as acolytes, serving as board members, or serving as lay readers.

Regarding newer members, the group identified interest surveys could be done for people who begin worshipping on a regular basis so others may learn about them, where their talents lie, and the areas of service in which they may be interested. The group also noted that “we old-timers” do not know much about the newer young adults or members. The group suggests a section of the *Calvary Comment* be devoted to spotlighting newer members.

Another idea for involvement by young adults and young families focused on “celebrating the family” and offering family activities outside worship. To do this, childcare can be provided so the young families and adults can have meaningful fellowship time.

Brett Witmer volunteered to organize a focus group of young adults to discuss some of the ideas surfaced in the breakout group discussion. The goal is to identify how we can better meet the spiritual needs of our young adults. Brett also discussed the possibility of encouraging college-age youth to become involved in other opportunities for fellowship through Higher Things, a recognized service organization (RSO) of the LCMS. Brett mentioned linking these things to the Board for Evangelism.

The group identified it would be a good practice if the young adults of the congregation serve as youth group mentors and advisors to assist with activities. Doing service projects is another area that should be encouraged, but the youth and young adults should initiate the projects. In the same way, Calvary should provide mentors and contacts persons who will meet and support young adults in their faith journey.

The group acknowledged short-term regular visitors such as college students and military families, but the group was unsure of how to address how we can best serve them as well.

IV. Summary

The turnout for the workshop was impressive. The dialogue was engaging, and many good ideas surfaced. In looking at the reports as provided by the facilitators, some of the same ideas for involvement were similar in each group, which is a good thing for Calvary.

The next step is to institutionalize what was covered in the workshop. To do this, a follow up workshop should be conducted in which the chairs of each board convene to look at how identified ideas and activities can be documented further, action plans developed, and activities implemented. Time and cost must also be a consideration in these efforts. Integration of the activities of the Board for Youth, the Board of Education, Evangelism, Stewardship, and the Board of Deacons will help ensure the suggestions identified in the workshop are given serious consideration.

A workshop to involve the afore-mentioned boards is tentatively planned for the June/July 2013 timeframe, upon approval from the Church Council. The congregation is invited to provide comments and other input to Pastor Zimmerman and Jim Blockus as we begin preparations for the next session.

Jim Blockus, Workshop Facilitator
Soli Deo Gloria
March 25, 2013
The Feast of the Annunciation