



# Missouri District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

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## Sunday School & Family Ministry

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*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might... You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*

*Deut. 6:5,7*

**The LCMS has a strong history of education programs in our churches and our commissioned ministers are well trained in education. Most of all God's Word is always on our hearts. As we go through each day, we do so striving to love as God has loved us, and in doing so we not only set an example for our children, but we teach them.**

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### Faithful Adaptations

This is perhaps one of the most difficult sections to address simply because Sunday schools have not started back up. Many churches adjust their summer schedule for a variety of reasons, many churches have gone completely online with their education programs (including Sunday school and Vacation Bible School. Worship services have opened and there have been sporadic events (mostly outside) in our district.

As we look forward to being able to gather together, we face restrictions due to safety. Keep in mind that all of these ideas assume that you are wearing the proper face coverings or masks, keeping 6 ft. social distancing whenever possible and utilizing proper sanitary practices like washing hands and using hand sanitizer. Here are some of the ways our children's educational ministries have adjusted:

- **VBS**
  - At-Home Vacation Bible School has been one of the more popular adaptations with churches sending home kits with supplies, instructions, and links to videos.
  - Using cloud storage resources like OneDrive or GoogleDrive participating VBS families can upload their pictures from the week to one safe, easily accessible, and shareable location.
  - A closing car parade can allow for VBS staff to interact with families in person, while maintaining safety measures.
- **Sunday School**



- For at-home Sunday School, churches can provide families with resources such as leadership training, devotions for parents, videos with music playlists, and examples of activities that go with the lesson.
- Live video streaming can be used to connect with families and to teach. One way is to create a private Facebook group for church families. From this group, your church can use Facebook live to lead Sunday children’s stories, weekly devotions for families, and however else your families would normally gather together. Facebook Live allows people to interact in real time, make comments, and ask questions. And whatever you record on Facebook Live can also be viewed later if a family cannot be online during the live feed.
- **Social Distancing Gatherings**
  - Some great social distancing gatherings include Ice Cream Socials, Fire Pits, gathering outdoors, or in a large space (e.g. field or gym). However, please note that proper safety measures should still be observed, so parents will certainly need to be involved in these events as opposed to simply dropping off their child.
- **Your Child’s Mental Health**
  - Depression and anxiety levels can increase with isolation, so being proactive about mental health is important. Exercise is one way to promote physical and mental health. One idea to combine spiritual, physical, and mental health is to incorporate exercise and spiritual disciplines together, like organizing a prayer walk.

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## Guiding Principles

### Relationships Rooted in Christ

*“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Colossians 2:6-7*

At the heart of Christian education is growing in relationships rooted in Jesus Christ. Whatever curriculum, program, or method you are using there is one thing in common – the goal is to build these relationships. We build relationships with one another and we strengthen our relationship with Jesus Christ. Reading God’s Word, praying together, group discussions and activities are all ways we encourage these relationships. In education this is called synchronous learning – where learning happens in real-time. However, relationships cannot grow in an environment that is not safe. There may be times where it is not safe to gather in person for Sunday school, but you can still be together safely while apart (e.g. a Zoom video conference).

Now, if you have ever been on a preschool Zoom you know that a synchronous experience for a class may be difficult. Asynchronous learning is learning that happens at different times and/or places. Many churches have added some kind of asynchronous competent to education that was not there before (e.g. sending home Sunday school lessons, at-home VBS, etc.). Think about it, though, is having children learning about the Bible at home with their parents a bad thing? No! Our question is *“How can we provide different opportunities to learn about our faith in Jesus in a safe way?”*

1. How do we create an environment where children and their parents feel safe about the environment your church is providing? See the F.A.Q for factors to consider as you look to “open” Sunday School.
2. Take some time to evaluate the blend of methods you have used (synchronous vs. asynchronous) and how they can foster relationships in your children and their families.



3. Are the asynchronous resources you provide for Sunday School or education encouraging the building of relationships in the home?
4. Do your synchronous methods allow for conversation, questions and discussion that can help build relationships?

## **Making Disciples of Parents**

For many educators the focus of work has shifted to creating content. While there is more time spent finding and developing resources than in the past, however, we must also be careful not to simply dump resources on our parents who have also taken on the role of Sunday School teacher recently as well. Whether you are a Sunday School teacher or administrator (i.e. superintendent) you invest in people just as Jesus did. Jesus invested considerable time into His disciples so that they could go out to make other disciples in His name.

One of the differences you may find is the object of your investment. Sunday School teachers may be used to pouring into the lives of their *children*, but now they have no one in a classroom. Our education ministries can seek to create opportunities to encourage and educate *parents* to help them make disciples in their own homes. Many of our Sunday School teachers are trained, or have some experience teaching, but there are parents who have no training or experience in Christian education. Sending home a full lesson plan for a one hour Sunday School may be daunting to some parents. Since your Sunday School teachers do have experience with this, it may be beneficial to involve them in helping to train your parents. It does not have to be overwhelming, look for simple ways to connect and alleviate stress. Perhaps this means including extra examples of how to do a lesson or an activity. Some churches take 10 minutes to connect, share about the day, discuss a lesson, and pray.

1. **How can you equip parents without overwhelming them?** (e.g. pre-VBS/Sunday school Zoom meeting, “How-to” videos for curriculum sent home, etc.)
2. **In order to walk with parents through teaching their children, in what ways can you communicate with parents so that you can encourage and equip them?**

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## **FAQs**

**Note: This section is nearly identical to the FAQ on youth ministry. We are asking the same questions about in-person youth ministry as we are Sunday school and other education programs.**

We encourage you to develop your plan for your own community. Everyone is going to have a different setting and context they are working in. As much as we might love to have someone make the decision for us, an outside entity will not have the insight that your ministry teams have in your congregation.

Communication between staff is extremely important, especially with churches that have multiple ministry spaces, staff, or sites. We encourage frequent, honest communication among your ministry leaders using whatever leadership structures you have in place – pastor(s), other commissioned staff, school staff, boards, etc.

It would be best practices to make sure that your communication comes from a place of unity – whether it be a church and school, or simply different ministries with different leaders in your church.



## **SAFETY**

### **Screening for Symptoms**

What protocol do you have for screening participants (both children and adults), staff, and volunteers?

Some things to consider:

- Temperature checks
- Self-Report Questionnaire

What do you do if someone in your ministry displays symptoms of being sick during a program?

(fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion, headache, feeling unwell, unexplained rashes, vomiting or diarrhea within past 24 hours, skin or eye infections, chicken pox, mumps, measles, etc.)

- Is there a place for them to go to avoid exposing others?
- Will there be adequate staffing to handle a sickness?

### **Sanitation**

Do you have a plan to address...

- Sanitation of space, toys, and equipment?
- Use of shared spaces (e.g. Sunday school classes sharing rooms with a school)
- How is it best to handle drop off and pick up procedures?
- How frequently will common spaces be sanitized, and by who?

### **Physical/Social Distance and Contact Tracing**

- How will physical distancing be encouraged?
- Will there be a single-door entry method or staggered arrival times?
- What kind of attendance records will you keep in case anyone finds out they have contracted symptoms after an event?
- Are there shared supplies, or is there a need to provide individual supplies for certain activities to have proper sanitation procedures?
- What attempts are you making to keep groups at a gathering size recommended by local governmental guidelines?
- While grouped in smaller clusters, students will generally be expected to stay together with their small group and not mingle with other students. How will this be encouraged?

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

- How is it best to encourage open communication with families, youth, leaders, and staff?
- How will helpful reminders be displayed around your location so everyone understands that wellness and safety is the ultimate goal?

## **TIMING**

- When is the right time to begin meeting in person? There is not a simple answer to that question, so what factors are you considering?



- Please also consider that as the church we are setting a moral example for our people in how we respond to authority.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- Are there less risky ways to implement the event? (e.g. outdoors as opposed to inside a smaller room)
- Are there restrictions being imposed by local government and/or the CDC?

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## **References and Resources**

- **Chapel of the Cross – Sunday School Resources**
  - <https://chapelofthecrosslutheran.org/index.php/health/70-children-s-ministry>
- **COVID KIDS & YOUTH MINISTRY POLICIES (DCE Cassie Moore)**
  - [Click to view PDF](#)
- **In-Person Youth Night – Sample Form**
  - [Click to view PDF](#)
- **Mental Health Information: Teen Depression**
  - <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/teen-depression/index.shtml#pub3>
- **7 New Disruptive Church Trends Every Leader Should Watch**
  - [https://careynieuwhof.com/the-original-2020-is-history-7-new-disruptive-church-trends-every-church-leader-should-watch/?fbclid=IwAR2gBvZiwRLC0xKnPQ2fzyxRV1ThoE8xm\\_R3ZFbL6r2S70m-pHkAwiy1YeE](https://careynieuwhof.com/the-original-2020-is-history-7-new-disruptive-church-trends-every-church-leader-should-watch/?fbclid=IwAR2gBvZiwRLC0xKnPQ2fzyxRV1ThoE8xm_R3ZFbL6r2S70m-pHkAwiy1YeE)

