

FOCUS: Parish Education



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Now is the time for parish education

By Dr. Jan W. Lohmeyer, adjunct professor at Concordia University Texas and apologetics instructor at Lutheran High North, Houston

What is parish education?

Each church has the responsibility to offer lifelong biblical instruction to its members of all ages. Parish education is Christ-centered, biblical instruction for every person in the Church. It has its roots in the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.* And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (emphasis added).

But isn’t Baptism, confirmation and church attendance enough?

What is “enough”? Deut. 6:7–9 tells us: “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*. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets

between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (emphasis added).

It is to be done constantly because it is so important. Now, how many parents are doing this for their family? As a parent, when I read this I feel as if God has just punched me in the stomach, and it hurts. I know that I have not followed this commandment. How many pastors are doing this for their members? The answer is not enough.

How does parish education help keep young members in the church?

Many young members become disinterested and leave the church after high school or college. The Barna Group recently completed a five-year study, which states that 59 percent of

The deplorable, miserable condition that I discovered ... has forced and urged me to prepare this catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! ... The common person, especially in the villages, has no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine.

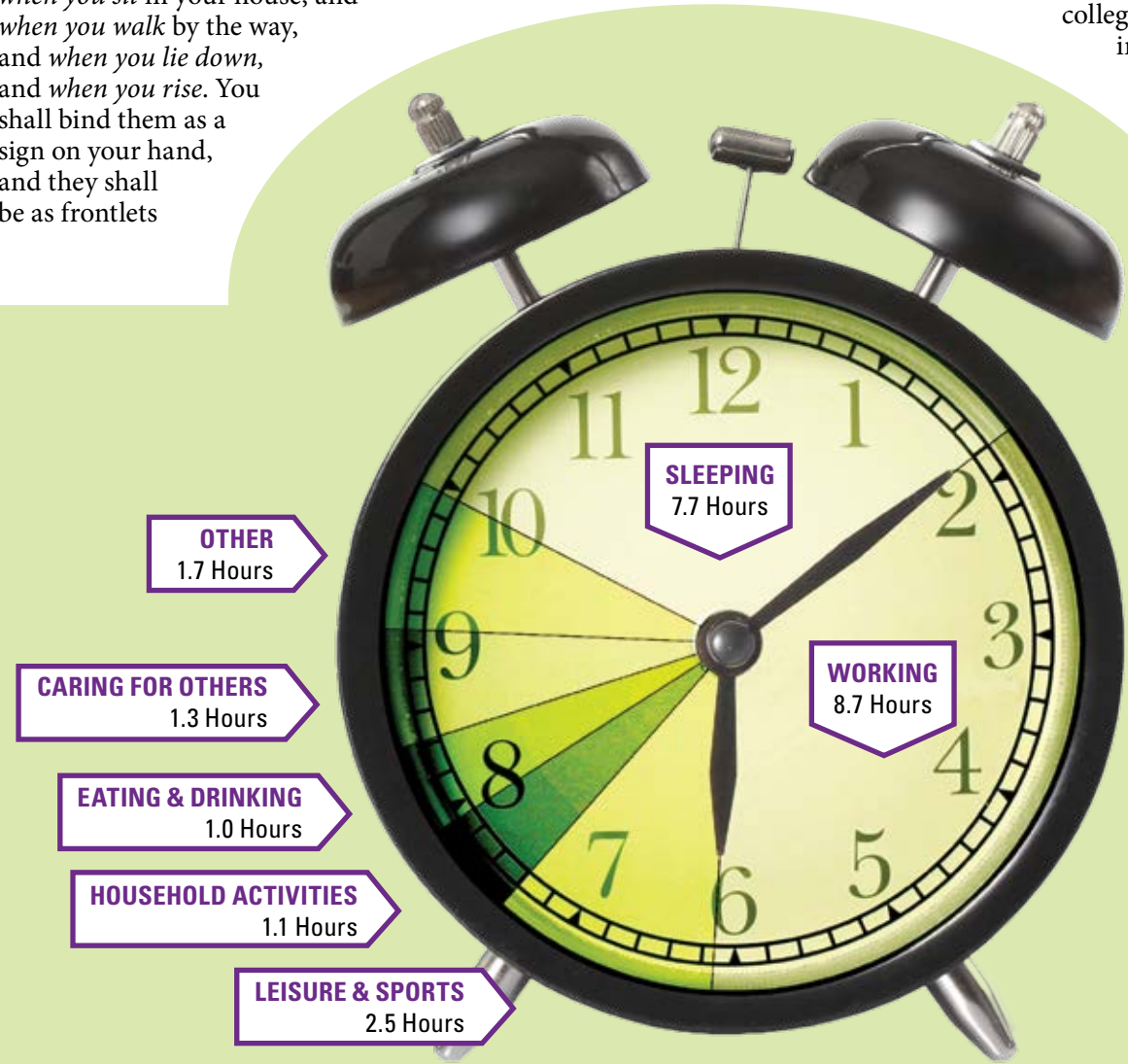
—Martin Luther (“Luther’s Preface” to *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, Page 246)

young adults disengage with church after the age of 15. I believe this is due to the church’s poor performance in the area of instruction (parish education). Our Sunday schools, for lack of a better option, sometimes enlist teachers with little or no training. Sometimes their lessons become little more than story time. Many children think of stories as fables and fantasies, just like the stories read to them at bedtime. Our high-school and college students are taught in their schools that Darwinian Evolution is the truth, not the Bible. The church needs

an overhaul of its parish education. We need to give our young students the answers to the questions because we have the truth. We have science and reason on our side, and we don’t use either. Every church should offer an apologetics class for different age groups.

With all the mixed messages in today’s world, what does the church offer?

The truth. When Pilate questioned Jesus, our Lord answered thus: “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to *bear witness to the truth*” (John 18:37, emphasis added).



Where do YOU make time?

Compared to your other daily activities, how much time is spent engaged in the Word of God each day? According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, this is how the average American between the ages of 25 and 54 spends the day.

Note: Data include employed persons on days they worked, ages 25 to 54, who lived in households with children under 18. Data include non-holiday weekdays and are annual averages for 2013. Data include related travel for each activity.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey


All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

(2 Tim. 3:16–17 ESV)


Want a healthier congregation


FOCUS ON LIFELONG EDUCATION


A recent study in the LCMS found that well-designed parish educational experiences correlated with congregations that exhibited “healthy” characteristics. Here are the top recommendations:


-  **Enhance the vitality of parish-educational ministries**

The study identified these eight effective educational practices:

 - teacher training,
 - stated goals and objectives,
 - student-centered learning experiences,
 - evaluations of educational offerings,
 - expectation of member involvement,
 - pastoral support for Christian education,
 - service projects, and
 - opportunities for intergenerational interaction.
-  **Since pastors are often the leaders of a parish’s educational ministries, ensure pastors have training in effective educational theory and practices.**

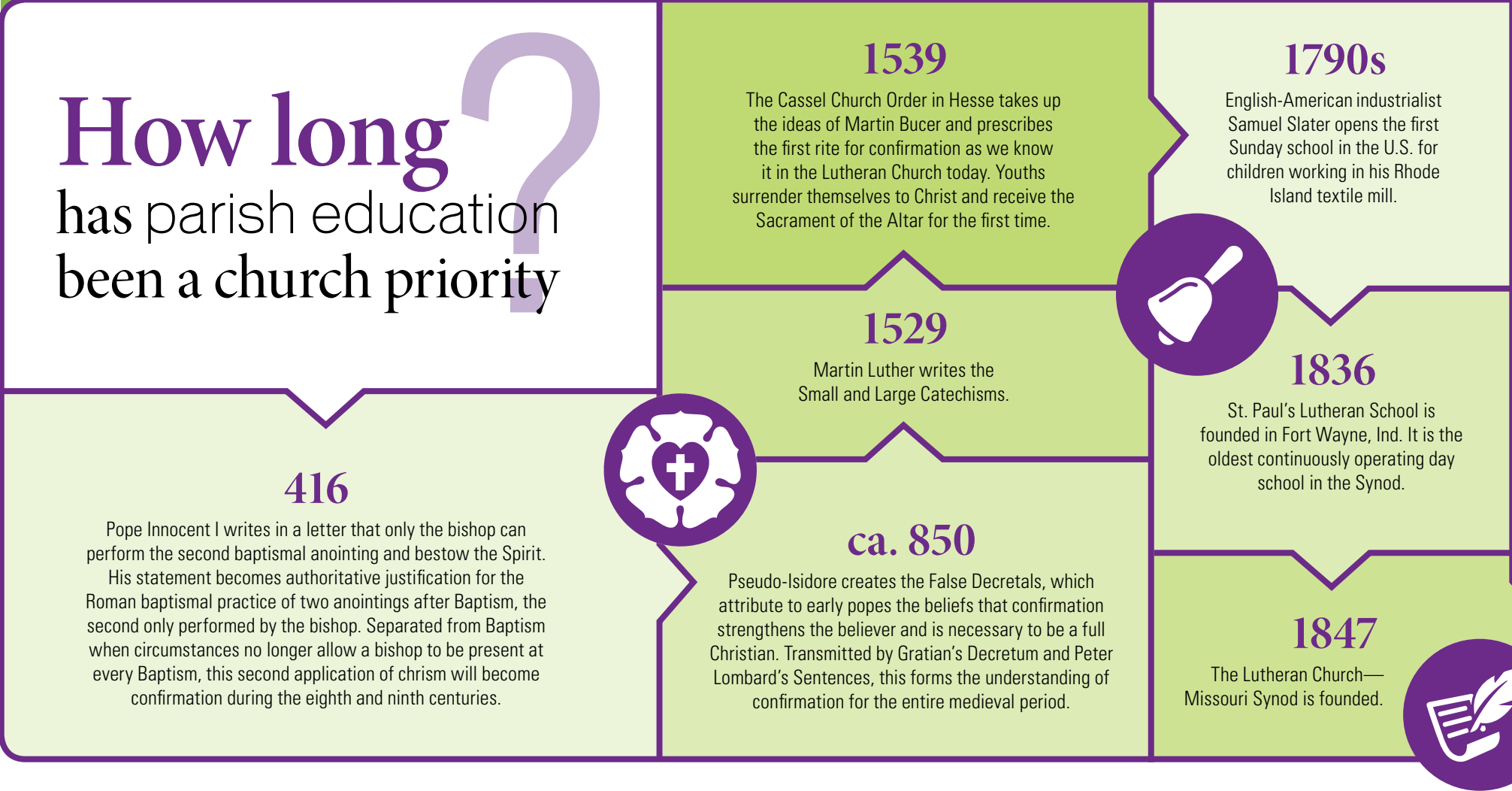
 - Add learning opportunities aimed at enhancing educational insights to circuit and pastors conferences.
 - Consider inviting pastors to attend portions of conferences and training for DCEs in the district.
 - District boards of Parish Education should offer learning opportunities for pastors.
-  **Where possible, bring in staff trained in implementing effective teaching methods.**

 - Ask members who are trained teachers to use their expertise to help teachers in the church to use effective methods.
 - If you don’t have one, bring in a local director of Christian education (DCE) to help assess your congregation’s strengths and weaknesses in its parish-education ministries.
-  **Districts and the Synod should better inform congregations of the importance of effective educational practices and help to develop resources as needed.**

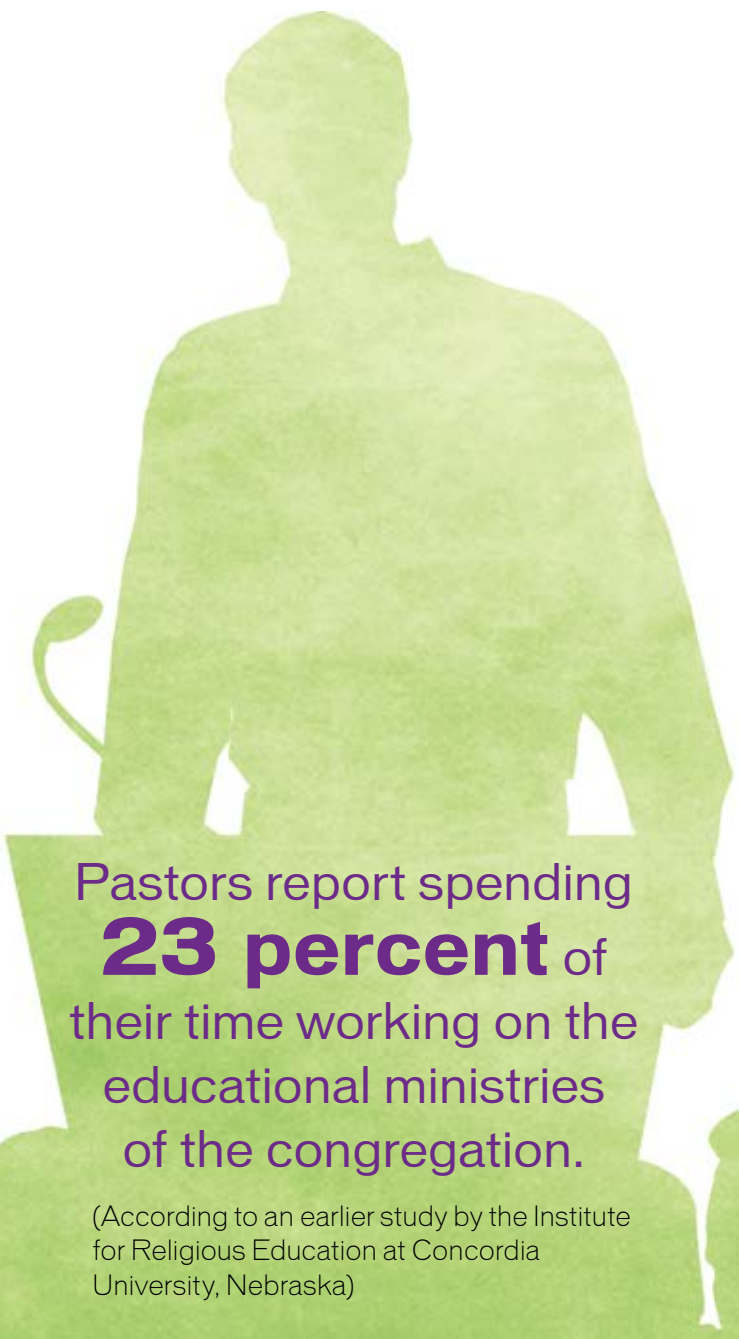
 - Visit LCMS Youth Ministry’s thESource (youthesource.com) for Christ-centered Bible studies, devotions, talking sheets on important societal and theological topics, discussion guides for popular teen literature and media, resource reviews, and Christian education tips and support for education practitioners.
 - Check out these resources (available from Concordia Publishing House):
 - *Confirmation Basics*
 - *Family Ministry Basics*
 - *Rotation Basics: A Practical Guide for Sunday School and VBS*
 - *Sunday School Basics*
 - *Youth Ministry Basics*
 - *Eutychus Youth: Applied Theology for Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*
-  **Assess the status of the church’s educational efforts and seek recommendations for how to enhance them.**

 - Use district staff to help find resources and people who can assist with this process.
 - If the district doesn’t have resources available, consider contacting the National Association of DCEs (NADCE).

Information taken from the “Christian Education Practices and Congregational Characteristics” study, which was a joint effort by the Institute for Religious Education at Concordia University, Nebraska.



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Pastors report spending **23 percent** of their time working on the educational ministries of the congregation.

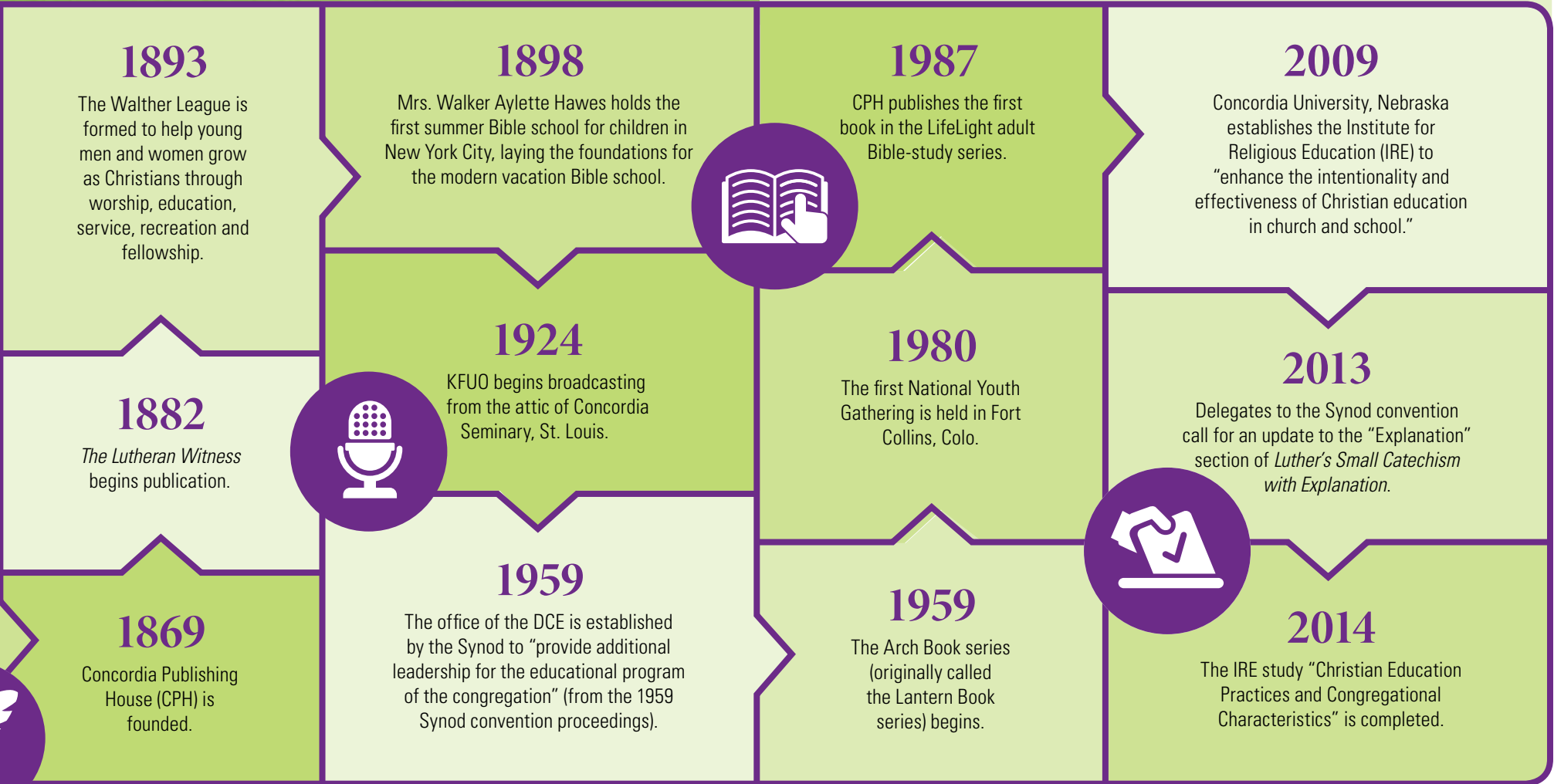
(According to an earlier study by the Institute for Religious Education at Concordia University, Nebraska)



How to recognize a HEALTHY CONGREGATION

Any church where **the Gospel is preached** and **the Sacraments rightly administered** should be considered “healthy.” But Scripture is clear: the people of God should be devoted to the **study of His Word**. Other vital characteristics include **lack of conflict**, **member giving**, numerical **growth in membership**, and **adult and youth participation** in Christian education. All are God-pleasing and consistent with biblical and confessional directives.

a and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.



Why Sunday school?

By Thomas A. Nummela, senior editor of Sunday school materials, Concordia Publishing House

Perhaps your congregation is facing a tight budget. Every expenditure, including Sunday school material, is being reconsidered with an eye to saving money. Should you consider a cheaper Sunday school curriculum?

A non-Lutheran publisher has mailed an attractive flier to your Sunday school director featuring their new curriculum. It looks flashy and fun. Some teachers are in favor of trying it out. Should you?

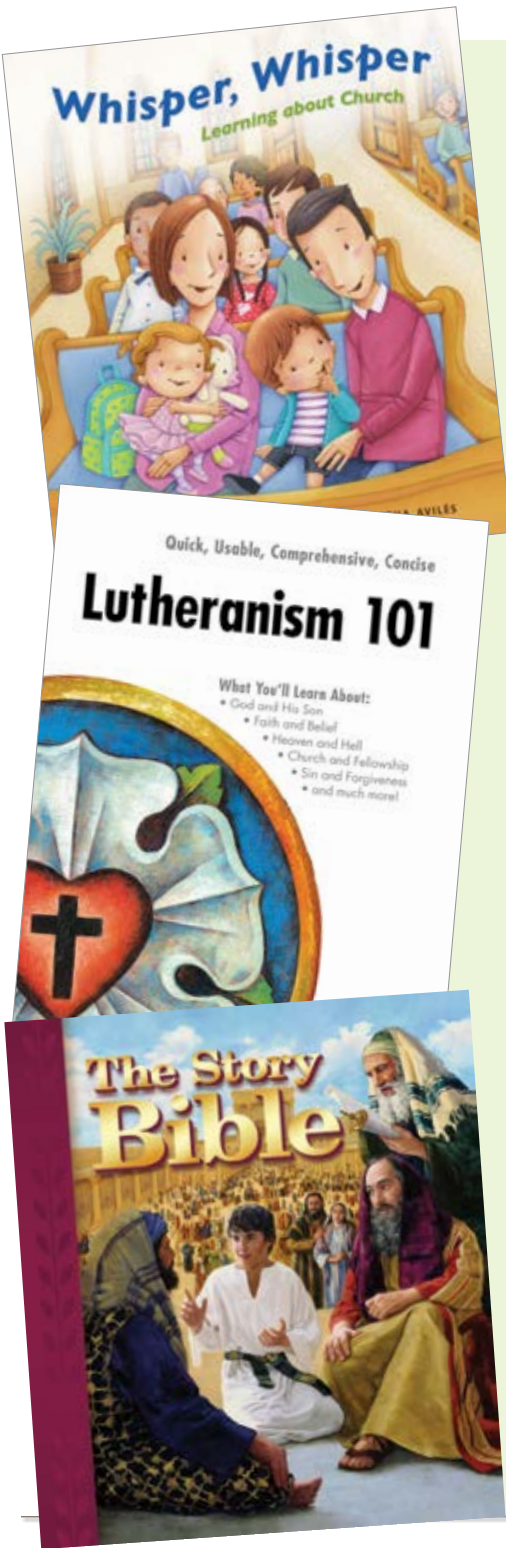
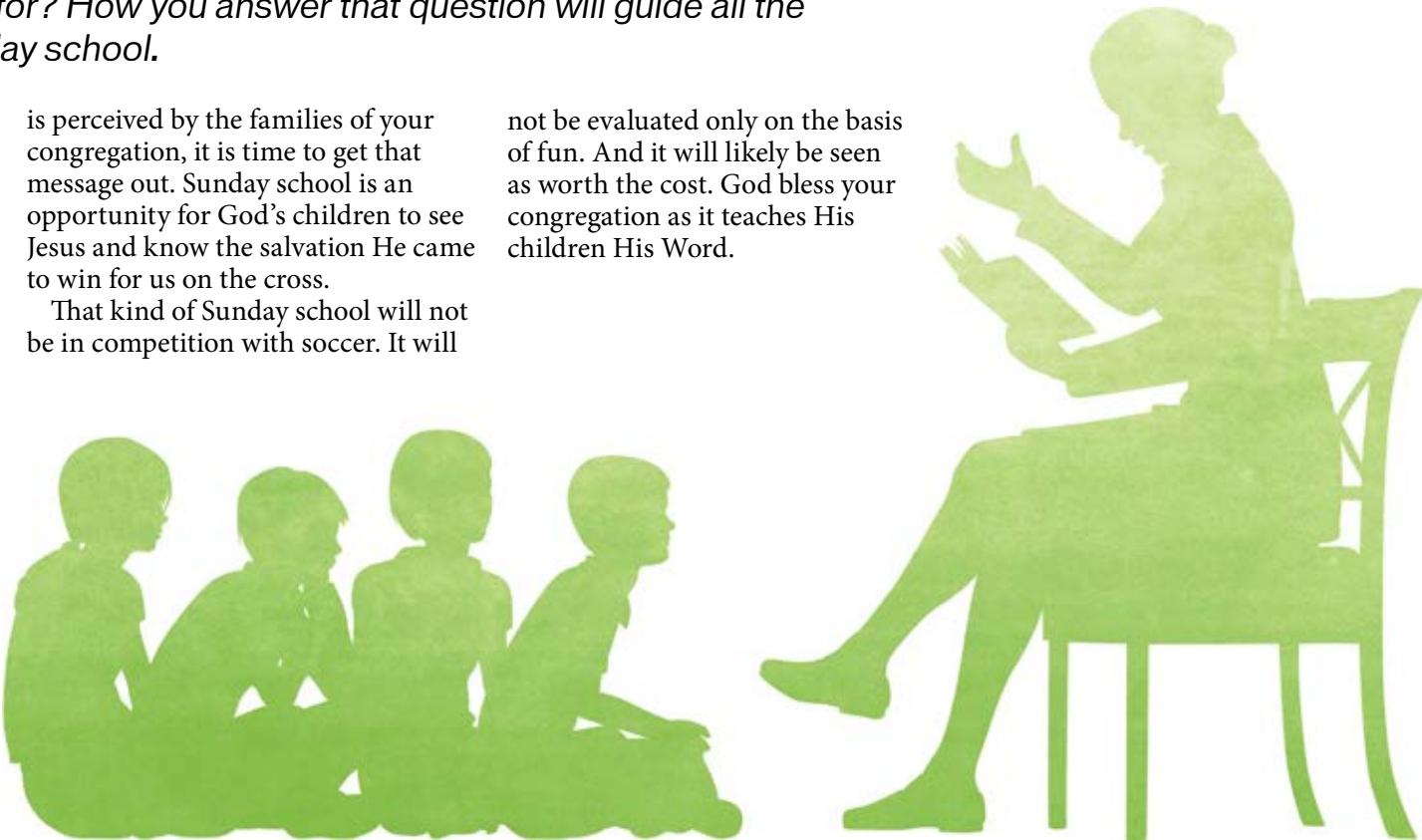
A parent reports that it is difficult to get her child to attend Sunday school; the child says it is boring. He would rather be in the city soccer league on Sunday mornings. You wonder whether some new style of Sunday school would make it more attractive to families with similar issues.

What is your Sunday school for? How you answer that question will guide all the critical decisions about Sunday school.

IF YOUR SUNDAY SCHOOL is in competition with other activities in family schedules as a form of entertainment, someone has missed the point. It is time to review the purpose for your Sunday school. Sunday school is valuable as an agency that assists families with the spiritual nurture of the children and adults in those families. It is a place where the proclamation and study of God’s Word combats the forces of sin, death and Satan, offering grace and forgiveness for those burdened by guilt and mired in sin. It builds a foundation of biblical knowledge that will serve young Christians for a lifetime. Sunday school, seen in that way, offers far more than any game of soccer. If that is not what your Sunday school is for, perhaps a change is in order. If that is not how Sunday school

is perceived by the families of your congregation, it is time to get that message out. Sunday school is an opportunity for God’s children to see Jesus and know the salvation He came to win for us on the cross. That kind of Sunday school will not be in competition with soccer. It will

not be evaluated only on the basis of fun. And it will likely be seen as worth the cost. God bless your congregation as it teaches His children His Word.



10 FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESOURCES TO TEACH THE FAITH from Concordia Publishing House

Whisper, Whisper—Rhyming text, in-sanctuary tips and engaging, colorful illustrations help children up to age 4 understand the rituals and routine at church. (Item no. 562510)

3 in 1: Discovering Our Triune God Summer Sunday School—Students will learn about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as they study 13 Old and New Testament stories. (Item no. 444105)

The Story Bible—This treasure will be a great help to pastors, teachers, parents and grandparents as they, like the faithful mother and grandmother of St. Timothy, lead the little ones to understand the sacred Scriptures. (Item no. 012049)

Our Faith from A to Z—This book invites kids to discover new words with a poem that weaves together 26 terms and explanations in alphabetical order. (Item no. 562509)

My Church Words Book—Introduce children to people, places and things they experience in church. Simple, descriptive text is paired with bright pictures on themed pages, so kids learn over 100 words related to church and worship. (Item no. 630919)

My First Hymnal—This heirloom-quality hymnal contains lyric hymns with beautifully conceived illustrations presenting the colors, seasons and symbols of the church year and the life of Jesus. (Item no. 992268)

Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation—Written by Martin Luther in 1529 in question-and-answer format, the Small Catechism explores the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession and the Sacrament of the Altar. Also included are daily prayers, a table of duties for Christians in their various callings in life and a guide for Christians to use as they prepare to receive Holy Communion. (Item no. 223110)

Lutheranism 101 (2nd edition)—This book examines Lutheran beliefs and heritage in a fresh way. If you are a lifelong Lutheran searching for more information or new to Lutheranism looking to understand what we believe, this book will be your guide. (Item no. 124357)

Lutheranism 101 for Kids—This book helps pre-confirmation children learn more about God’s love for them in Christ and about faith as a Christian. (Item no. 562500)

Lutheran Spirituality: Collection on CD-ROM— Authored by respected Lutheran scholars in the United States and Australia, Lutheran Spirituality opens participants’ minds and hearts to the center of our Christian faith and the only source of a God-given spirituality — His rich forgiveness of our sins in our crucified and resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ. (Item no. 203767)

► Find these tools at cph.org.