

Evangelgram

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VBS banner tours six states

Kathy Bouffard was on the VBS planning committee and served as decorating coordinator of Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Livonia, Mich. Part of the decoration and promotion for the 2002 VBS involved making a banner. Kathy made the long four-by-six banner depicting the VBS theme: "Bug Safari" (published by Group Publishing). The banner depicted Buddy Bee and Domino Ladybug frolicking through blades of grass and vines.

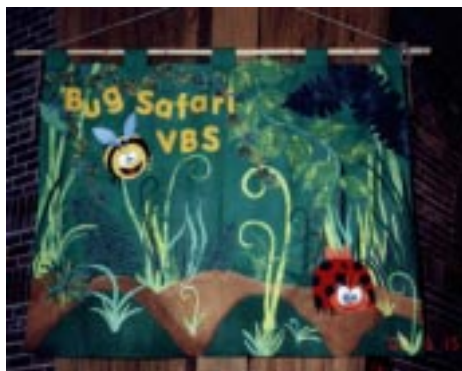
Group Publishing maintains an on-line message board where VBS directors can share ideas and resources. Through this message board, contact was developed with Rev. Joe Rodriquez of Bayonne, N.J. He became interested in the banner. So after Christ our Savior was finished with it, Kathy mailed it to him to use for their VBS.

Pastor Rodriquez was so pleased with the banner that he suggested offering it to other churches. Thus the banner tour developed. Throughout the summer, the banner was mailed from one church to another. It served churches in six locations: Livonia, Mich.; Bayonne, N.J.; New Orleans, La.; New Freedom, Pa.;

Shelby, Ohio; and Estherville, Iowa. Each church attached a patch on the back with their name and VBS dates. This summer is it being used by Grace Lutheran Church, Canton, Mich.

Pastor Rodriquez commented, "I am one of those who have been greatly blessed by her (Kathy's) creativity and encouragement."

Kathy Bouffard added, "It has been a tremendous blessing for me."†



The banner created by Kathy Bouffard for the VBS "Bug Safari," for Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Livonia, Mich. The banner shows Buddy Bee and Domino Ladybug frolicking in the grass and vines. It went on tour and served five other churches in five states.



Winning with pipe wrenches

It's not the typical way to reach neighbors," said Rev. James Brooks of Grace Lutheran Church in Atlanta, Ga. He explained how a large group of Chinese immigrants and college students started attending the congregation. He continued: "It started when one of our women told trustee Carl Koppe that a commode in the women's bathroom was not working."

Koppe is a faithful prayer partner, covenanting to give thanks in everything, as St. Paul counsels in 1 Thess. 5:18. The word "everything" does include things like a slow commode. So they mentioned it to the Lord in prayer. After they prayed, they discussed what to do and concluded that one of them would have to be there if they called an outsider to come repair it. "Why don't we do it ourselves?" they asked. So the next day, they came dressed in old clothes and went to work.

"We were thanking the Lord as we worked," Pastor Brooks says. Soon they realized they needed a new stool. They were carrying the old stool across the parking lot to Carl's pickup truck when a well-dressed Chinese man drove

O AFC summer training

The annual summer training for youth as witnesses, sponsored by Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ, will be held July 8-14 at Trinity Lutheran Church and School in St. Joseph, Mich. Between 250 and 300 Missouri Synod youth are expected to attend. Some of those who attend will also serve on traveling teams in various parts of the country after the training. They will conduct training events in congregations.

The keynote speaker this year is Dr. Paul L. Maier, Lutheran historian and author. Also on the program is Dr. James Lamb, director of Lutherans For Life; Judge Jim Sheridan; and Javed Khan, development director for POBLO (People of the Book Lutheran Outreach), an outreach to Moslems. Lutheran churches from Berrien County, Kalamazoo and South Bend will serve as host churches to provide housing and meals.

For more information go to www.OAFC.org or call (217) 636-7729.—
OAFC CRIER, Spring 2003.†

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A Christian school can be missionary

Thousands of children from unchurched homes are enrolled in Christian day schools. The parents send them to these schools for a variety of reasons. Some want their children to have some moral education and they believe a little religion will help; or the fact that Christian schools offer quality education; or that a relative or neighbor invited them. Whatever the reason, when they attend they hear the Gospel and they become a way to reach the parents.

This is what happened to Stephen. A recovering alcoholic, he believed there

According to researcher George Barna, there are 125 million unchurched adults in the United States. This includes 29 million who say they are Christians but never go to church. In addition there are more than 5 million who are members of a non-Christian faith like Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist. A Christian day school is one way to reach them with the Gospel.

was some kind of god that he called a “higher power.” His daughter was confined to a wheelchair, but he wanted her to attend a “regular school.” One day as he drove home, he noticed that the school near their home had no steps. He told his wife and they went to investigate. They agreed that Brenda would have no trouble getting in and out of the building. But as they checked it out they discovered that it was a Christian school.

However, they enrolled Brenda and her brother. They soon noticed the loving care and concern of the teachers. They met other parents at school functions and at parent-teacher meetings. When a pastor’s membership class was announced in the school paper, they thought this was not for them. But then their son’s teacher visited



Cindy Ji of China, who recently was baptized at First Immanuel Lutheran Church in Chicago. With her are her sponsors, Rev. Don and Gerry Krist (left), Northern Illinois District Missionary Paul Hoemann and First Immanuel Pastor John Carrier (right).

The testimony of a new Chinese Christian

My name is Xin Ji. My chosen English name is Cindy. I come from Liaoning, China. I am a scholar/researcher in the immunology department of Rush University in Chicago, near the University of Illinois—Chicago campus. I came to Chicago three years ago after earning my doctorate from Magoya University in Japan.

I didn’t know anything about God or Christianity when I arrived in 2000. I came to the Chicagoland International Student Ministry Friendship House to study English conversation. The volunteer teachers are all Christian. All of them are so nice and friendly. They touched my heart. I thought I wanted to be like them. If I felt frustrated or worried about something, I would only see the negative aspect. But they would see it in a positive way. They always have great joy.

I was curious about the Bible. I studied the Bible at Friendship House. I changed little by little. In China we are taught to believe there is no God; to believe only in yourself. At first, it was difficult for me to accept the truths of Christianity. Finally after two years, I decided I wanted to be baptized. I learned and prepared for baptism with Pastor Paul Hoemann.

After my baptism, I felt anxious about the future—academic studies, career, my relationships with other people. When I was in Japan, I always felt like I was struggling with life. I could not feel any peace.

After I became a Christian, I knew I don’t have to worry about my future. I remember the words of Jesus: Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? By worrying, who can add a single hour to his life?†

them and invited them to attend. Stephen resisted at first, but then he and his wife agreed to try it.

Later Stephen stated, “When I was young, I was turned off by organized religion. Religion to me was a bunch of rules and regulations. During the class, I learned about God’s love and forgiveness.

I learned how God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners—and I was one of them. Religion became to me a personal relationship. I was so glad that we had decided to send our children to this school. Because of it I was saved and my life changed.”—Kay Meyer, St. Louis, Metrovoice, March 2003.†

Events attract the community

Recently, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Macomb, Mich., received 80 new members: 45 adults and 35 children. Of the adults, two were baptized and 24 confirmed. It is true that the congregation is in “the fastest growing suburb of Michigan,” according to Nancy Kruger, minister of outreach and mission. She adds, “We seek to reach out to those in our area, whether a new resident or a long-time resident.”

One way Immanuel seeks to reach out is through special outreach events, which are publicized in the community and to which members can invite their friends or family members in a non-threatening way. After experiencing an outreach event, people find it easier to attend a worship service. Nancy adds, “Every time we host an event, we hear of at least one family who wants to find out more about membership in our church family.”

In addition to vacation Bible school, Immanuel hosts an Easter egg hunt, ladies

Advent tea, Lenten “soup suppers” and what is perhaps the biggest event each fall for the past five years: the Fall Family Fun Fair. (See the December 2002 issue of the EVANGELGRAM for a story about it.)

This event provides fun for the entire family with moonwalks, clowns, ponies, putt-putt golf, games, prizes, food and a train ride. The event is free, but people are asked to register and indicate any church connection. The registration forms are used to award prizes and for follow-up. After the event last year, prizes were delivered to 30 families, most of whom had no church connection. The prizes were Bibles, Christian CDs, Christian videos and Bible storybooks.

In middle of the festivities there is always an information table, staffed by Immanuel’s pastoral staff. Brochures are provided to share the Gospel and information about the church.

Immanuel’s mission statement is displayed in signs around the church and

in every classroom. It says, “To know Christ and to share His love.” There is repeated encouragement for members to invite others and to share their faith with friends, family members and neighbors. To help members do this, twice a year the Minister of Outreach and Missions teaches a course called “Becoming a Contagious Christian.” Those who take the course learn how to share their faith in a way that suits their personality and style.

New members at Immanuel repeatedly say that “the friendliness of Immanuel” attracted them. Immanuel makes a strong effort to practice to hospitality. There are greeters at every church entrance, a Welcome Center in the vestibule, and coffee and donuts provided. During the service, guests are welcomed and encouraged to stop at the Welcome Center to receive a special gift (a pad of paper and a pen attached to a refrigerator magnet, and a bookmark).†



Some of the 80 new members received recently at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Macomb, Mich.: 45 adults and 35 children. Two adults were baptized and 24 were confirmed. Immanuel grows, says Pastor Mike Lutz, as it puts into practice its mission statement: “To Know Christ and to Share His Love.”

Winning with pipe wrenches

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in. He said, “We’ve been looking for a church. A friend said this might be a good one for us. What do you Lutherans believe?”

Carl referred the question to Pastor Brooks. So, although he was in old clothes, sweaty, with hands that showed he had been working with rusty pipes, he responded, “We are a one-Book church. We believe the Bible to be true from cover to cover. Our motto is, ‘Word alone, Grace alone, Faith alone, Christ alone.’ ”

This escalated into a half-hour discussion with the stranger, who they learned was Dr. James Liang, who had immigrated to their community from China some years ago. He had become a Christian in China where he was trained. Now he had a tailor shop in the area. Finally he said, “I have to go now, but I’ll see you soon.” He went home to his wife and told her, “We’ve found our church! They believe every word in the Bible and have a pastor who is willing to get his hands dirty.”

The next Sunday there were four new faces in church. The following Sunday, there were 12—and more from the

Chinese community followed. They were open to instruction and before long, 14 were baptized.

And there is a sequel, Pastor Brooks says. Because of his witness, Dr. Liang some years before had been given the name “3L” (Light, Life, Love). One day when Koppe, who is the LLL congregation rep, told Liang about the Lutheran Laymen’s League, Liang broke into a big grin. He said, “Now I know why we love it here so much. All week I have 3L and then some more on Sunday. God wanted us to be Lutheran all along. We are where we belong!”†



Some of the Chinese who attend Grace Lutheran Church, Atlanta, Ga. Recently, several individuals were baptized. They started to come because of a plumbing job!

How to share your faith in Christ

This is how Ascension Lutheran Church in St. Louis teaches its members to share their faith. These suggestions were prepared by Ascension’s Inreach/Outreach Minister Dr. Otto Hintze and Kay Meyer, founder and president of Family Shield Communications.

You have done your homework and have built a relationship with your friend. He asks you to explain the Christian faith. You know he has no previous connection with the church and knows almost nothing about the Bible or Christ.

Some key points to discuss:

1. Talk about God

Share some of the characteristic s about God. Stress that God is both just and righteous (Ps. 7:11, Dan. 9:14, Matt. 5:48). Therefore, He must punish sin. But God is also loving; He does not want to punish people by sending them to hell.

2. Talk about Man

Although God created people in His own image (Gen. 1:26), that is without sin, they rebelled against Him. Satan tempted Eve and both she and Adam disobeyed God. That’s how sin came into the world. Man’s nature became sinful and this condition was passed on to the whole human race. Sin separates us from God (Rom. 5:19a). Man cannot save himself by doing good works (Eph. 2:8-9, Titus 3:5a).

3. Talk about Sin

It is easier for most people to talk about sin in other people than in themselves. God says, “There is no one who is righteous . . . no one who does good” (Rom. 3:10). “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). It helps to use one’s self to talk about sin, rather than accuse them of sin. But it is imperative that people recognize they are

sinners and cannot save themselves. Unless they accept this, they cannot see the need for a Savior. If we stumble at just one point, we are guilty of breaking all of God’s law (James 2:10).

4. Talk about Jesus

Out of great love, God the Father sent His only Son from heaven to earth to do what we could not do: live a righteous and sinless life as our substitute and then to pay the wages of sin, which is death. This He did when He died on the cross. He suffered and died in our place and even suffered the torments of hell as our substitute. And then He rose from the dead to become our guarantee of forgiveness and eternal life (Rom. 4:24-25).

5. Talk about Repentance

God wants us to repent of our sins—that is, be sorry for them and want to turn

How to share your faith in Christ

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away from them. He wants us to trust in Jesus as the one who saves us, the one who gives us forgiveness and promises eternal life.

6. Talk about Faith

Faith in Christ means that we trust Him completely for our salvation, believing that He suffered, died and rose for us. This kind of faith is a gift of God, created in us by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:8-9, Acts 16:23-34).

7. Talk about Eternal Life

When we trust in Jesus Christ, God gives us the gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

Be sure to ask the person if he or she understands everything you said. If necessary, explain further. If they understand and believe, pray a prayer of thanks with them and encourage them to read the Bible and attend church—perhaps with you.†



Some of the new members who recently joined St. Mark Lutheran Church in Mason, Mich., after going through confirmation class. Several of them and the children were also baptized. Harriette Stevens, a member of St. Mark, says, "We are a very small church, but we do have some visitors. We are now trying to start an evangelism program." One of the new couples comes from a different town, but they never miss a Sunday.

Keys to growth



One of the new member groups received last year at King of Kings Lutheran Church, Round Rock, Texas. Last year the congregation received 35 families, 83 by baptism, 55 by confirmation. This included 25 adult confirmations, four by reaffirmation and 26 by transfer.

According to Rev. Mark J. Dankis at King of Kings Lutheran Church in Round Rock, Texas, these four items are keys to growth:

1. A Growing Community

King of Kings grows about 15 percent

annually. Although its location hinders visibility and accessibility, King of Kings has averaged 75 new members a year over the last three years so that it now has 267 families, 490 confirmed members and 720 baptized members.

2. Revelant Worship

The worship at King of Kings strongly emphasizes praise. The average Sunday attendance is 365.

3. Relevant Ministries

The strong ministries of King of Kings include a youth ministry that attracts many families and an adult small group ministry. All members are encouraged to be involved in one of the ChristCare groups. This is also strongly stressed in new member orientation and assimilation.

4. Passion for Families and Friends

This includes community outreach. "We have no special outreach program," the pastor says, but "Friends invite friends." Most new members find King of Kings by word of mouth or through its Web site. "We have a four-week orientation class for new members," the pastor continues, "taught by our Minister of Discipleship, as part of our efforts to assimilate them. Each new member is given a spiritual gifts inventory and is expected to serve the congregation or the community in some capacity using their gifts according to their interests."†

LLL groups

There are 1,295 groups affiliated with the Int'l LLL, whose purpose is to support the Lutheran Hour, "Bringing Christ to the Nations—and the Nations to the Church." Staff worker Dotty Arbet says, "In the Int'l LLL family, groups have a special value connecting laypeople within the individual congregations to ministry opportunities and the communities." They are usually connected to a Bible study and sponsor community outreach events in addition to supporting the Lutheran Hour ministry.

A group is defined as a collection, a set, an assembly and a cluster. Any group in a congregation can become affiliated with the LLL. There are no dues or fees. New groups are given a charter, sent a packet of Bible studies and provided with information on current projects. For more information, contact Arbet at 1-800-944-3450.†

Lutherans not equipped for outreach

Lutherans are "unprepared and ill-equipped to reach out to non-Christians and engage them in a transitional process that leads to an active faith in Jesus Christ." That is what Martin Saarinen says in an article called, "Why Some Churches Don't Grow," based on research among Lutheran congregations.

He maintains that the Lutheran church, like most mainline denominations, works under an unwritten assumption that the conversion to personal faith in Jesus Christ has already occurred in people's lives elsewhere and that church growth merely means assimilating those "already converted" into the ongoing life of the congregation.

Lutheran clergy, Saarinen says, "Are trained as nurturers of the faith, rather than as catalysts in any process of spiritual transformation."†

—Brian Stoffengen

www.e/sermons.com, April 2003