



*eMonograph*

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# **Recognizing Outreach Moments**

## ***An LEA Monograph***

by  
Richard Cohrs

Editing and publishing team: Ed Grube, Sharon Stadtwald, and Kathy Slupik

Lutheran Education Association  
River Forest, Illinois  
Jonathan Laabs, Executive Director

## Foreword

“Recognizing Outreach Moments” by Rich Cohrs should find a prominent place in your reading schedule. After all, you serve God through your role in Lutheran Christian education. More than a job or profession, you are in ministry.

Chances are good that you serve people who have little or no Christian background. You, then, are a missionary. Your mission strategy is to be alert for times when outreach moments, herein given emphasis as Outreach Moments, have potential for spiritual impact. The Holy Spirit will help you, and you are not to feel guilty if your impact seems slight or ignored. Your role is to identify and capitalize on Outreach Moments.

Outreach Moments aren’t only for those who do not know Jesus; all whom you serve need outreach into their lives as well. For them, Outreach Moments are nurturing of faith.

This LEA Monograph differs from previous issues in that it is written in conversational style, sprinkled with stories and occasional questions to provoke your thoughts.

May God bless your reading—and doing—of Recognizing Outreach Moments!

Edward Grube

Director of Publications and Communications

Lutheran Education Association

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A story from the Word of God: Esther 4

King Xerxes ruled over a mighty kingdom.

King Xerxes promoted Haman, one of his nobles to a position above all the other nobles. All the officials and nobles would bow down to Haman as he passed by, for the King had commanded all to bow down to Haman.

Mordecai was an exiled Jew living in the capital city. As a Jew, he refused to bow down to Haman. Haman became so angry he vowed to wipe out all of the Jews from the kingdom. In order to do this, he convinced the king to send out an edict to all of the provinces that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month all the Jews would be killed and their goods plundered.

Mordecai heard about this decree and was so distressed that he sat at the gate of the palace in sackcloth and ashes.

His niece, Esther, also a Jew living in exile, had found favor with the king and became his queen. He didn't know she was a Jew. Queen Esther soon found out why her uncle was so distressed, for her race would be destroyed at the order of the king.

Mordecai asked Esther to speak to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people.

Esther was afraid, for approaching the king without being summoned meant she could be killed, unless the king stretched out his golden scepter.

When Mordecai heard of Esther's fear, he said to her, "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and

your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Queen Esther asked all the Jews in the capital to fast for her—for three days.

After three days she approached the king, who held out his scepter. Queen Esther was able to convince the king not only to spare the Jews but also to destroy Haman and all those who would have killed the Jews.

Her people were saved.

A story from God's Word.

***What did you learn about people from this story?***

This story reminds me that people are basically sinful and that they will rebel against God and His people. Haman and his culture wanted to destroy the Jews for following God's commands rather than those of man.

I also was reminded how family and friends support one another in times of great distress. All of the Jews in the city fasted and prayed for Esther's success.

***What did you learn about God from this story?***

I was reminded that God raises up His people and sets in motion events that will allow them to be His voice to an ungodly culture. Esther was placed in a position to help save God's people.

***What was your "Aha" from this story?***

For me, Esther was the one whom God used to speak the words of salvation for her people. I am reminded that we, as workers in the Lutheran education system, have the

opportunity to speak the words of salvation to those with whom we are in relationship.

The words of Mordecai will echo in my memory, “And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

### **For such a time as this—and what a time it is!**

All across the nation, children and young people enter the doors of Lutheran congregations, day cares, preschools, elementary schools, high schools, or universities. Some are from Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod families who choose Lutheran education for their children so that their values, practices, and faith may be enhanced by the instructors.

Some come from Christian families who are looking for a youth group, summer program, small class size, dedicated Christian teachers, safe environment, challenging curriculum, or a place where their child will not only learn about the secular subjects but also hear the words of eternal life.

Others are from families without a Christian faith. These families look for the advantages of “private” programs. These families agree to have their child taught about Jesus but see this only as another price to pay for “special treatment.”

God has placed you in your position for such a time as this. You are in the position to bring the words of eternal life to these students and their families every day.

### **What are Outreach Moments?**

An Outreach Moment is more than an opportunity to share a Gospel message. It is an invitation to join a fellowship or event, or a time you model Christ with words and deeds. Part of the joy of working in a Lutheran educational program is planning for these Outreach Moments.

An Outreach Plan is nothing more than a systematic method to intentionally move contacts through a process of communication and invitation.

Each inquiry about the ministry, each time names are gathered at events such as Vacation Bible School, Trunk or Treat, and so forth, contact information is recorded and placed into a process designed to move the person systematically through a series of steps that culminate in their joining the fellowship.

The Outreach Plan recognizes that at any point along the process, the contact may decide not to join the fellowship. That does not, however, necessarily mean that all contact is stopped. The plan accounts for this contingency and continues to offer information and invitations, albeit at a reduced rate, generally only two to four times in the year.

The process starts with a follow-up phone call or email from the ministry inviting the family to tour the facilities. If the family declines a tour, the information is placed into a permanent contact list that is used to send periodic messages and invitations to special events of the ministry. These messages may be informational pieces parents can use to expand their parenting skills and knowledge coupled with a no-

pressure invitation to join the ministry for a special event.

If the family accepts the invitation to a tour, they are placed on a different contact list, one designed to move the family into enrollment.

If the family enrolls their child and if they have no church home, their contact information is passed along to the appropriate data base maintained by the congregation. The congregation has the ability to continue the process of communication and invitation as they begin and maintain contact with the family.

All along the process, each time the family is contacted or invited, an Outreach Moment happens. Every communication provides an opportunity for a Bible story, a testimony from other parents, a Christian response to the culture, prayer requests, and invitations to join the ministry fellowship.

By designing an intentional Outreach Plan, Outreach Moments are guaranteed to happen as parents are regularly informed and invited by the educational ministry as well as the worshipping community. These planned Outreach Moments allow for a systematic and intentional way to provide the words of salvation to the people. However, part of being a worker in the educational ministry setting is that each day brings unexpected, serendipitous opportunities for Outreach Moments.

It is these unexpected Outreach Moments that can often go unnoticed, and an opportunity to provide words of salvation might be lost.

The following stories and examples are based on my experiences as a Lutheran

principal, teacher, and director of Christian education. Many of the stories are a combination of several events; names have been changed, and some literary license has been employed for ease in reading.

These examples are not intended to be a definitive list of every Outreach Moment that arises for workers in Lutheran educational ministries. They are presented to offer time for individual reflection, inspiration, and examination. It is my prayer that by sharing my stories, you will be encouraged to share yours with your colleagues. By encouraging one another with our personal Outreach Moment stories, we give the greater community an opportunity to rejoice with us, be encouraged to recognize Outreach Moments of their own, and recognize unique Outreach Moments.

A guiding principle for responding to Outreach Moments is found in 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV): *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

I have found that Outreach Moments come disguised as something else.

### **Outreach Moments come disguised as prayer time.**

As principal, I had the privilege of being invited to the three-year-olds' snack time on the first day of their class. The teacher wanted me to meet Tomatoa.

Tomatoa was enrolled by his grandparents. He was born in Tahiti, his mom a native Tahitian, his dad retired from the Navy. They met while he was stationed there.

Tomatoa's mother was observing a family custom of sending her child to stay with his grandparents, in order to know them.

Grandma asked if he could attend our school to help him get along with his peers, but, more importantly, to learn English. He came to the United States speaking only French.

I stood in the corner of the room watching a small boy with large dark eyes take in all that surrounded him. His teacher gently set him at his place for a snack and announced, "We will pray now." The children all folded their hands and bowed their heads, except for Tomatoa. His eyes got even wider as he watched the scene unfold. His teacher lovingly put her hands around his, folding him in hers and spoke softly, "Come, Lord Jesus...".

She relaxed her hands, and Tomatoa ate his snack. I was informed of his progress: he spoke his first English word, "pig," he knows "Come, Lord Jesus," he can sing "Jesus Loves Me," he knows what a tractor is, and so forth.

One day grandpa came into my office and asked to speak to me. He was complimentary of the teacher and the progress made but wanted to know about, this "praying thing."

"Tomatoa won't eat unless we all pray. Now, you know I don't believe in that nonsense. What should I do?"

I thanked God for the Outreach Moment set in motion by Tomatoa's teacher; "How about I give you a list of all the prayers the class says? That way, you can pray with him."

One day the preschool teacher approached me. "Tomatoa was praying today and said his grandpa is sick. I am going to visit him."

I thanked God for her recognizing an Outreach Moment disguised as a prayer.

Grandpa was indeed sick. Terminal cancer! His doctors were not optimistic about his future.

Over the next few months, his teacher paid special attention to Tomatoa, telling him about the joys of heaven. Pastor spent many days in discussion with grandpa, sharing the Gospel message of the hope of heaven.

Then the day came. It was unexpected. Grandma called and asked if pastor could come over to the house as soon as he could. The word went out, we gathered for prayer as pastor sped to the bedside.

Grandpa smiled when he saw pastor enter the room. "Can you baptize me and my family?"

We rejoiced that day and later we rejoiced with Tomatoa as grandpa was called home to heaven.

Each day as little hands fold and small heads bow in prayer, Outreach Moments shower down around the classroom.

Little voices share their hearts with their Savior, and teachers are privileged to listen in. Sick dogs, absent dads, distraught mothers, tables with not enough food, closets with no warm coats, jobs lost and jobs gained, sickness, and concerns great and small are brought before their heavenly Father in the absolute trust and faith only the youngest of the children have. No matter the faith tradition at home, these

voices have been trained to bring to their heavenly Father all that is on their hearts, and they do.

Teachers, aides, principals, and pastors can surround these lambs with prayers of their own, but more importantly, they can be God's hands and feet in these lives as they provide answers to these prayers.

When the voice that prays asks for a warm coat, one can be provided. When the voice that prays asks for food, meals are sent. When the voice that prays seeks peace in the home, appropriate visits are made to bring words of peace.

When the voice that prays comes from a house that does not have a church home, Outreach Moments abound as the Good News of the Gospel is shared along with the needs of this world.

"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

### **Outreach Moments arrive with anger and tension**

More times than we care to remember, our days in the Lutheran education system are filled with dissent, anger, and rejection. I have found that some Outreach Moments come disguised in these times.

I was sitting at my desk on a lazy Thursday afternoon in spring, having given students a homework assignment and time to work on it, fully knowing we all longed for the day to be over, so we could enjoy the afternoon.

The classroom door banged open as Mrs. Dee swept into the room. I looked up into the face of a very angry woman. She had

closed the distance to my desk and towered over me, yelling. I was so startled it took me awhile to understand just what she was saying.

"...most terrible, self-centered teacher in the world. I am taking my son now, do you hear me? Now!"

"You are the worst," finally registered in my brain. It took awhile, since we had never had a cross word between us.

Before I could stand, she had grabbed her son and stormed out of the room, slamming the door with such force that the pictures on the opposite wall rattled. The class sat stunned, not knowing what to do.

"Please continue working, I will be right back."

I went to the office and made a quick call to ask pastor if he knew what was happening. He promised to check it out and let me know. The class and I enjoyed a longer than normal recess until it was time to go home. Pastor called just as the last student left.

"I'm not sure what is happening but she is in the hospital."

I called my wife, filling her in on the excitement of the afternoon and told her I was headed to the hospital.

I entered her room. She lay quiet, hooked to tubes and machines recording her vital signs, having just had emergency surgery.

My heart still hurt from her angry words, but my mind was registering that she wasn't upset as much with me as she was that she had to have emergency surgery.

I swallowed hard as I walked forward, praying that she really wasn't still angry with me. I approached and she opened her eyes. She began to apologize. I stopped her and asked if I could pray for her. We had a short prayer. She asked if her son could return to school.

"Yes."

An opportunity to give a Gospel witness, share a prayer, and offer comfort could just as easily been lost in the hurt and anger of the moment. Our human side screams out to dissociate from those who cause pain, anger, hurts, and dissension, while our outreach side recognizes moments to reach out with a comforting word of prayer, hope, and love.

"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

### **Outreach Moments come in fish-bowl moments**

Those that work in the Lutheran system know that their lives are often scrutinized, second-guessed, and evaluated like no others in the community. This [fish-bowl existence](#) can be annoying but has the potential to create outreach moments, as others watch and evaluate how we relate to others.

The Door family did not have a church home when they approached me to enroll in the Lutheran school. Others that knew the family suggested they were there just to take selfish advantage of us. I was moved, however, to accept Mrs. Door and her family.

Mrs. Door enrolled her four children with the understanding that we could teach them all we wanted about Jesus but not to expect her to believe.

Over the first year, we did teach the children about Jesus. They learned prayers, sang songs, memorized Bible passages, and participated in special worship services. Every Friday their teachers would invite them to attend church services. Every Monday they reported "no" when asked about church attendance.

The second year started out similar to the first, the children loving Jesus and mom refusing to bring them to church. Every Friday, the teachers would invite, to no avail. One day, the faculty was discussing the situation, and each teacher volunteered to make a special effort at the upcoming teacher's conference to talk to her about Jesus and the church.

It looked as if it would be more of the same until one teacher said she had made an invitation for coffee and they would meet socially. That continued and soon the women became friends, sharing that which only trusted friends will share.

Mrs. Door confided that she was having some financial problems. The teacher thought I could help and asked her if she could share. Mrs. Door agreed, and I became involved. The rest of the year, we worked on her finances, as well as other stresses she faced.

The third year began again with invitations refused. One day I confronted her. "Why won't you come to worship?"

"I have nothing to wear and no way to get there."



“Would you go with us if we picked you up? By the way, you can wear jeans if you wish, it’s okay.”

Her face lit up. “You would do that?”

“We will be there at 7:30 a.m. for church and Sunday school.” That Sunday started a routine that would last almost a year, with a very packed car driving to church.

Then she asked, “Can the children be baptized? Can I?”

There were tears that day as five souls were transformed by water and the Word.

Over the years, my family and I were the subjects of conversations around the community. People watched as we helped the family, even giving them our old car. Tongues wagged as people confirmed we were being taken advantage of.

After the family was baptized, I was shocked to learn that there were others who watched how we interacted with this family and were impressed with how we had acted. They wanted to know more about being a Christian.

I admit, it was extremely humbling to know that just living our lives and reaching out to this family had repercussions beyond people I knew.

“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

### **Outreach Moments come disguised as discipline problems**

Some of the hardest Outreach Moments to recognize come disguised as times we must discipline a student. These times usually

Recognizing Outreach Moments

generate angry feelings, stress, and frustration—for the educator as well as the student.

Most times, I had to discipline students when they were sent to my office as a last resort by a frustrated teacher. Over the years, there were a few students who stand out as visiting my office more than most.

One such student was Jerry.

He was large for his age, played the part of the class clown, and was able to figure out which buttons to push so he would spend time in my office. It was almost as if he were challenging me to remove him from school. He never crossed that line, but he did push against it—hard and often.

I would mete out the appropriate consequences for his actions and then take time to share with him the love of Jesus. I would tell him that Jesus saw him as important, special, and a child of God. After he graduated, I lost touch with him.

I did see him after he was the dad of two children; one was a boy with his dad’s behavior tendencies. He confessed, “Whenever I was in the office I knew I was in trouble, but Mr. Cohrs always made me feel special.”

These discipline times were the Outreach Moments that God used to influence a student who grew into a Christian husband and father.

“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

### **Outreach Moments are surrounded by hostility**

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The culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seems similar to the culture that surrounded Queen Esther. Esther found herself surrounded by those who would seek the destruction of God's people. Today, we hear much about Christians being persecuted, some to the point of death. Today's culture, at best, tolerates and, at worst, persecutes Christians.

In this culture, God establishes His schools, filled with educators who shine as a light in the darkness to the surrounding culture. As more and more children enter Lutheran educational ministries, they come from a culture that has many questions about Christianity.

### **Outreach Moments come to us disguised as tough questions.**

Often, culture throws the tough questions at Christians not to obtain an answer but to justify its own unbelief.

It is not just the culture that asks the tough questions. Often, the church family struggles with doubts, fears, and anxieties. They ask the tough questions to receive an answer and to bolster their personal faith.

Thus an Outreach Moment disguised as a tough question reaches more than those outside the church fellowship and has the potential to strengthen the weaker brother.

A story from the Word of God: Matthew 22

One day the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Jesus in His words. So they went to Him and asked, "Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used to pay the tax."

They brought Him a coin and He asked, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

Then He said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"

When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.

A story from God's Word.

### ***What did you learn about people from this story?***

This story reminds me that those apart from Jesus have been asking tough questions from the time He walked Earth. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

### ***What did you learn about God from this story?***

I see God filled with incredible love and patience. No matter how many times people came forward with those tough questions, He answered them with the answers only His Word can give.

### ***What was your "Aha" from this story?***

An "Aha" for me was how Jesus listened to their question but knew their motive: evil intent. I need to spend more time looking for the intent behind the question than trying to give a perfect answer.

“Will there be dogs in heaven?”

“Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?”

“Did God really create the universe?”

“If God is a loving God, why do bad things happen to good people?”

“Aren’t all religions the same?”

These questions and more have been and will continue to be asked of Lutheran educators across the system, from preschool through the university level. Questions such as these will be thrown at instructors as challenges to shake their faith and prove Christianity false.

I have struggled with many of these questions and have learned a simple framework (Lutheran Hour Ministries, [MISSION U](#), 2014) to answer them:

- Get to the root of the question
- Use story and illustration
- Use the Word of God

“Will there be dogs in heaven?”

This question usually comes from our younger students. Generally, the root of the question is that they have a special pet that is sick or has died. Students want the comfort of knowing that their loved friend is okay.

I often use the story of how God created the heavens and the earth and there were animals. I then quote Isaiah 11:6 (NIV): *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.*

Many times I can stop there.

“Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?”

Often this question comes from the parent whose children want to go to church, but the parents have many excuses for not taking them. The parents reasoned that one does not have to go to church to be a Christian.

I use a story with them.

We know that going to McDonalds will not make you a hamburger. Going to church will not make you a Christian either. But consider this:

What if you said you were a Cardinal baseball team fan, or a Green Bay Packer fan, or a Chicago Bulls fan, or a Detroit Red Wings fan – eventually you will hit on a team they say they are fans of.

Now suppose I offer you the best seats in the house – free. Suppose also that I will pick you up and drive you to the game—free.

Then you say to me, “No, I don’t want to go. I can be a fan without attending any of the games.”

Are you really a fan? Wouldn’t a Christian want to attend church?

I would quote Hebrews 10:25 (NIV): *Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

“Did God really create the universe?”

The motive behind this question is often one of unbelief in a God that could be Creator of the Universe. Something other than God

had to be responsible, for that is only rational and reasonable.

I would direct them to look at a painting and ask, "Was there a painter?"

Now it is very reasonable to say, "Yes, because the painting points to the existence of the painter."

Thus it is with the Universe: the Creation itself speaks to the existence of the Creator.

Colossians 1:15-17 (NIV) speaks to this:  
*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

"If God is a loving God, why do bad things happen to good people?"

The motive behind this question usually is related to a disaster or illness experienced by the person asking the question. This question is very common when one faces illness, tornado destruction, hurricane, or other forms of "bad things."

This question was asked of my wife when she was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer. Her pupil was very sincere when he came to her and asked, "Why did God send you cancer? You are such a good person."

Knowing that this third grader wasn't looking for a long theological answer, she responded, "Better me than someone who doesn't believe. I know I will go to heaven when I die."

He was very comforted by this answer. Sometimes that is as far as we need to go in our answers to bring comfort. But when she died I was challenged with, "Why did God take her when you two are such good people?"

I gave my wife's answer, but the comfort didn't come. So I expanded, "We are not good people. We are sinners, separated from God in our sin. The wages of sin is death, and we must pay that bill, an earthly death."

"But God so loved us that He gave His only Son to pay our price for an eternal death—hell. Through His suffering, death, and resurrection my wife will live—eternally in heaven. That gives me great comfort, peace, and hope. You can have that, too."

Several Scriptures speak to this issue, including:

Romans 3:23 (NIV): *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Romans 6:23 (NIV): *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV): *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

John 3:16 (NIV): *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

"Aren't all religions the same?"

The motive behind this question usually revolves around the concept that

Christianity is wrong because it claims to be exclusive. The world wants to have an out, an escape clause, not face an absolute. After all, they maintain there can be no such thing as an absolute, and they believe that absolutely. A quick illustration would be, “What about those religions that sacrifice babies, demand people eat people, or exclude all people except for just a chosen few— what about them?”

Proverbs 14:12 (NIV) speaks to this issue: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*

Christianity is far from exclusive, it is very inclusive, according to Acts 16:31(NIV): *They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”*

“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

### **Outreach Moments may come disguised in sporting events.**

It was the last quarter of the eighth-grade girls’ basketball game. It had been one of those games where neither side held a clear advantage, with the lead changing hands many times. It began to look as if whoever scored the last basket would win.

The girls were excited, for they represented a small Lutheran school, and their opponent was a much larger public school. Spirits ran as high as emotions did, with each passing tick of the clock bringing the end of the game closer.

Then it happened—a quick basket, a steal, and another basket put the opponents up by four points with less than a minute left. The

air felt as if it was sucked from the gymnasium as the realization that we would come out second settled on the crowd. But the girls never quit—a steal, a basket put us within two points. Then came the inbounds—all they had to do was get it in the hands of their team and the game was over—they win.

Just as the ball was thrown in, one of our girls stepped in front of the pass, catching it and shooting in one motion. A buzzer-breaking basket tied the game, but she was fouled in the act of shooting. The gym echoed as the ball bounced on the floor. She stood alone at the free throw line. One, two, three bounces and then she raised the ball, unleashing an arc.

Cheers erupted, threatening to shake the walls down, as the ball swished through the net!

Girls fell to their knees, some in exhausted agony, and others in exhilarated shouts of joy. The opposing coach quickly left the gym, promising the team more practices. But across the floor one girl from the opposing team still lay on the floor—gasping for air. Her parents ran to her and searched the crowd with pleading eyes, looking for help.

A quick assessment found her to be in distress. An ambulance was called; I sat with the parents, our teachers administering first aid until the ambulance arrived. A shadow fell across the scene as our girls stood silently in a circle, surrounding the fallen foe, heads bowed, praying for her health and safety.

The ambulance arrived, stabilized her breathing, and took her to the hospital.

A late night call from a grateful father indicated she had experienced anaphylactic shock but was doing well and would return to school after a day's rest. He thanked me for the first aid, the quick response of calling an ambulance, and continued: "You know, we are not church people, but thank you so very much for the prayers."

The girls unashamedly and openly did what they knew brought hope and comfort—they prayed. The girls thanked God the next day when I shared the good news that "Number 8" (as she was referred to on the court) would be just fine.

"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

### **Outreach Moments can be disguised as trips into the community.**

The third graders had a tradition of visiting the local nursing home at Christmas, singing seasonal songs and carols, putting on a short play depicting the birth of Jesus, and giving the residents a handmade card replete with a crayon drawing of the nativity scene, wishing the residents a Merry Christmas. Each year the students were well received and thanked for their gifts.

One Christmas season, I was privileged to join the class for the presentation. As the residents were gathering, I noticed that most of them were in wheelchairs, some seemingly paralyzed, and several had very little light in their eyes.

One gentleman was pushed into the room at the back, and as the program progressed he seemed to be showing signs of discomfort as he fidgeted in his seat. Other

residents started to notice him as he started to grumble about the children and missing his nap. At the end of the presentation one little girl approached him, climbed into his lap, gave him a card, a big hug, and announced, "Merry Christmas. Jesus loves you." Just as quickly, she jumped down and ran to her teacher.

According to the workers, his smile was the first one they had seen in a long time. They thanked us for sharing love with a man who did not feel love.

Over and over again, our students go into the community and share their faith with those that they meet.

What struck me about the nursing home visit is that each child shared God's love through Jesus, but not all of the children were part of a Christian community—other than their classroom. It's true. No matter what the parents' affiliation, each child sitting in a Lutheran classroom—whether a day care, preschool, elementary, high school, or university room—is part of a Christian community.

The teachers, volunteers, and aides are challenged with the greatest task one can have in this world—sharing the Gospel message of eternal salvation. They do this with their words and actions and their loving discipline, coupled with their encouragement. They have the joy of planting seeds of faith every day in all that enter their room. Most of all, they couple their words and actions with a winsome invitation to be part of a greater Christian community—the church.

## **Outreach Moments come with an invitation**

It started out as a normal day. I was preparing to interview a principal and was preparing the questions I would ask her. The subject turned to baptisms. She acknowledged that more than 20 children were baptized last school year.

I asked, “What is the secret?”

She smiled as she replied, “Every week, we invite the children to be baptized.”

Sometimes it is as simple as that – invite others to come and see Jesus.

“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

## **Outreach Moments happen every day**

Everyone involved in the Lutheran system encounters Outreach Moments every day—from the time they say “hello” to their charges to the time they bid them farewell, God places them in the right place, at the right time, and gives them the right words.

Whether Outreach Moments come disguised as prayers, in times of dissent and anger, living a Christian life, disciplining a student, answering tough questions, sporting events, field trips, or other situations, there is one common denominator in all Outreach Moments.

That commonality is found in the words of 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV): *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to*

*give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

As we enter into relationships with our students and their families, we have an opportunity to share the hope we have. Sometimes it takes preparation and thought on our part as we search for the words to start the conversation.

Some topics that might be a starting point for us are found in Lutheran Hour Ministries’ [MISSION U 201](#) (LHM, 2014).

If you are in a relationship with a person who is broken by sin, feeling the weight of the Law, you can start with Gospel topics such as: grace, love, Jesus, the empty tomb, joy, new hope, mercy, peace, and forgiveness. These topics will soothe the guilt of a stricken conscience and open the way for more dialogue.

You may, however, be talking with a person who is stuck in the pride of sin. You can challenge him with the Law and topics such as the holiness of God, eternal punishment, sin, judgment, wrath, justice, and hell. These topics will reveal sin, point to the need for the Gospel, and open the way for more dialogue.

A story from God’s Word: Luke 10 (NIV)

*Jesus gathered together seventy-two of His followers and sent them out two by two ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go.*

*He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out*

*like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.”*

*“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.”*

*“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”*

*“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”*

*The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”*

A story from His Word.

### ***What did you learn about people from this story?***

I see people who follow Jesus gladly going forth in His name, with His blessing, to

proclaim His Word in every place He would go. I see people willing to go, to be sent, into a hostile world armed with Christ and His teachings, finding joy as they serve Him.

### ***What did you learn about God from this story?***

I see Jesus sending His disciples out, after He has prepared them, to go into places ahead of Him, to be His hands, feet, and voice. He also provides for them in people of peace who will provide for their needs. When the peace ends, they are to move to the next place of peace.

I see a gracious God who gives us training and support as we work in His service.

### ***What was your “Aha” from this story?***

I see in this story pieces of the stories of Lutheran educators across the nation and across time. They proclaimed the Good News of the Gospel, and the message was heard! The joy shared by the 72 is reflected daily in the joy of the educator, who seizes an Outreach Moment and shares a Gospel touch.

It is my prayer that you always are prepared to give a reason for the Hope you have in the Gospel.

“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”



Continue the discussion:

You are invited to be part of the private Facebook Group, “For Such a Time as This.”

Here you will be able to:

- Share your Outreach Moments
- Be encouraged and inspired
- Share prayer requests
- Post inspiration and encouraging pictures, graphics, videos
- Ask questions of others
- Be involved in a greater learning community

To join, please send a request to Rich Cohrs at [cohrrs.rich@gmail.com](mailto:cohrrs.rich@gmail.com)

Further Resources:

- Developing an Intentional Outreach Plan
  - <http://www.lhm.org/schoolresources/plan.asp>
- Evangelism Training
  - <http://www.lhm.org/missionu/>
- Topical booklets for early childhood children:  
<https://www.lhmgift.org/storefront/products.asp?by=topic&id=33>
  - Learning to Pray
  - Sharing Your Faith
  - The Bully
  - The Christmas Journey
  - The Easter Story
- Lutheran School Outreach Training Series
  - <http://www.lhm.org/schoolresources/trainstaff.asp>

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