

Building Bridges

Ideas for Cooperation between Christian Day Schools and Homeschool Families in Christian Congregations

Note: This handout has been prepared in a general way; not all points may apply to your church or school. However, even in the case of churches without schools, or churches with schools but no homeschool families, many of the suggestions can still be implemented for the sake of the local homeschooling community or for public school families within the church. Be creative!

How Might a Church/Church School Support Homeschooling Families in the Church?

1. Shared Goals/Recognition

- God calls all Christian parents to be “home educators”; some parents also choose to make use of outside help, like employing a tutor, or using a school.
 - In a recent presentation to a southern Minnesota men’s group, a Lutheran pastor stated that homeschooling is the #1 Biblical choice for families.
 - Although the Lutheran Church has a wonderful long-standing tradition of establishing schools, it has an even longer-standing tradition of home education, especially during the elementary years.
- The choice to homeschool should be perceived as a success of the church, not competition with the school. We all share the goal of Christian education but go about pursuing it in different ways.
- Consider the mission of the church’s school. Might the mission be expanded or developed to include all of the children of the congregation, or the children of the community? What does the school’s mission have in common with the mission of homeschool families?
- Recognize the unique gifts that homeschool parents and children can offer to your congregation/school. (See attached list, “Homeschooling Parents Could... .”)

2. Open Communication/Invitation

- If an activity in the school is perceived as important to the well-rounded education of the students, why not include all children of the congregation?
 - Some activities require larger groups than individual families can provide, i.e., band, choir, spelling bees, musicals, and sports teams.
 - Perhaps even public school families would be interested in joining extra-curricular activities.

- When challenges present themselves regarding the practical implementation of including homeschooling students in CDS-related activities, brainstorm with homeschool families for solutions.
 - If school finances would limit participation by others, maybe homeschool families would be willing to contribute.
 - If leadership is lacking, perhaps homeschool parents could step up.
 - If finding the time in the school day is challenging, maybe homeschoolers would be willing to switch around their schedules temporarily.
- Create a generous policy for inclusion of homeschoolers in activities. When a clear policy exists, it can be changed through proper channels, if desired. This is to be preferred above assumption or miscommunication. Be proactive, rather than reactive in communicating these policies. For instance:
 - “We welcome homeschool families to participate in any after-school activity or church-related activity. Parents are encouraged to help run these activities.” *and/or*
 - “We ask that homeschool parents contact individual teachers about interest in activities during the school day.” *and/or*
 - “If there is room in a given classroom, homeschool students are welcome to take classes a la carte and pay an appropriate percentage of tuition for compensation.”
- Rosters of homeschool students could be posted in the classroom with contact information for the family. Teachers might contact homeschool families if they may be interested in a certain unit or a special activity the teacher is planning.
- An annually updated email contact list can make it easy to communicate with homeschool parents.
- Consider the possibility of meeting(s) to clarify the reasons church members may choose to homeschool. Recognize the positive reasons of these families, or brainstorm to solve negative reasons.
 - Positive reasons may include the ability to choose their own curricula, increased family time, ability for students to progress at their own pace.
 - Negative reasons may include finances or a frustration with a certain teaching method.
- Work to build personal relationships between school leadership and homeschooling families, viewing each other as individuals with gifts and vulnerabilities. Build one another up and share joys and resources.
 - Sponsor an annual “teachers’ Bible study luncheon,” inviting CDS teachers, Sunday School teachers, current or retired public school teachers, and homeschool parents.
 - Elect a homeschool parent to the board for education.
 - Consider holding subject-specific brainstorming sessions and sharing pedagogy ideas.
- The School Board could keep yearly statistics on the enrollment of the congregation members in the school, public school, and homeschool to aid in planning for the future.

3. Shared Resources

- Consider providing religious instruction materials to all families of the congregation.
 - Much like children in both the Christian Day School (CDS) and public schools receive similar instruction in confirmation class, the CDS, homeschooling families, and public school families could share a similar scope and sequence in religion.
 - Whether a school has an entire K-8 scope and sequence, or instead gives individual classroom teachers the freedom to choose a religion curricula, homeschool parents could be informed of the options.
 - Curricula could include memory work, hymnody lessons, Bible story list, worksheets, and morning and afternoon devotions.
 - Each semester's CDS memory work could be posted as a PDF to the school website for any family to download and use.
- Might a homeschool family like to make use of extra textbooks not being used in the classroom?
- A willingness to share equipment will go a long way. Microscopes? Gym time? Library? Handbells? Ipads? In most churches, the finances are set up that all members, including homeschooling families, are contributing to the fiscal support of the school, thus lowering the total tuition amount for CDS families.
- Offer the possibility of occasional or permanent classroom space if homeschool families of the congregation would like to meet.
- Welcome homeschool parents to teach a topic or subject on a short-term or long-term basis.
- Consider the feasibility of a la carte classes or block classes being open to homeschool families through a congregational or community survey. Homeschooling children could enroll and pay an appropriate percentage of total tuition.
 - An example of block classes might be to offer math, science, and Latin for the first two hours of every school day. Another example might be to offer gym, art, and music on two afternoons a week.
 - This may or may not be feasible for the school, or relevant for the homeschooling community.
 - But alternatively, it may provide a great service to some families and assist the school in finding a niche.

How Might a Church/Church School Use Community Homeschooling Support” as Outreach?

1. Mission and Vision:

- The educational horizon is changing. The formerly clear lines between public schools, CDSs, and homeschools are blurring. Is your congregation uniquely situated to serve families that don't clearly fit into a “box”?
 - Many homeschooling families make use of classes like choir and band at a local CDS.

- Homeschooling families make use of classes like chess, art, or PE at the public school.
- CDSs can now subcontract for online courses.
- Public schools offer online classes for students in their homes.
- Part-time school teachers might homeschool their own children.
- One-day a week schools for homeschooling families exist.
- Consider this vision for your church:
 - We support Christian Education for all families! Here's how:
 - We support and encourage homeschool families. (See Regional Homeschool Resource Center at 2 below.)
 - We offer optional classes and extra-curricular activities for homeschool families.
 - We have a CDS with full assortment of extra-curricular activities.
 - We provide religious curricula and after-school activities for public school families.
 - Bible studies for families, adults, children, men, or women at these times....

2. Regional Homeschool Resource Center (HRC)

- A pastor, principal, or trained layperson could be available to walk any family through the initial choice to homeschool:
 - Educational philosophies of homeschooling
 - Options for curricula/learning styles
 - Support with filling out district paperwork and following regulations
- Not all homeschool families are Christian or have a church-home. An HRC could provide an authentic opportunity to spread the Gospel while serving community families in a very powerful way.
- A curriculum library could be developed and made available to all area homeschooling families. Families who might not otherwise set foot in the church may come to use the library, thereby meeting church members and building relationships.
- Extra-curriculars could be opened up to all area homeschooling families. Policies would need to be developed for non-members if church-specific activities might present doctrinal conflict.
- Monthly meetings could be provided for homeschoolers to discuss topics, including a devotion with the pastor.
- A space could be provided for homeschooling co-ops.

3. Educational Opportunities Beyond the CDS

- Congregation members could teach classes for any age (including seniors) after school. Examples include art, Greek, or speech and debate.
- The congregation could host night classes for the community, aimed at topics appealing to the whole family, such as mission work, cuisine, Christian biographies, or homesteading. Special speakers could be invited on a one-time basis.

About the Author

Marie MacPherson attended high school at Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin, a teacher training school of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. She attended Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota, and received her B.A. in Elementary Education with Synod Certification and a specialty in Communication Arts and Literature in 2007. She is the homeschooling mother of five children. Ryan MacPherson, professor at Bethany Lutheran College and President of the Hausvater Project, is her husband of twelve years. She served for several years on the Evangelism Committee of her congregation, pioneering three new outreach efforts. Marie is the editor of *Mothering Many*, a book surveying mothers with large families, which includes a chapter on homeschooling. Her personal interests include health research, cooking from scratch, speech and debate, theatre, breastfeeding education, international travel, and theology. Her prayer is that the CDS not just be a place where some children of the congregation “go to school,” but rather a center to carry out the vision of Christian education for the entire congregation, making use of the unique gifts of all members to equip us to disseminate the love of Christ to the world. You are welcome to contact her with questions at www.intoyourhandsllc.com/contact.html.



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Note: This is the full version of talking points.
An abbreviated version is available at:

www.intoyourhandsllc.com/blog/146

Possibilities for Church Schools to Integrate Homeschooling Families

Homeschooling Parents Could:

- direct choir
- direct handbells
- plan field trips
- teach art or music
- plan science experiments/science fair
- teach speech and debate
- manage other clubs
- teach languages
- serve on the PTF
- serve on the school board
- organize the Christmas program
- organize a talent show
- attend teacher's conferences for continuing education
- collect boxtops or participate in other fund-raisers

Homeschooling Students Could Participate in:

- Sports
- Choir
- Band
- Pep Rallies
- Field Trips
- Christmas Program
- Holiday Celebrations
- Spirit Week
- Lutheran Schools Week
- Service Projects
- Standardized Tests
- Art Gallery
- Library Time
- Spelling Bee
- Playing pre- and post-service music
- Chapel
- Ala Carte Classes or Block Classes