

# Where Are the Children?

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There is nothing more frightening to parents than not knowing where their child is. If even for a nano-second in a store or shopping mall, or within the safety of one's own neighborhood—if a parent looks for his or her child, and that child is not visible or able to be heard from, there is instant panic! Relief comes when the child is safe and secure in the presence of their parent or guardian. Anguish beyond belief, beyond consolation, accompanies those parents who never find their child again, or discover that their child's life was tragically taken from them. No parent in any generation or culture wants to lose a child in any way.

We have strong laws that protect children in our 21st century society. Special training for children and parents is offered so they can avoid risky situations. We have a national system of alerting our communities to child abductions. We have trained law enforcement agents who respond quickly and with expertise, all in the hope of returning the child home safely. Our society has done a lot over the last several decades to ensure the well-being of children, so they can get home safely.

But have we done this in the church? Have we done it in terms of spiritual matters? Have we done what it takes to make sure our children make it home safely to their heavenly Father? The numbers in our church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, do not make a strong case that we are doing well in this area. Sunday school attendance in the LCMS declined from 533,573 in 1997 to 415,066 in 2007, and the number of baptisms has dropped from 46,984 in 1997 to 27,913 in 2007. Even the stalwart of children's ministry within the LCMS, the Lutheran school, saw a decline in enrollment from 181,854 in 1989-90 down to 140,678 in 2007-08.

According to these numbers, we are not reaching children as we have in the past! This, despite the overall growth in the U.S. population (more than 70 million since 1985) and a large generation of children, totaling 73 million—which is second in size only to the “baby-boomers,” estimated at 78 million. Of these 73 million children under age 18, nearly 43 million of them lived with their biological mother and father who are married to each other. An additional 19.3 million lived with one parent. Overall, 94 percent of children lived with a least one biological parent, this according to a 2009 release from Robert Bernstein of the Public Information Office of the U.S. Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov/>).

So, where are the children? It appears that we are not adding them to our LCMS family of faith or helping them get home safely to our heavenly Father. Just as parents grieve over a lost child, it must grieve our Father in heaven to see His children lost and wandering. He gave His only-begotten Son to die on the cross, so that all the children, young and old, can make their way home to heaven.

Now is the time for action! Now is the time for the LCMS to start working in more intentional ways, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to teach the saving faith to our children! It's time to make sure the next generation is a generation of believers, a generation who knows their Father in heaven.

How do we do this? Parents must be equipped to model and teach the faith in the home. As the family of faith, congregations must intentionally support and train parents to pass along the faith to the next generation. As children of our heavenly Father, we must boldly proclaim the message of the saving love of Christ, demonstrating His love and acceptance in intentional ways to the millions of children around us who do not know Him. We need to make sure that no child is lost or forgotten, and that all are accounted for in the census of heaven. We must, for the time is short: “Behold, I am coming soon!” (Rev. 22:7, 12).

*(This is the first in a three-part series on a plan of action for more intentional approaches to Family Ministry within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.)*



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