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# Tidbits

Early Childhood Education Newsletter of the Nebraska District LCMS

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## From Eunice's Desk:



As the Christmas season approaches, more pressure is put on schools, centers, and teachers to do Christmas “programs,” make Christmas crafts/decorations, and host all sorts of parties and celebrations.

Are you going to buckle under the pressure of what parents want or are you ready to share with parents what is appropriate for the age of the children? Is it really appropriate for 3, 4 and 5 year olds to be practicing for a program? Does this age really have the fine motor skills to make some of the decorations that parents think are so cute and adorable? These and other issues need to be addressed in a non-confrontational way that is also teaching parents how to celebrate the birth of Christ in an appropriate manner.

Many of the families that utilize our schools/centers do not focus on the true meaning of Christmas: Christ’s birth. They are into the materialism and commercialism of the season. It is important that we share with the families why we celebrate Christmas and then assist them in doing it in a way that is appropriate for the age of their children.

**Celebrate  
the Season**

## Developmentally Appropriate

### DAP Program Ideas:

1) Use a Christmas book such as *The Jesus Tree* by CPH. The children can make the different decorations in class and then at the program they can decorate a tree as the story is read. *Bright Star, Bright Star, What do You See?* by Cassandre Maxwell is another great book. This repetitive story is easy for the children to recite. During class time you could have each child dress up in the dress-up center as the different people, take their pictures and show them on the screen as the children recite the story.



2) Choose songs, finger plays or responsive readings that you will use during your sessions at Jesus time or other times throughout the day. The children will be familiar with them and enjoy sharing them with family and friends. Most preschool sessions are too short to spend time practicing for programs. Have the “program” be informal so the kids do not stress about being in front of a large group.



3) Have the Christmas Program be a “Baby Shower for Jesus.” Encourage each family to bring a baby item to be donated to a charity that helps young moms. Have your pastor or someone else tell the Christmas story. Put illustrations of the story on a PowerPoint. Let the children sing some of the songs they learned during class time. Focus on how we can share God’s love with others. End the program with refreshments decorated for a baby shower.



4) Invite the families, congregation, and community to a “Birthday Party for Jesus.” Put up streamers, balloons, etc. to decorate. The children can sing songs, do finger plays, etc. about Jesus’ birth that they learned during class time. Everyone can join in singing *Happy Birthday* to Jesus before the birthday cupcakes are served.



### DAP Classroom Ideas:

1) Put up a small tree and decorate it with non-breakable ornaments. Include stars, candles, angels, and candy canes. Let the children decorate and undecorate the tree.



2) Invest in a non-breakable nativity set (or two or three). Encourage the children to play with the pieces and retell the story of Jesus’ birth.



3) In the dress-up area, wear shepherds’ headpieces (make these out of adjustable baseball hats with material glued to the brim. Have the children wear the hats backwards for headpieces), garland for angels’ halos, crowns for the wise men, and bathrobes for Joseph, Mary, and the Inn Keeper. Provide short sticks for the shepherds’ staffs and stick horses for the wise men’s camels.



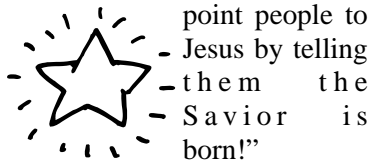
*Jesus is the Reason for the Season!*

## Developmentally Appropriate

4) Cut out a light green Christmas tree shape for each child. Let the children use the eraser end of the pencil, dip it in a shallow pan of paint, and press onto their papers to put "lights" on their tree.



5) Add glitter to the play dough. Provide star-shaped cookie cutters. Share with the children how "the star pointed the way to Jesus and we can



point people to Jesus by telling them the Savior is born!"

6) Have a collection of Christ-centered Christmas books available for the children to check out during library time.



7) Gifts for parents: Cut muslin into the size for a small banner. Fold and stitch at the top for a wooden dowel to go through for hanging. Paint the child's hand with green paint and have them make a circle of handprints on the banner. When dry, let them stick their pointer finger in red paint to add berries to the wreath. A bow can be added at the top or bottom by painting the child's hand red and putting the handprint back-to-back.



### DAP Ideas for Home:

Share these ideas with families in the newsletter, on the school website, etc.

1) If the school budget allows, purchase a tall white candle for each child and use a permanent marker to put the numbers 1-25 evenly from the top to bottom of the candle. Send one home with each child the first of December with a note to burn the candle each day as they count down to Jesus' birthday.

"I am the light of the world: Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12



2) Purchase an inexpensive Christmas book or other item for each child as their Christmas present. (*March to the Manger* by Mary Manz Simon, Standard Publishing or go to [www.CTAinc.com](http://www.CTAinc.com) for several ideas.) Give the book to the child at the beginning of December so they can read it with their parents. CTA has free downloadable family devotions to go with their items. On the back of the book *March to the Manger* it states, "Each day, along with reading this book, move nativity figures through your home; from window to window, coming closer to the empty stable. By Christmas the figures are in place, ready to receive the baby Jesus."



3) Take your child to the Dollar Tree or another bargain store. Together pick out books, crayons, lip gloss, puzzles, games, etc. Pack the items in a fun bag or basket and take it to a local hospital to share with a sick child.



4) Leave the Christmas frenzy behind and take the family to a special Christmas movie or play. Or just enjoy a quiet evening together at home—play games and enjoy hot chocolate.



5) As Christmas Eve draws near, have your child assist in baking a birthday cake for Jesus. Let them help with frosting and decorating. Don't forget the candles!



6) Put together a basket of fruit, baked goods, coffee, etc. Take the basket to a neighbor, friend, or someone who has helped you during the past year.



## **Spotlight—Wee Lambs Preschool, Gretna - Written by Lisa Stirtz, Director**

Wee Lambs Preschool at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Gretna is 10 years old this year. We opened our doors with 44 children and have grown to 130 children. The Lord has truly blessed this preschool.

Lisa Stirtz was called to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church as the director/teacher 10 years ago and for the past two years has been just director. Lisa graduated from Concordia College, Seward in 1984 with a degree in Special/Elementary Education. She began teaching in Winner, South Dakota. Since moving to the Nebraska District, Lisa has taught in Columbus, at Kings of Kings in Omaha, and now at Wee Lambs. She loves to work with children and teach them about Jesus. She is married to Craig Stirtz, also a graduate of Concordia, Seward. They have lived in Gretna for the last 12 years with their children-Tyler, 23, who lives and works in Omaha; Jordan, 21, who is currently attending Concordia, Seward; and Kari, 16, a sophomore at Gretna High School.

Wee Lambs Preschool is currently served by eight ladies. Lisa Stirtz is the Preschool Director/Teacher. Deb Luedders and Susan Josoff teach the four-day program of 4 and 5-year-olds in the morning and the Pre-K class in the afternoon. Katie Skorcz and Lori Collins teach a Monday/Wednesday/Friday morning class of 4-year-olds and Tuesday/Thursday morning and afternoon classes of three-year-olds. Deb Knihal, Rachel Doorenbos and Carol Theall teach Monday/Wednesday/Friday morning and afternoon classes of 4 and 5-year-olds and Tuesday/Thursday morning and afternoon classes of three-year-olds. These ladies are all very dedicated to our preschool and sharing the love of Jesus with the children. They teach them their ABC's, 123's, and songs, make art projects with them, and just have a lot of fun with these children. They all are a true blessing to Wee Lambs Preschool.

Our mission here is to bring Jesus Christ into the lives of these little people. We want to share Jesus' love with them all. We want them to go

home and tell their moms and dads, brothers and sisters, grandpas and grandmas, and all their friends about Jesus. We want our community to know that Wee Lambs Preschool in Gretna is here to tell others about Jesus. I truly believe that this mission is what Wee Lambs Preschool is all about. We want everyone to know that Jesus loves them, cares about them, and that the staff of Wee Lambs Preschool cares about them too. It is a true joy to share this mission with the children and the parents.

Little children always have stories to share with you. Sometimes these stories come from home, and Mom and Dad don't always know that these stories get shared with us. We all know that little children are so honest. One little boy here looked up at his teacher and said "Teacher, did you get your haircut?" to which the teacher responded, "Why, yes, I did." The little boy responded to the teacher and said "Well, I really don't like it." Another little boy was sick one day. His mom called to say that he would not be in because he was sick but to be assured that they would continue to work on things at home. Later that day she called again and said they had been working on the letter "H" at home; writing the letter and words that started with that letter. He was working and doing some coloring and said to his mom, "Could my teacher just come to my house and teach me?" Another little boy received a letter in the summer before school to inform him of whom his teacher would be for the year. He already knew her from his church. So, the first day of school he came to the teacher and said, "We have been praying for you." The teacher responded, "I have been praying for you too."

Wee Lambs Preschool is also blessed to have the staff of Good

Shepherd Lutheran Church involved in our ministry. We have chapel twice a month in the church where Pastor Werling, Vicar Joshua Traxel, or Miss Tara (our Director of Children's Ministry) leads us in chapel. They are all very creative in the ways they present each story about Jesus to the children. They also make a point to come into the classroom and play with the children, greet them in the morning when they arrive, or help them with jackets or back packs. We also have a prayer chain. Parents submit prayer request for their families when they are in need. We have had several families from the preschool join our church because they want to learn more and more about Jesus and to get their children involved in the programs at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. What a joy it is to see them on Sunday mornings here at church too!

Wee Lambs Preschool has also been blessed by the congregation of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. We built on an addition two years ago, and added three new classrooms, a preschool office, a storage room, and a playground. We also built on a MAC (ministry activity center) which can also be used as a gym. Again, Wee Lambs Preschool has truly been blessed.

Being part of early childhood ministry is a true joy. These little people are so eager to learn, to hear more about Jesus, and to make new friends. They get so excited to come to school, see their teachers, see their friends, and to see what new things they will learn today. God has blessed this ministry.

