

The child among us

by Karen Eggemeyer

There's always that child among us who seems a little different. Maybe he plays alone in a corner of the playground during recess. Maybe she doesn't quite grasp the basics of long division. Maybe he hates reading anything because the other children make fun of him. Perhaps she wears a hearing device to amplify sound.

These children are white, black—any color. They are Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist—any religion. These children can come from poor families or rich ones. Loving families—or dysfunctional ones.

It doesn't matter.

Each child deserves a chance to learn and hear that there is a loving God who cares about him or her as an individual.

Education for all

Education has always been important in our country. Laws require our children to attend school—public, parochial or home school—until they are 16. This belief in education for everyone is based on the idea that in a democracy, *every* person is valuable and deserves an equal opportunity to develop his or her full potential.

Education becomes "special" when it tries to solve problems posed by the special needs of a particular group of children who don't fit in—children with mental, physical or emotional problems: children who are handicapped with special learning needs.

Christian education is no different.

Just as the learning problems of a certain group of children hamper their

Two young students at the North Detroit Lutheran School work together to complete an assignment. Forty-two students attend classes every day here.



ability to achieve their full potential in public schools, many Christian schools and congregations have been unable to accommodate the learning and spiritual needs of those "special" children. Many times, these children are overlooked—or receive an inadequate education because of their learning needs.

Public schools are required by law to provide special education programs and services. However, there is no such written law that requires Christian schools to provide *religious* education for special children.

At Lutheran Special Education Ministries, we believe there is a sacred mandate, given to us in Matt. 19:14: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

We believe that "With the knowledge of God's love and the desire that God's love be revealed through our ministry, Lutheran Special Education Ministries serves to enable children with special learning needs to receive a Christian education."

Working to achieve our mission statement

In the past, as we've worked to fulfill our mission statement, quoted in

the paragraph above, we've:

- operated the North Detroit Lutheran Day School;
- coordinated resource rooms and consultant services in Christian schools in Michigan and northern Illinois—38 in the current school year;
- touched the lives of more than 1,000 children and their families this school year alone;
- started work in New York to reach the hundreds of children there who need special help;
- operated the Ephphatha Center to respond to requests from individuals, schools and congregations for help with Sunday school and confirmation materials, curriculum and other resources for special needs children.

As we look to the 21st century, we want to expand our work to touch more children everywhere.

'The Child Among Us' A 21st Century Ministry Plan

"When we were a residential school, children came from all over the country to Detroit so they could receive a Christian education and be

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helped to be all they could be," said Roger DeMeyere, Lutheran Special Education Ministries Executive Director.

"Now, after 121 years, with our new ministry plan, our role is really being reversed," he added. Instead of children coming to Detroit, the ministry wants to reach out to children across the entire nation, so they can stay at home, learn in their own schools and receive a quality Christian education.

"We also want to open the doors of congregations, Sunday schools, Bible classes and confirmation classes for children who are handicapped with special learning needs," DeMeyere said.

Lutheran Special Education Ministries is already reaching out. In 1976, North Detroit Lutheran School (once totally focused on deaf and hearing impaired children) opened its doors not only to hearing, but also to otherwise handicapped children.

The next step was reaching out to area Lutheran schools. In 1984, work expanded to northern Illinois. Work began in 1991 in New York after an agreement was reached with the Lutheran Schools Association.

At the Ephphatha Center, religious education consultants receive inquiries from parents, teachers and pastors all over the country asking how to help a child in Sunday school or asking for confirmation curriculum for a hearing-impaired child.

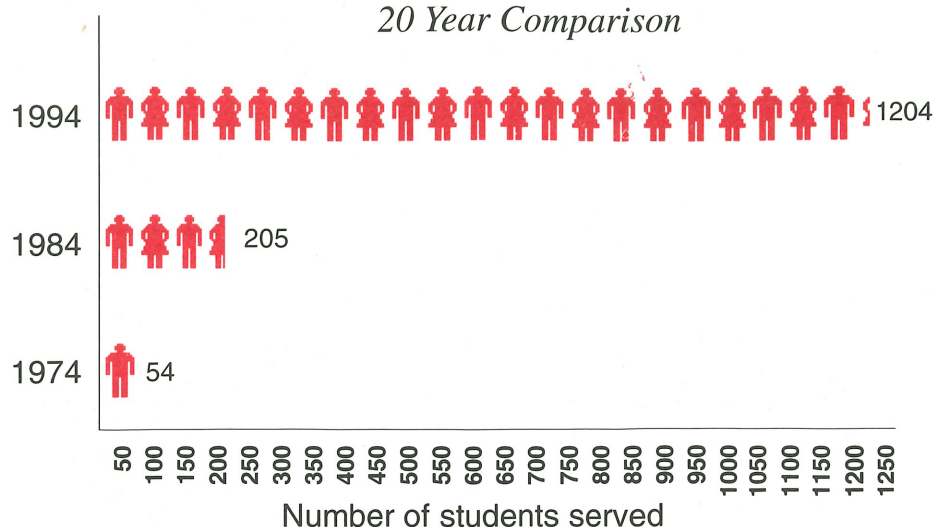
Formerly the Ephphatha Center was used frequently as an evaluation site for special needs children. Although this service is still available, Ephphatha Center encourages more use of the special education evaluations in the public schools. Consultants are now available to focus on helping congregations and schools provide Christian education resources for their special children.

Our vision for the future

We at Lutheran Special Education Ministries realize that the child among us doesn't have to be Lutheran or Baptist or black or white. All children everywhere deserve the chance to learn about God's love for them.

Lutheran Special Education Ministries is not the only organization that provides help for special needs children. However, says DeMeyere, "We are the only organization that has a national vision to reach out." Most

Lutheran Special Education Ministries 20 Year Comparison



other agencies are localized—helping children in their immediate areas.

The vision of Lutheran Special Education Ministries to help handicapped children has expanded:

"Lutheran Special Education Ministries is a Christ-centered organization with a national vision to reach out to Lutheran and other Christian denominations to open the doors of schools and congregations for children who are handicapped with special learning needs." Certain specific goals are included in our plan:

For children:

- To help children learn about Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- To offer children individual assistance as appropriate in order to benefit from the educational process.
- To develop knowledge, competence, behavior and attitudes necessary for children to become contributing members of society.
- To educate children in the most appropriate environment possible.

For families:

- To support parents as partners in a Christ-centered education process.
- To provide families with information and resources in order to understand and accept the special learning needs of their children.

For schools and congregations:

- To help day school teachers understand and instruct children with special learning needs.
- To serve as a resource to congregations for the inclusion of special needs children in Sunday school, confirmation and vacation Bible school.

For community

and public congregations:

- To work with community agencies on behalf of children.
- To advocate for children and families with community agencies as appropriate.

Summary

"I'm really excited about the direction the ministry is going," says Paul Quitmeyer, president of the Lutheran Special Education Ministries Board of Directors. "It's absolutely wonderful how the Lord has blessed us in the past 120 years. When I joined the board (18 years ago), there were about 40 deaf students in the residential school. Now we provide services for over 1,100. With the Lord's blessing, I'm sure our ministry will keep moving forward so more children can come to know about Christ's love for them," Quitmeyer said.

As our work continues to grow, of course our needs increase. "The Lord will provide for us," DeMeyere believes. "We will work hard to implement our strategic plan for 'The Child Among Us,' but as we do, we will also keep in mind the passage from Proverbs 19:21: 'Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.' How comforting it is to know who's really in charge. To Him be all the glory!"

Is there a child with special learning needs in your area? Can you share our story with your congregation or with your friends? Keep our ministry in your prayers and please remember our ministry with your financial support.

Around the ministry

Illinois

by Jim Krone

Lutheran Special Education Ministries awarded the Northern Illinois District congregations the Sustaining Partnership Award.

On behalf of the district congregations, District Education Executive Dr. James Kirchhoff accepted the award. This award honors the 120 years of support that the Northern Illinois District congregations have given to Lutheran Special Education Ministries, which first operated as a deaf school and now serves as a program serving children with many different academic handicaps.

This award honors the partnership with Northern Illinois District that helped form a consortium in 1983 that helped bring Lutheran Special Education Ministries into Illinois.

Ephphatha Center

by Jim Pagels

It is very interesting that spring and Easter occur at the same time. It reminds Christians of a wonderful symbol: the butterfly. Just as the butterfly emerges from its cocoon, revealing new life, so Christ transcended the grave to shine forth in the magnificence of that first Easter morning.

Similarly, our goal is to equip others so they can share this wonderful message with children who have special needs.

This year, religious consultations increased by 200 percent and inservice staff presentations by 100 percent. We anticipate completing 120 psychological evaluations that enable teachers to understand handicapped children and minister to them in a Christian setting.

Thanks to Kathy Krause for her leadership and inservice efforts in Michigan, Illinois and New York by updating staff on an educational testing instrument: the Woodcock Johnson—Revised. We thank the Siebert Foundation for a grant that made these efforts possible.

Honorable mention also goes to Jim Pagels, whose article on Attention-deficit Hyperactivity Disorder was published in "Lutheran Parenting," newsletter to Lutheran schools.

New York

by Paula Rosen

We often look for a miraculous story to tell for inspiration. Although those stories exist and make us feel good, there are many other stories to tell.

Many children served by Lutheran Special Education Ministries struggle to learn every single day. For them, acquiring skills like reading, writing and arithmetic are monumental tasks. When you think how difficult learning is for them, you must admire their courage. How blessed we are to be their teachers, their parents, their facilitators. What an opportunity we have to share God's love with them.

What is truly miraculous is the love and hard work of our Christian teachers in Lutheran schools. They give 100 percent each day and ask if it is enough. It is often hard for them to see how much they give a child.

When compared to other students, a child with learning disabilities is still far behind. They ask themselves, "Have I done enough? Would she be better off in a

public school? Have I taken away from others to give to him?"

These are difficult questions. What is so wonderful and unique about what we have to offer is the knowledge and love of Jesus, our strength and Redeemer. This our children will carry with them always.

Be sure to read the story on page 4 about Jordan.

Michigan

by Gloria Burley

Winter is a time for indoor activities at North Detroit Lutheran School, the self-contained campus operated by Lutheran Special Education Ministries. The annual Read-In, held in February, was one of the highlights of the school year. Students were allowed to dress casually, spread quilts and sleeping bags on the gym floor, and for one entire day, read just for the fun of it. The children participated in literature-related activities including music and art, and had to give a brief oral report or read a book aloud to an adult. This year a reading contest was held to raise money which was used to adopt two zoo animals, a gibbon and a spider monkey. The children will go to the zoo this spring to visit "their" animals.

The Jump Rope for Heart fund raiser was held in March. The 42 children in the school raised \$1,200. The top fund raiser was John Sanford, who raised \$93 for heart research. Demetrius Howard raised \$71 and contributed all of his own money to the cause. All of the students are to be commended for their participation in this worthwhile cause. The school will receive gym supplies and the children will receive T-shirts, jump ropes, or other participant gifts from the American Heart Association.

So far this year, the resource room teachers have directly served 143 students with an additional 164 being served through consultation by the resource teachers and on-site consultant. Some of the resource rooms are at capacity with waiting lists for space availability. Our new teachers, Mrs. Tammy Kapraun at St. Lorenz, Frankenmuth, and Mrs. Karen Schempf at Peace, Saginaw, have become integral members of their satellite schools. The ministry and the children have been blessed with the presence of these dedicated, intelligent Christian teachers.



Teacher Dennis Pieper jumps right in with students on "Jump Rope for Heart" day.

The Advocate

for Students with Special Learning Needs

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Jordan, a student at Emanuel Lutheran, Patchogue, N.Y.

Jordan's story

by Elizabeth Munz, on-site consultant, Emanuel Lutheran School, Patchogue, N.Y.

You probably wouldn't notice Jordan on the playground. He fits in with the other children. A slight, agile sixth grader, Jordan loves sports. He plays hard as he smiles and calls a football play to a friend. At recess he looks happy, outgoing, energetic, confident.

The ADVOCATE for Students with Special Learning Needs
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However, if you saw him in the classroom, you would describe him as unhappy, withdrawn, lethargic and unsure of himself. Jordan has such a broad range of behavior and academic performance in the same school that he has attended his whole life. It is difficult to understand how one child could be so different.

At Emanuel, his teachers teach to his areas of strength and individualize his instruction as much as possible. He is in a class of only 10 children and has received remedial reading and resource room help.

Lutheran Special Education Ministries has had an on-site consultant here one day a week for the past two years. Jordan, his teachers and his mother have each benefited from these services.

This is Jordan's last year at Emanuel. Staff members have tried to enhance Jordan's self-esteem and build on his strengths while working in an academically difficult area for him: social studies. He completes hands-on projects related to the social study units worked on in class. With the on-site consultant, he builds a model of the Parthenon or makes a life-sized knight dressed in protective clothing and armor.

These activities are meant to give Jordan another way to assimilate information, but more important, another way to achieve success. When he takes his projects back to the classroom, he is too shy to talk about them, although the other students have expressed interest.

There are very subtle indications

that he is proud of his accomplishments, but he seems disinterested in much of what he does in school and does not express himself. To try to motivate him, as well as make social studies more "manageable," an arrangement was made with his classroom teacher that Jordan can look at his social studies unit test and choose not to complete the one section he thinks would be the hardest for him.

Jordan asked two classmates to join him in learning about making decorated Ukrainian eggs while studying Russia.

What lies ahead? Next year, Jordan will probably be in a special education setting in his community's public school.

What have his years at a Lutheran school given him? Hopefully, Jordan can move to his new school with the knowledge of his specialness and worth as a child of God, knowing that he is loved, acknowledging his strengths and weaknesses while striving for success in his own way.

Jordan's siblings attended Emanuel. Now Jordan will be a graduate too. A Christian education is a top priority in his family. Every year, his parents asked the school if it was possible to keep Jordan. Every year, the faculty struggled with the decision, always praying that it was the right one. Each teacher gave just a little more than they thought they had to for Jordan and his classmates. Lutheran Special Education Ministries thanks these wonderful people for their part in enabling Jordan to receive a Christian education.