



# Shaping the Future



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## Sneak Preview: The Case for Lutheran Christian Early Childhood Education

by Dr. Martin W. Barlau

The following excerpt is a chapter from Barlau's *Lutheran Christian Education: What Does This Mean?*, an unpublished manuscript.

**D**r. Shirley Morgenthaler has been a bold leader for the cause of Lutheran Christian early childhood education in our church body. In her book, *Right From the Start*, she reminds us that Jesus has a heart for very young children.

**Perhaps we need to give more thought to the role of parents and the Church in the rearing of the very young.**

*“When Jesus tells the disciples to let the little children come to Him, He’s speaking not only of preschoolers, but also of infants and toddlers. (In Luke 18:15, babies has been translated from the Greek word brephos. Brephos implies children as young as eight days old.)”*

Perhaps we need to give more thought to the role of parents and the Church in the rearing of the very young.



## Rearing Children Has Changed in Our Culture and Time

Since the beginning of time, infants and toddlers have been raised by their mothers or their grandmothers, often with the help of older siblings. In some parts of the world, village streets, rice paddies, and sugar cane fields still reveal mothers or older siblings with babies strapped to their backs. While the practice varies from culture to culture, the pattern has been largely similar. In many cultures it still holds today. The younger children are reared in the home, by the family.

But not so in modern America. Many fathers and mothers among us are calling on someone outside of the home and family to help with the task of rearing a child, from

infancy on.

**The concept of “work” has changed for young mothers in our culture and in our nation.** In an earlier day, a mother worked hard to maintain the home and the family through meal preparation and wash days and sewing and housekeeping and gardening. These were all valuable and necessary contributions to the well being of the family in days gone by.

But much of the “work” has been designed out of these tasks today with advances in appliances, prepared meals, and less expensive clothing. And much of the “how to” for these tasks has been lost among the current generation of mothers, because it is not needed anymore. Therefore it can be more difficult today for a woman to find a fullness of purpose in the tasks of homemaking.

In addition to this, mothers have frequently joined their husbands in selecting a home for the family, and in taking on a mortgage that requires two incomes. The two incomes usually require two cars and still more income. And mothers are also free to consider other ways of contributing to the well being of the family because babies are not coming along nearly as close together as they once did. Mothers have joined the work force outside the home, and families have prospered in this respect. But now to sustain these patterns of life, they frequently need care for even the youngest of their children.

**Consider also what has happened to the art of mothering.** With 41 percent of children born out of wedlock in 2009, we should ask ourselves how able these mothers are in meeting the responsibilities that God gives to parents. How likely is it that

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## Review, Reflect, Resolve

Who needs to hear or read “The Case for Lutheran Christian Early Childhood Education?” How does the push for public universal preschool impact the need for Lutheran Christian early childhood education?

## Links & Resources

***Right From the Start***, Dr. Shirley Morgenthaler. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO. 2001.

The [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) has spent more than a year investigating the \$350 million taxpayer-financed child-care system known as Wisconsin Shares and uncovered a trail of phony companies, fake reports and shoddy oversight. **The latest installment looks at how centers use school-age children for profit.**



Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of **Shaping the Future:**

[\*\*Finding Common Ground in Running and Teaching\*\*](#) by Mark Newman (Feature)

[\*\*Top Online Resources for Early\*\*](#)

these children have a responsible father present to help “train up a child in the way he should go?” This may represent one of the most serious and negative changes that have taken place in the entire picture of childcare and in the future of our nation.

The art of mothering, as it was practiced two or three generations ago, is being lost. It has fallen victim both to the cultural changes and to the abominable decline in morality. Too often it is our children who are having children, because they have not learned or do not care about God and about His commands against fornication, lasciviousness, and adultery. The word “chastity” has all but lost its meaning for much of our teenage and young adult population.

Couple this with the fact that thousands of children each year are killed before they are even born. What does this tell us about how our nation feels about its children? How shall we rate the quality of this kind of mothering? For these reasons, we who are God’s family need to ask ourselves how we may help to rescue our children from their various stages of abandonment.

[Childhood Educators by Julie Faulkner and Melanie Heggemeier \(ECEnet\)](#)

[Evaluation: Bane or Blessing? by Neil Sandfort \(LEADnet\)](#)



## The Growth of the Childcare Industry

**The changes in our culture, in our families, and in our work lives have resulted in the growth of the childcare industry.** In all but the most rural communities of our nation, childcare providers have arisen to take on the mothering of our children. Fort Morgan, Colorado is a community of just under 11,000 with an economy still largely based on agriculture. As of January 2012, web resources listed 12 preschools or childcare centers and 21 home-based childcare programs in Fort Morgan. A few of the home-based programs had recently closed, however, at least partly due to increasingly stringent state regulations. The youngest children of Fort Morgan are hardly to be found in their own homes during the day.

Every state has a department existing solely to regulate, evaluate, and supervise the childcare industry. Every state has federal funding for distribution to families of low income to help them bear the cost of childcare. In Wisconsin, the program handles some \$350 million dollars each year.

In 2010, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* won a Pulitzer Prize for local reporting with a series of articles resulting from its investigation of the extensive fraud in Wisconsin’s program of childcare subsidy. The newspaper “...uncovered a trail of phony companies, fake reports and shoddy oversight.” Childcare providers, mostly home-based, have been indicted for receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars of subsidy for which they did not qualify. We cite this not to cast a pall on the entire childcare industry, but to illustrate how extensive it has become, and how a few childcare providers may not be doing it for the sake of the children.

The majority of children in childcare are to be found in larger centers operated by national franchises or corporate entities. We may assume that the care which children receive there is reasonable and proper, and in many cases even excellent. The centers compete against each other and cannot afford to have the quality of care brought into question. New centers are opening all the time.

**Knowledge of child growth and development has also grown.** Along with the growth of the childcare industry we have seen a great deal of study and research in the area of child growth and development. This has resulted in the availability of several nationally known and recognized curricula for infants through five-year-olds, with goals and objectives, lesson plans and activities, and observation and evaluation tools. As a matter of fact, we find the early childhood domain to be more advanced in this regard than the world of education at any age above five.

Childcare is all around us and it’s not going away. Each year childcare is expanding and becoming more technical. And it is expensive. Open Arms Christian Child Development Center at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Glenview, Illinois, is paid \$350 per week for the full time care of an infant. They are filled to capacity through age 4, and have 19 children in Kindergarten. This is after Immanuel closed their Lutheran school just over 10 years ago due to low enrollment.



## All of These Children Are God’s Children

Every new infant is conceived first in the heart of God. The prophet Jeremiah learned this directly from the Lord, who came to him and said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” **JEREMIAH 1:5** Jeremiah was not unique in this respect. Just as Adam and Jeremiah were born first in the heart of God, so is every human ever conceived.

After we are born in the heart of God, He hands us off to a mother to shelter us in her womb for our earliest months of life on this earth. Then He gives us to parents with the charge to “train up a child in the way he should go.” No child is born to just one parent. Every child has two. Both will be held responsible for keeping the child in God’s family and for setting that child on the path to a joyful and fruitful life with Him. That child still

belongs to God first, whether he ever learns it or not.

Jesus died for children too – every one of them, whether they are allowed to be born or not. Jesus yearns and expects to share life with them, forever. He paid the price, and now He dearly longs for a return on that sacrifice.

Why should it be difficult for Jesus to realize His dream of oneness with each new little human? All that is needed is for the child to be brought to faith and to grow in it. The very Spirit of almighty God is standing by to wash the child clean in the waters of Baptism, to plant the seed of faith in the child’s heart, and to water and nurture it with God’s Word.

So what is missing? Why isn't it happening for more children? Such a tremendous opportunity for Jesus to "...take the children up in His arms and bless them," but so few parents are bringing them. Parents are bringing children instead to someone else's arms. The children are coming to childcare centers where all they can learn about is life *without* Jesus. Too often parents cannot find or do not choose a center where Jesus is present and waiting.

But there are some places where Jesus is present. There are places where His body, the Church, has its arms out to receive these children. But there should be more of these places. Instead, in many places we find the Church weak and struggling to survive. Even in our Synod, congregation after congregation is dwindling and drawing inward, with muscles and nerves atrophying, and eyes for mission dimmed and clouded. In other places, where congregations are prospering, they have chosen to extend their arms in other directions, and to bless another culture or another segment of society with their care and ministry, and we praise God for this. But where does it leave the children?

## God's Children Need God's Family

Many, many children all around us still really need a family. God's church is a family. Isn't there some way that we can reach out to more of these children, even just during the day? Can we take a few more of these infants, toddlers, twos, threes, and fours into our arms? Can we do something to help mothers and fathers become better mothers and fathers as we partner with them to parent a child?

Where we see God's family caring for these young children in a Christian early childhood program, we see joy in the eyes of the caregivers who have come to understand their important role in the life of a child and in the life of God's family. We see joy in the eyes of children who have sat in the lap of a caregiver and felt the love of Jesus in the arms around them. We see two- and three-year-olds going home to families who have not met God, and teaching their parents to pray. We see children baptized, their siblings baptized, their parents baptized, and in a few cases even a grandparent baptized. Then there is joy also in heaven. Angels are singing again. This time they're singing, "For unto us more children are born."



## A Christian Early Learning Center is a Bridge to the Unchurched

A Christian early learning center is a bridge for a congregation to the unchurched families of a community. No other program of congregational ministry can match it as a point of contact. It's a place where God's people can meet those who are not yet His people, get acquainted with them, develop a relationship with them, and allow them to feel the warmth and fellowship of God's loving family.

The gulf between God's family and the unchurched has grown much wider than it once was. It can be very difficult for someone who has been away from the Church for most of a lifetime to find the courage to draw closer once again. They need a "bridge" to cross that gulf, and they will walk that bridge to find secure childcare, even if they do not walk it to find God. Yet in a Christian childcare center God's Word is on the walls, in the air with the Jesus songs, and on the lips of staff and children. And when they enroll a child, they are signing up for an extended period of time. That time is needed for relationships to develop and for the barriers to come down.

A Christian early learning center can be a congregation's strong response to the Lord's command to make disciples. It can be a Lutheran school's finest invitation to a family looking for the right education for their children. And it can be a doorway to eternity with God Himself for a child who might otherwise never know Him.

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*Martin Barlau served as a teacher and principal in Lutheran schools in Nebraska and Colorado for more than 25 years. Beginning in 1987, he held the office of Missions Executive for the Rocky Mountain District – LCMS. Then in 2000, he was asked to assume the position of Executive Director for the newly formed Open Arms Institute, to help congregations learn about the concept of Christian early childhood education and to inaugurate such programs. Today, centers affiliated with the Open Arms Institute are serving nearly 6,000 children and their families.*

You are invited to respond to [Dr. Barlau](mailto:mbarlau@msn.com) at [mbarlau@msn.com](mailto:mbarlau@msn.com).

Children's artwork courtesy Grace Lutheran School, River Forest, Illinois.



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