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10-year-old wears tie and spirit of welcome

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**Evangelical Lutheran
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Study guide:

Spirit of welcome

What we can learn from a 10-year-old

By Robert C. Blezard

Grown-ups certainly can learn a lot when a 10-year-old boy serves as the congregation's greeter-in-chief and biggest cheerleader.

Exercise 1: Warm welcome

Instead of giving visitors a warm welcome, many congregations give them the cold shoulder. It's one of the main reasons visitors fail to return. How does your congregation do? Check it out by asking a friend not connected with your congregation to visit some Sunday. Afterward, check in with him or her: How many people said hello, introduced themselves, told something about the church and made small talk? Alternatively, just pay attention to how visitors to your congregation are treated.

What would be a good "code of conduct" for greeting and treating visitors to your congregation? As a study group draw up some simple guidelines. What are good ways to publicize the guidelines? Can you teach or train your congregants to be more welcoming? How can your congregation develop a better culture of welcoming visitors?

Exercise 2: 'Why you should attend'

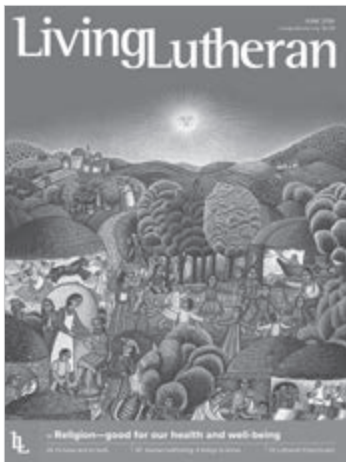
In a letter to his local newspaper Zachary Fetter described "Why You Should Attend Jerusalem [Lutheran Church]." Why should people attend your congregation?

In your study group have everybody write a letter describing the benefits, joys and opportunities of attending your church. Have members read their letters aloud to one another. What common elements are there? What points in distinction?

Finally, condense the best ideas into one letter and send it to your local newspaper—and put it on the church bulletin boards and website, as well as in the newsletter.

Exercise 3: Church boosters

Which people in your congregation exude the most enthusiasm for church life? Ask them to talk with your study group about why they are so gung-ho. What observations and insights did your group share? Which are new? How can your congregation encourage these enthusiastic members to help create a positive culture and spirit about church life? Do these members hold positions of authority and responsibility?



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continued

Exercise 4: A caring place

In his letter to the newspaper, Zachary describes his church as a place where caring people pray for others. Discuss:

- How well does your congregation care for and pray for others?
- What ministries support those in trouble or need?
- Are there groups that offer intercessory prayer, or lists of people who need to be lifted up?
- How can your church do better?

Exercise 5: Faith like a child

Is there a child like Zachary Fetter in your congregation? It's not uncommon for children to have a strong faith that results in an outpouring of enthusiasm. Question is, does your congregation recognize such youngsters and help them to grow in faith? Does your congregation offer leadership or service roles to children and youth? Why or why not? How could it do better?

Exercise 6: Tell your story

Evangelism involves telling others about the good things that God has done for us, God's sons and daughters. This is the message Zachary expressed in his letter to the newspaper: "With God, their life can be better." Have you told others the good news of Jesus and what God has done for you? Many Christians simply haven't been encouraged or equipped to do so.

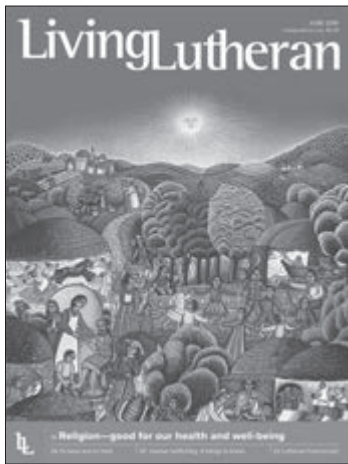
As a study group, break into pairs and tell one another about what God has done for you and what God is doing in your congregation. Have someone keep time, and every few minutes change partners and tell the story again. When done, share as a group the experience of telling your story. What was easy? What was awkward? What was rewarding?

Could you tell the story to a stranger? How? Why? Under what circumstances? If that would be outside of your "comfort zone," what other ways could you spread the good news?

Exercise 7: Attitude

Zachary certainly has a good attitude and optimism about church and faith. It's out of that attitude that he sets an example for outreach, friendliness and evangelism. On a scale of one to 10 (one is lowest and 10 is highest) how positive is your attitude? Share as a study group. Rate the attitude of your congregation as a whole. Then discuss:

- What words describe your congregation's overall outlook?



About the study guide author:



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University School of Theology and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa).

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- If your attitude and that of the congregation is generally not good, can you still do effective ministry and expect growth?
- How can you work to improve your own mindset? What can your congregation do?
- What can you learn from the Zachary Fetters of your congregation?
- Make a list of action steps (beginning with “pray”) that you and your congregation can do to create a more positive attitude.

10-year-old wears tie and spirit of welcome

By Sharron Blezard

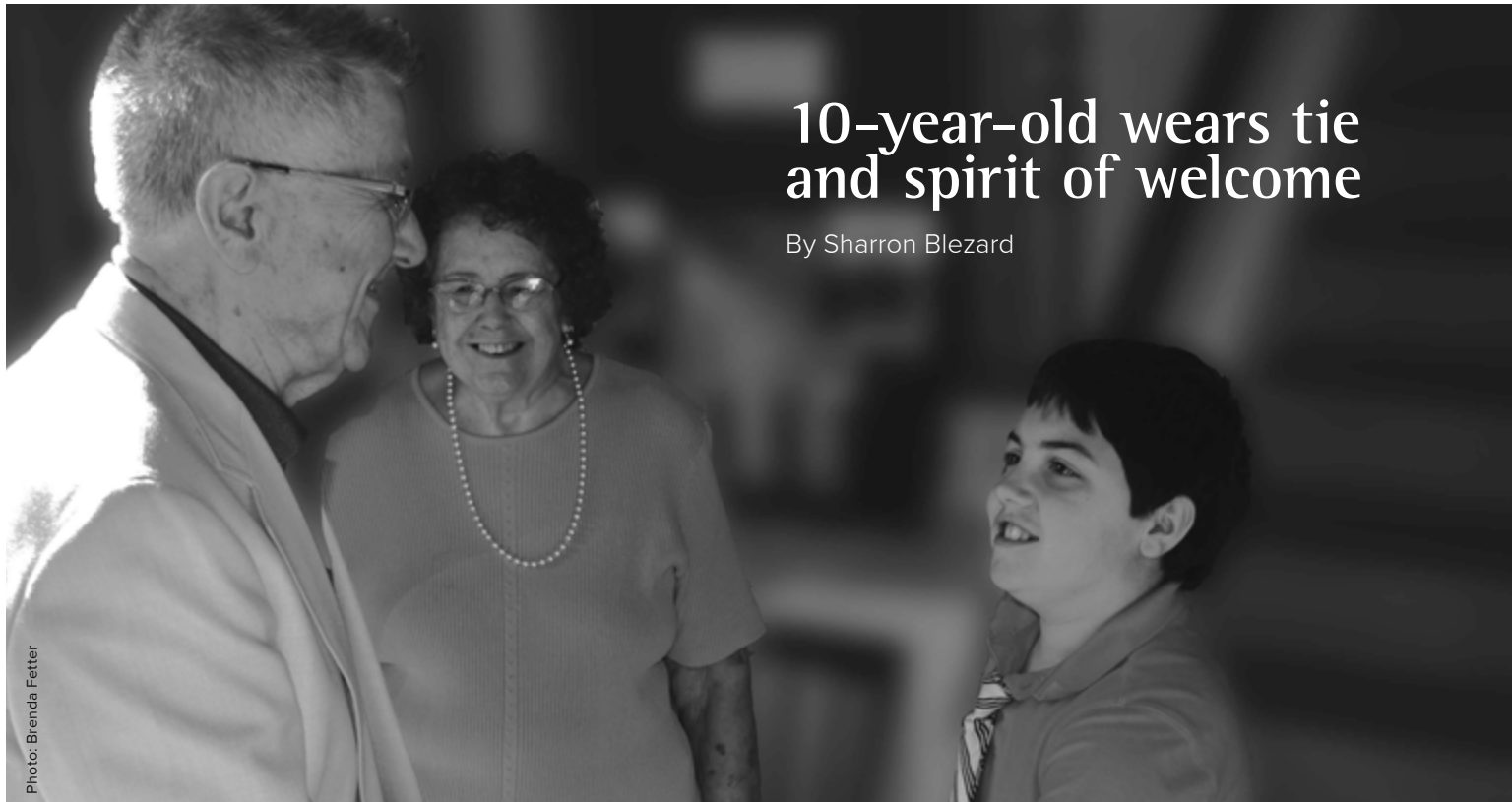


Photo: Brenda Fetter

Zachary Fetter (right), along with Audrey Ream, a fellow member of Jerusalem Lutheran Church, Rothsville, Pa., greets Jake Garman before worship—one of several ways this young evangelist welcomes people to his church.

Zachary Fetter looks like your average 10-year-old: he bowls, sings in his elementary school chorus, is interested in model railroads and trolleys, and his buddies call him by a cool nickname classic for a fifth-grader—Zach Attack!

Come Sunday morning, however, Zachary gets serious about his mission to make life better for everyone. He dons one of his many signature neckties and spends the morning at Jerusalem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rothsville, Pa., where he helps out in worship, sings in the children's choir and is a Sunday school regular. He has also helped serve community meals, sung Christmas carols to homebound members and hosted a basketball game for children at the community festival.


Behind his friendly smile and easy-going attitude is genuine concern for others and a desire to share Jesus' love. Zachary believes church is the best place to learn about God and help others, so he wrote a letter of invitation titled "Why You Should Attend Jerusalem." His carefully crafted treatise was published not only in the church newsletter but also in two area newspapers.

Zachary's letter describes Jerusalem as a friendly place that has something for everyone, from a nursery and Sunday school, to handicap accessibility for those who need it and lots of ways for people to be involved. But there's more.

"I want people to know that we will care for them," he said. "We will pray for them too. With God, their life can be better because going to church can really change their life. I want our church to grow. I see a lot of people with problems and stuff. Here you're with friends. Church is kind of like your family."

The folks at Jerusalem appreciate the boy's love for their small but active congregation. "He's a cool kid," said Dave Carson, council president. "He's willing to help wherever he can and has a real love for the church. Zachary gives us encouragement, and we're proud of what he's done."

Carson says some folks have even speculated that Fetter will trade his necktie in for a clergy collar someday. Zachary's not sure yet. "I could be a pastor," he said. "I've seen a lot of pastors who are pretty good."

Right now, he just wants people to know about God and that he'll be waiting to greet them on Sunday morning at Jerusalem. 

For a study guide, find this article at LivingLutheran.org.



Blezard is an assistant to the bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod.