



Related articles:

Fly like an eagle
(page 30)

Living Lutheran,
July 2016

Contact us:

LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540
lutheran@thelutheran.org
www.thelutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the
magazine of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide:

Fly like an eagle

Mentoring program seeks to help youth succeed

By Robert C. Blezard

Since education for children and youth is universal throughout North America, homework tutoring presents an opportunity for ministry for virtually every ELCA congregation. Tutoring not only helps the students get better grades, it also brings them into fellowship with the church and presents the chance to tell them about the gospel.

Exercise 1: Teaching commission

In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus told his followers to “make disciples” through two specific actions: baptizing and teaching. Why is education important to discipleship? By including a component of God and faith, how does EAGLES help the congregation fulfill this commission? Why is this especially important for young people?

Exercise 2: Educational excellence

- How does failure make you feel? Can you think of a time when you experienced failure and share how it made you feel? How did you cope?
- When children and youth are doing poorly in school, how does it affect their self-esteem? Their behavior? Their attitude toward the world in general? Their level of happiness? When a child is failing, what negative emotions are they more likely to exhibit? Can you think of examples where you witnessed this principle in action?
- When children fail in school, how does that affect the overall arc of their lives? How does it impact their college or trade-school prospects? Their job opportunities? Their choices in such things as neighborhood, housing, lifestyle, spouse and recreation. Can you think of examples?
- By contrast, when children succeed in school, how does that affect their self-esteem, behavior and other areas mentioned above? Can you think of examples?
- As a result of this discussion, what can you conclude about the importance and value of the EAGLES tutoring program?



Reprints:

Permission is granted for individuals, small groups and congregations to reproduce this study guide for local use.

Tell us:

Do you find this guide helpful? Send comments and suggestions to rcblezard@embarqmail.com

Contact us:

LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540
lutheran@thelutheran.org
www.thelutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide: **Fly like an eagle**

continued

Exercise 3: Youth opportunity

- Describe your congregation's ministry and outreach to youth. What are the best parts? What are the elements that could be improved? Overall, how would you rate the youth ministry? How would a tutoring program complement or improve the youth ministry program?
- Do any of your congregation's ministries involve working with the local school system? How, or why not? If there is an existing connection, how could your congregation build on that to start a tutoring program? If there is no existing connection, are there contacts within the congregation—such as teachers, school board members or administrators—who could help start a tutoring program?
- What assets or resources does your congregation have that would be helpful in starting a tutoring program like EAGLES? What does it lack? How could your congregation put the pieces together? As a study group, put together an action plan and present it to your congregational leadership.

Exercise 4: Unchurched families

The fastest-growing "religious" group in America is the "nones"—those who identify as having no religious faith. In 2014 people with no religious affiliation accounted for 23 percent of the population, up from 16 percent in 2007, according to the Pew Research Center. Its data also show that the younger the person, the more likely he or she will be a none. Discuss:

- With fewer people identifying as Christian, what are the implications for church stability? What does it mean for church evangelism strategies and outreach? Where will the church find growth?
- If younger people, especially, are more likely to be in the none group, what does that signal for the long-term outlook for the church? How does that change the importance a congregation places on youth and family ministry? In what specific ways can a tutoring program like EAGLES help to bring younger people into relationship with the church?

Exercise 5: Messages of hope

By spending time with students, helping them to learn, EAGLES volunteer tutors send many unspoken messages to students, such as "We care." How many other messages can you think of?

By creating a space for students to gather, welcoming them and organizing the tutoring program, the congregation sends numerous messages as well. How many can you think of?

By doing all these things in the name of Christ, the EAGLES tutors and



About the study guide author:



Rob Blezard is an assistant to the bishop in the Lower Susquehanna Synod. He holds degrees from Boston

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

Contact us:

LivingLutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, Ext. 2540
lutheran@thelutheran.org
www.thelutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

Study guide: **Fly like an eagle**

continued

the congregation give witness to the highest ideals of the church. How many can you think of?

Exercise 6: Community roots

Look closely at thriving congregations and you will usually see that they have close ties with the communities they serve. They are in touch with civic groups, such as Rotary Club, the Lions Club, 4-H, the YWCA, local Red Cross, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. They work with governmental groups such as the police, fire and ambulance service, the public library and the school system. Discuss:

- How does community involvement help a congregation achieve its mission to spread the gospel and reach people? How many direct ways can you think of? How many indirect ways? What are some other benefits for a congregation to be deeply rooted in its neighborhood?
- With what community and governmental groups does your congregation interact? What kind of projects? How would you rate your church's level of community involvement? How would a community tutoring program assist your congregation in becoming rooted in the community?

Fly like an eagle

Mentoring program seeks to help youth succeed

By Francine Knowles

Helping teens soar is the focus of a North Carolina tutoring and mentorship program that involves a small group of Lutheran volunteers working in partnership with public schools.

Based out of Zion Lutheran Church, Hickory, N.C., the program is called EAGLES—an acronym for its focus on education, adventure, God, leadership, the environment and service.

The program is geared for male students struggling with poor grades and personal challenges from Jacobs Fork Middle School and Fred T. Foard High School in nearby Newton.

The students meet for three hours every week in Zion's gym to receive help with homework from volunteer tutors, play sports and eat a meal. They also interact with the mentors' pet pooches, who have become beloved mascots.

The program launched in fall 2014 and is the brainchild of Zion members Drew and Kay Dodd. Both were beginning retirement and looking for ways to give back.

"I knew I wanted to do something with kids," said Drew Dodd, a former engineer. "It occurred to me the church has all the facilities you could ever need to do this program. We're doing this on a shoestring [budget], so it slowly evolved from that."

The program received \$5,000 in funding from the North Carolina Synod its first year. Supported by church donations, this year's budget is \$10,000, including \$4,000 for scholarships to Lutheridge Camp, Arden, N.C.

The students and mentors have volunteered at local charities and have participated in several adventures, including ziplining, mountain hiking, flying in a private plane and visiting the BMW plant. This summer the teens will spend a week at Lutheridge.

Seth Hendrix, who will be in 10th grade in the fall, has seen benefits from participating in EAGLES. He said he began falling behind in third grade after he missed several weeks of school and began skimming by. Since the EAGLES program his grades have gone from Cs and Ds to As and Bs.

"Now I read a lot; I write a lot," Hendrix said. "I'm amazed at how smart I truly can be. I've learned a lot [about] how to respect my elders or anyone, and I've learned how to act in public, how to talk appropriately."



EAGLES reach new heights

The program's primary goals are making sure the kids graduate from high school and "to have them realize they can achieve great things in life," Drew Dodd said. "We talk a lot about their life goals. We talk about behavior. We're trying to help them see that they can have a bright future."

Before launching the program, the Dodds sought advice from counselors and church members and met with officials at Jacobs Fork.

Melanie Sigmon, school counselor for Jacobs Fork, said the Dodds approached her with their vision. The board approved the program, and Sigmon serves as liaison between the school and Zion, and connects with teachers who recommend students for the program.

Sigmon said the teachers suggest students who are struggling with academics, those who are capable but just aren't producing.

"These students need that extra support, that nudge toward some sense of purpose," she said. "EAGLES does that. They kind of bridge that gap."



Photos: Aaron Canipe and courtesy of Drew Dodd

They help the parents, who are struggling to find that for their child. It's such a good way of forming a safety net from the teachers to the administration to the parents to the religious community."

Once students have been recommended, Drew Dodd meets with their parents and guardians to explain the program and get their support. Currently, EAGLES includes 18 students. Ten volunteers, most from Zion, serve as tutors and mentors.

Students Riley Bollinger and Stephen Bryant from Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, help out with the program and receive scholarship assistance from Zion in exchange. They bring the experience of having worked as counselors at Lutheran camps.

"[The program] gives the kids a safe place to just be kids," Bryant said. "They can be active, do homework. They don't have to worry about outside peer pressure."

Dakota Bentley, a ninth-grader in the fall, credits EAGLES with helping him improve his


grades and behavior. "I used to get in trouble a lot in class," he said. "I've been talking to people here at the church. They've taught me to stay focused."

Before EAGLES, Kaleb Giles, also going into the ninth grade, said he typically didn't do his homework. Now he does and his grades have benefited.

The students are "getting a chance to see there are different choices they can make," said David Bryant, pastor of Zion. "It's given them an opportunity to make choices to empower themselves and find more effective ways to go forward."

Participants pray before each session and before the meal. They discuss God, but program leaders make a point to not preach to the students. "We try to show it through what we do," Drew Dodd said.

Volunteer Barbara Mahnke, a member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hickory, said she's driven to help provide students the opportunity to do well and to experience success. She and others say the work is fulfilling.

Linda Morton, another volunteer and member of Zion, agrees: "[We're] reaching out to kids outside the church door; it's such a powerful program." 

For more information, contact Drew Dodd at dodd1@charter.net.

To download a study guide for this article, click on the "Spiritual practices & resources" tab at LivingLutheran.org.



Knowles is a freelance writer and former religion and business reporter with the *Chicago Sun-Times*.