



E-Quipped for Prevention

December 2011

Stories, resources, and training for
Cherish Our Children Leaders

Taking Action in Golden Valley, MN

Submitted by Nancy Rogness, Minneapolis Area Synod

Nancy Rogness is the leader of Christian Education at Valley of Peace Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, MN. One of her roles is to head the congregation's Cherish Our Children Team. Valley of Peace was a Cherish Our Children pilot congregation, so they were one of the first congregations to begin to tackle the issue of child sexual exploitation.

Six years ago, when we first got involved with Cherish Our Children, child sexual exploitation wasn't talked about. The first action piece of our congregation was very safe in terms of not challenging comfort zones. We adopted our neighborhood school, Noble Elementary School, because many people in the congregation have ties in the community and were distressed to hear about the poverty level of kids in the school. Poverty brings vulnerability.

The congregation believes that every child should have equal footing. So, every year we provide school supplies so that each child can have the supplies they need. The principle of the school lets us know what the needs are, the congregation provides those supplies, and then the children can go up to the school and get what they need. We also help supply boots, snow pants, jackets, and other winter clothes, which are required for recess, so that all children are able to participate. We also have members who tutor and help with events such as the pancake breakfast and carnivals. When children feel different or vulnerable because of poverty, this puts them at greater risk for exploitation. So, the congregation tries to make school a level playing field for all children. Often, it takes very little to change lives.

The next action piece was writing letters to Steve Jobs when he was taking inappropriate material off of the Apple application site about two years ago. The congregation saw this as positive reinforcement, thanking him for making that decision. Companies should hear when they make the right choices as well as when we'd like to see change.

The biggest action was to get involved with the Safe Harbor legislation. Prior to Minnesota's Safe Harbor legislation, when a minor was caught in

prostitution, they were caught in double bind. They were seen as both a victim and a criminal. When arrested, minors under the age of 18 would often get put into the criminal justice system because there was no way to deal with them as victims. With the Safe Harbors legislation, they are now legally seen as "sexually exploited youths" and can get help rather than punishment.

Our congregation members advocated for the Safe Harbor legislation from the beginning. The Advocates for Human Rights in Minneapolis kept us informed about what was happening in the legislature. We had over 20 people involved in an email/phone tree to inform people once our congregation leader heard from The Advocates. People wrote, called, and visited their legislators to explain why the Safe Harbors legislation was important.

We had an education hour during which we let people know about the problem and talked about how to get involved. It was an exciting process that required a huge commitment, because people had to be involved all the way through the legislative and voting process. The Safe Harbor bill was signed into law in July, making Minnesota the seventh state to have such a law.

The Cherish Our Children team coordinates the ministry at Valley of Peace, but the whole congregation is involved - including the Sunday School coordinator, youth leader, and members of the congregation. Every person from baptism to age 25 has a prayer partner; we do internet safety training, and adult forums that relate to Cherish Our Children. We encourage the partnership with Noble School and offer ways to take action, such as with the letter writing and legislative action. We have a very active group of members who seem to always rise to the occasion when invited to do so.

It was huge and positive outcome just to bring the issue in front of the church. If we can't talk about uncomfortable things in the church, where can we talk about them? We need to look at the ugly things and be aware that they happen within our community. People get tired of reading and hearing things in the news, and not being about to do anything about it. In our congregation, prayer came first, then education, and then action. People said, "Enough is enough! What can we do?"

There have been several rewarding aspects to taking action against the sexual exploitation of children. Seeing the church pull together as a community has been exciting. Often it's the easy things where we come together. But this is a difficult thing, and it's rewarding to see people coming together around a difficult issue. It's also rewarding to see the response of the teachers and principle of the school, especially when they realize that the congregation is in this for the long haul.

Our future plans at Valley of Peace include viewing the documentary "[Call + Response](#)" which is about global human trafficking and includes educational program materials. We will also view a local documentary, "[Broken Trusts, Broken Childhoods](#)" produced by the National Child Protection Training Center. It was made in conjunction with the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network. We are also encouraging people to use the "[2011 Fair Trade Federation Holiday Gift Guide](#)" to guarantee that what you are purchasing is slave-free in its production. This looks at the treatment of all ages of people, including children.

† www.cherishchildren.org

Find current and past Wednesday Prayers, join the mailing list, catch up on other activities.

† [Find us on Facebook](#)

"Like" Cherish Our Children, the Wednesday Prayer, and other links.

How are you praying for children and families?

Send your ideas to Erica Larson, E-Quipped Coordinator (elarson@lakenokomis.org), by December 10 for the January 2012 issue of *E-quipped for Prevention*. The topic for January is "Prayer" - Praying for the children in our congregation and communities. Please send stories of how you or others have included prayer as a part of your efforts to care for and prevent the sexual exploitation of children.

Cherish Our Children

Cherish Our Children is a national Lutheran ministry of prayer, education, relationship-building, and action to prevent child sexual exploitation.

You are invited to [give financially](#) to support this ministry. Thrivent members may designate Cherish Our Children to receive Choice Dollars. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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