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The importance of mission and ministry in early childhood

Queensland Lutheran Early Childhood Services (QLECS) was formed as a governance, administration and management arm of Lutheran Education Queensland (LEQ) in 2000, after specific needs were identified, to centrally manage a child care centre that was experiencing significant difficulty and to support Lutheran services in their regulatory responsibilities. Now, in 2016, QLECS oversees and supports sixty-one early childhood services – fifty-nine in Queensland, one in Victoria and one in New South Wales. These services cover all areas of early childhood education and care (Family Day Care, Long Day Care, Kindergarten, Limited Hours Care or Occasional Care and Outside School Hours Care).

QLECS's strategic intent is the '*[p]rovision of excellence in children's services within a Christ-centred framework*', with the moral purpose of our organisation being '*[l]iving and teaching God's word within the community*'. Whilst our responsibility lies largely in legislation and compliance, we also see, not only a responsibility but an opportunity, to bring the gospel message to our children, their families and carers and also to our staff.

Children are unique gifts from God. Each child has a spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, creative, and physical component. The first years of life are extremely important in a child's total development. The development of self-concept and their understanding of who they are begin in the early years.

Early childhood education refers to care and learning opportunities that are available for young children, particularly from birth to age eight. Children's learning experiences begin at birth and the first five years are a particularly critical time for socio-emotional and cognitive development, as eighty-five to ninety percent of brain development takes place before the age of five.

Early childhood education around the world, its focus and development, is growing significantly and is being highlighted in academic and social contexts, as research and evidence tell us that a person's life, successes, health and emotional wellbeing, have their roots in early childhood. We know that if we get it right in the early years, we can expect to see children thrive throughout school and their adult lives.

The policy of our church in relation to its schools (including early childhood services) as an agency through which it carries out its

mission of proclaiming the word of God and administering the sacraments, also refers to this deliberate Christian witness, as we 'serve students, parents, the church, the community and the government, by providing a quality education for the whole person' [LCA and its schools 2001].

So how does this connect to a child's spiritual development? What does this say then, about the importance of our mission and ministry to young children in Lutheran early childhood services?

Children are active learners drawing on direct physical and social experience, as well as culturally transmitted knowledge, to construct their own understandings of the world around them. Children contribute to their own development as they strive to make meaning out of their daily experiences in the home, in church and in the community. Children's early learning is distinct and foundational. It establishes the patterns for successful schooling and lifelong learning. The concept of developmentally appropriate



Children's learning experiences begin at birth and the first five years are a particularly critical time for socio-emotional and cognitive development. Photo courtesy of Bethania Lutheran Kindergarten

Children contribute to their own development as they strive to make meaning out of their daily experiences...

practices for young children, framed within quality early childhood programs, refers to providing an environment offering content, materials, activities and methodologies that are coordinated with a child's level of development and this should be no different for their spiritual development. Developmentally appropriate programs are as vital for the development of a child's skills, as they are for their spiritual growth.

Lutheran early childhood services are usually co-located on school or congregation sites and whilst they often have very close ties to that community, many of the staff and families are not connected to a church nor do they have any Christian beliefs. If we are to model Christian beliefs and practices, it is critically important for each service to have a clear understanding of their connection to the church, what it means to be a Lutheran service and to be able to frame this in their philosophy as well as embed it into their daily practices.

Not all children in our Lutheran early childhood services will go on to a Lutheran school or be involved in a church community, so the time we have with them is critical in laying the foundation for the Holy Spirit's work. For these key elements to happen, the church needs to be clear about not only what it wants for the young children in its services, but also for the staff who care and educate them each day. Our schools have well-developed Christian curriculums and staff accreditation courses, but these are often only loosely applied to early childhood services, mainly because they don't quite fit the various contexts that encompass the early childhood scene, where our children range from six weeks of age to school age.

All forms of education will have a particular perspective on life. It may not always be obvious or overtly stated, but it will shape



We also see, not only a responsibility but an opportunity, to bring the gospel message to our children, their families and carers and also to our staff. Photo courtesy of Beenleigh Family Day Care Scheme

how things are understood and spoken about, how things are done and what is chosen to be taught. No form of education is neutral as it will always be providing a particular lens through which the learner sees the world and their place in it. Christian education invites the learner, at whatever age they may be, to see and understand the world through the perspective of God's truth. Scripture teaches that children are a 'heritage from the Lord' [Psalm 127:3] and that God gives parents the direction to 'bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord' [Ephesians 6:4], but the reality of the society we live in today means that many children are

spending a significant amount of time during their early years, in some form of care. The Christian nurturing of young children is therefore a necessary and vital aspect of the mission of the church, because a quality early childhood ministry can be an effective channel for bringing the gospel message, not only to children, but also to their families.

Lyndal Mayer
Chief Executive Officer
Queensland Lutheran Early Childhood
Services (QLECS)



The Godly play experience - the story, the wondering, the response time and finally the feast

Godly play

The questions are profound and provoke contemplation

The kindergarten service at St John's Lutheran School in Kingaroy has been operating for just over ten years. In addition to providing a happy introduction to the school, the kindergarten offers the local community a quality, stand-alone kindergarten experience. Being blessed with an expansive natural space as a playground is one point of difference between this kindergarten and other local services. Another is the inclusion of faith in all day-to-day activities. As the local parish has been without a permanent pastor in recent times, the kindergarten staff have been working hard to ensure that this occurs. While LEA's Christian Studies Curriculum Framework guides the children's daily program in matters of faith, St John's has recently begun to offer *Godly play* sessions after hours.

As the service leader and kindergarten teacher, I undertook the *Godly play* core training in 2015. Finding the whole experience of a *Godly play* session to be profound, I was determined

to introduce it into regular practice at the kindergarten. To this end, the support of QLECS was vital. They helped to obtain necessary resources and facilitate ready access to the support of other *Godly play* practitioners within the organisation.

The *Godly play* experience has four quite separate sections – the story, the 'wondering', the response time and finally the 'feast'. Each part is equally important and a total session requires approximately an hour. Finding that amount of time, in a single block, during a busy kindergarten day was a major factor in my decision to offer the sessions outside of the regular program. The prospect of being able to include older siblings and other family and school community members was an equally important factor.

Approximately twice per term, up to ten kindergarten children, accompanied by family, gather together for a time of quiet reflection, the sharing of Christian stories and learning about faith. With the school day over, the grounds become quiet and peaceful. The kindergarten

room feels different, with low lights and a circle of comfortable cushions inviting participants to join us. As the story is told, eyes follow, heads nod and children and parents draw physically closer to one another. During the 'wondering' the questions are profound and provoke contemplation. Adults respond as often as the children and many have said that the questions have remained with them for days. During the response time, art materials and Christian books are provided for sharing. To enhance the feeling of 'specialness', the specific materials are not the same ones used daily.

Working together, sharing ideas and reflecting on the recently heard story is a beautiful time for both children and parents – and is

Working together,
sharing ideas
and reflecting...



As the story is told, eyes follow, heads nod and children and parents draw physically closer to one another

not something we find much time for in our busy daily life. The work produced is proudly shared during the feast, along with general conversation. Simple crackers, juice and dried fruits form the basis of the food, although we also include fresh bread, made in our bread maker on a regular basis. Sometimes, the artists choose to leave their work to be included in our sacred space. At other times, the work goes home to remind the creators of the experience.

Jenny Christensen
Director

The children are encouraged to have a sense of wonder

Here at Immanuel Early Learning Centre, Buderim, Qld, we support all of the children and their families in coming to know the love, friendship and personal knowledge of a God who loves them. This is embedded in our daily practice. We help each child understand they can talk to God in any way — just to be themselves with God. They can talk to him anywhere at church as well as home or even on the playground, wherever they are. As educators we model this by asking God to help us when we have a problem to solve.

Within the sacred spaces in our rooms there is opportunity for the children to read the Bible or stories that bring the message of God in a way that is purposeful for them.

We encourage them to kneel or stand to pray. They can say loud or quiet prayers, they can sing their prayers. When it comes to teaching children about prayer we feel that if they can



We help each child understand they can talk to God in any way

grasp this simple truth early enough in life, they will most likely grow up enjoying a fulfilling relationship with God and a satisfying prayer life. Children will talk openly and honestly about almost anything. This is how we can teach them to pray — openly, with honesty, about anything that's on their mind.

The 3-5 year old children have the opportunity take part in *Godly play* with Chaplain Kathrin (Koning). The *Godly play* room is a space within the college which is designed to focus the child's predominately visual attention on

images and ideas that are at the heart of the Christian understanding of God. The children are encouraged to have a sense of wonder. Chaplain Kathrin always asks for the children's input into the Bible passage by enquiring what part has meaning to them and what part the children feel may not need to be included. The children draw a greater connection to their world by being aware of what God has done for them.

Tracey Ellaway
Director

Lutheran 101

Upskilling early childhood educators on how to implement Lutheran ethos in everyday practice

QLECS identified a need within our services for quality Christian Studies professional development for our early childhood educators. Whilst *Equip* and *Pathways* can somewhat meet this need, the ability to release our educators to attend this training was simply out of reach in terms of affordability and replacement staffing. However, our teachers and educators had a strong desire to learn about the Lutheran faith and how they could implement these into their daily practices.

Lutheran 101 was designed to meet this need. This two hour workshop, usually delivered to all staff in a service at a special staff meeting, introduces

educators to Martin Luther and the foundations of the Lutheran church, how and when the church came to Australia, what Lutherans believe, how they worship and what they celebrate. Participants unpack the Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) policy statement for Lutheran Early Childhood Education Care. Written over 15 years ago, this document still aligns amazingly well with the current National Quality Standards that all early childhood and outside school hours care services are regulated by.

Educators that serve in our learning environments commit to 'uphold, promote and identify with the Lutheran church's ethos', but what does this actually mean and how many actually do this when most have limited or no ministry training and in some cases, no connection to a Christian faith at all. *Lutheran*

It is about exploring five key everyday practices that support the church's beliefs and practices – grace, devotions, service, sacred spaces and prayer.

101 is not a deep examination into the church's theology. It is about exploring five key everyday practices that support the church's beliefs and practices – grace, devotions, service, sacred spaces and prayer.

Our educators are all trained and experienced in how to educate young children. They have informed us that whilst they have the willingness to support the church's ethos, they resist because they are fearful of doing or saying something wrong and offending the Lutheran church, or those closely associated with it, in some way.

Being part of the Lutheran church's ministry and mission, our early childhood educators who have completed *Lutheran 101*, have made immediate changes and adjustments to their programs and practices. As a facilitator, I challenge all teams of educators to develop a grace book for their service, deliver daily devotions and prayers, design child friendly sacred spaces in their rooms and investigate how they can serve within their community.

Educators are invited to explore a variety of children's ministry resources, including devotional books, children's Christian literature and grace cards, diverse resources for sacred spaces, children's Bibles and Christian music. Educators are encouraged to critically reflect on which resources will enhance the children's learning.

The Lutheran church is recognising that the early years are critical in lifelong learning and development, therefore quality care of all children including excellence in children ministry should be highest priority and integral to the expression of Christian love in our early childhood services.

Carolynne Noonan
QLECS Children's Services Manager
Christian Studies facilitator



All teams of educators [are challenged] to deliver daily devotions and prayers, design child friendly sacred spaces in their rooms. Photos courtesy of Immanuel Early Learning Centre, Buderim Qld, St John's Lutheran Kindergarten, Kingaroy Qld, Nazareth Lutheran Early Learning Centre, Woolloongabba Qld

Queensland Early Childhood Services

St Pauls ELC Townsville

St Pauls Lutheran Early Learning Centre is a long day care centre catering for 66 children per day ranging in age from 15 months to 5 years. We are nestled nicely in an older leafy well established suburb surrounded by old style Queenslander homes in a suburb of Townsville.

The centre has been operational for 60 years and is situated on just under an acre of wonderful natural land complete with its very own 120 year old tree, dry creek bed and 'bug hotel'.

This year we welcomed Pastor Steve (Cronau) and his lovely family to our little piece of paradise. Pastor Steve, his many volunteers and the parish play a huge part in our centre with many of the congregation volunteering to take 'Kids Church' each week and visiting the children for story time. Because our centre almost wraps around the church, it is very easy for the children to access and have their worship times there.

The congregation and the early learning centre work very well together and share many projects.

Pastor Steve and the congregation are invited to all the centre's special events and many of them join the families from the centre, which builds a sense of belonging and a beautiful community spirit. At the start of the year the staff are welcomed and blessed at a service.

St Paul's Townsville is a wonderful place to be with a very supportive community.

Kerry Strickland
Director



Worship at St Pauls ELC Townsville

Only the best is good enough for children

Every day at Beenleigh Family Day Care (BFDC) we strive to fulfil this vision in partnership with the Bethesda Lutheran Church. Our two organisations have been linked for more than 25 years and our ties are built on years of respect and a desire to work for the glory of God in this place. Together we share a physical home with FDC and church staff sharing an office space that was previously the church manse. This space provides us with a unique working environment where the lives of church members and the FDC staff are nurtured by each other.

Our vision of 'only the best is good enough for children' is also based on a solid foundation of prayerfully seeking the Lord's support, strength and guidance in everything we do. Weekly prayer and reflection provides an opportunity to peel away the layers of busyness and quietly sit at the feet of our Lord. This is a time of stillness, focus and a realisation that the work we do in this place is so much more than the education and care of children. The work comprises a multi-faceted ministry that reaches into the lives of those connected to our organisations.

One part of our ministry includes the development of a 'belonging culture' that includes the educators, staff, families, church and wider community. This culture displays compassionate outpouring to those in need of our love and support. From car accident victims, those with life threatening illnesses, victims of

domestic violence and those who have been touched by suicide and loss. All members of our community are supported in prayer and in practical ways to implement the best outcome in every situation.

Another part of our ministry is a joint venture between the Bethesda congregation and BFDC. The local congregation funds a biblical outreach program with our BFDC families. This involves the gift of a children's pictorial Bible to each family at the time of enrolment. This small gesture is a concrete means to plant the seeds of the gospel into the hearts of young children and their families. It provides a genuine attempt to draw families to God's word in a comfortable, non-intimidating way. This Bible program is also fully supported by our BFDC governance committee. This committee includes members of the Bethesda congregation and Pastor Mark Hampel who acts as an advisor and facilitator of spiritual guidance to the committee.

Pastor Mark's role in BFDC also includes his involvement in our weekly playgroup session. Mark attends playgroup regularly, reading stories to the children and becoming involved in the children's play. Our modern day society includes a large number of single parent families and we believe a kind, gentle father figure can often form a stable foundation for the children to feel secure and safe. Pastor Mark provides this with a friendly and cheerful approach that the children find reassuring. He has also established relationships with the educators, parents and staff, therefore strengthening the links between BFDC and the Bethesda congregation. Educators, staff and families are given opportunities to be involved in church activities and to attend services throughout the year. Our BFDC service bookkeeper Deborah Sinn has been an active member of the church for more than 35 years and she provides yet another valuable link between BFDC and the church.

In conclusion I would like emphasise the importance we place on the collaborative culture we have developed between Bethesda Lutheran Congregation and Beenleigh Family Day Care. This culture is the cornerstone to our Beenleigh Family Day Care ministry. A ministry that provides education and care to approximately 300 children and their families every week. A ministry, that ultimately strives to provide a Christian influence and to fulfil God's work in this very special place.

Belinda Watson
Manager



Pastor Mark attends playgroup regularly, reading stories and becoming involved in the children's play

Queensland Early Childhood Services continued

Goombungee reaches 40 years

Located in the small rural community of Goombungee on the Darling Downs, 40km north of Toowoomba, Goombungee Little Folks Group shares the same grounds as St Matthews Lutheran Church. We are a kindergarten open three days a week for pre-prep and junior kindergarten children and a playgroup is run from the centre one day a week. We service the community within a 20km radius and this year marks the 40th year of operation.

We have a close relationship with St Matthews congregation and on occasions have had Pastor Joel Pukallus visit, play his guitar and sing to the children. We have also seen Pastor Joel in another role – that of rural fire fighter when we had our emergency services excursion. He talked to the children about fire safety and his role in the rural fire brigade.

Our management committee is a huge blessing. It consists of parents and members of the congregation and they are always ready to help out with whatever is needed.

One of the congregation members (also a grandparent to one of our children) has visited us several times leading music with the children. She also set up a hair dressing salon, and styled and coloured the children's hair. They loved it!!

We take pride in being involved in our local community and are teaching our children to do this also.

We regularly visit the town library for a story telling session, craft session and to borrow books.

We have had excursions to the post office to post letters to our grandparents to invite them to grandparents day and also to the doctor's surgery

where more of our congregation members work. We watched patients have blood taken and stitches removed. The children thoroughly enjoy these experiences and they build links with the congregation through our small community.

Our management committee is heavily involved in all our fundraising ventures. We make it a practice to support our local show by organising a fruit salad and ice cream and sample bag stall. This provides a good opportunity to promote the kindergarten when looking for new enrolments.

Apart from the show we run a major fundraiser each year. Some of these fundraisers include raffles, Christmas in July, car shows and a bike rally, bride of the year, red, white and brew night, dinner dances and this year we will be having a fete style open day with carnival games, music and entertainment to celebrate our 40th birthday this year.

Kylie Ferguson
Director

Collaborative partnerships

Our mission at Eight Mile Plains aims to provide collaborative partnerships with families and communities. Serving the needs of the diverse kindy community, our mission and ministry are woven into our daily life and program at St John's Lutheran Kindergarten.

The acceptance and respect of all and the uniqueness of how this weaves its complex pattern by bringing together the threads of our physical, mental, emotional, verbal, diverse cultures and religions. Learning to embrace these threads is our daily life.

Firstly, building relationships. Waving is universal and smiling speaks a million words and feelings,

so greeting people with these two gestures helps to break down barriers. We undertook research about the range of cultural and religious groups represented in the local area. We use this information to help prepare for the diverse families who access our kindergarten.

Christian Studies is embedded within the curriculum as we aim to provide a broad and integrated educational program within a Christian context.

We assist children to develop an understanding of God's love every day by role modelling that we treat all with respect and acceptance. Each day begins with prayer, includes grace for meals and a prayer for home time which includes our 'thank you' stone where the children hold the special stone and thank God for someone in their lives.

We have a special quiet area for the children to read the Bible, pray or reflect. We are also blessed with a dedicated local congregation member who comes twice a week to tell the children Bible stories which the children absolutely love. The pastor comes often to see the children, read Bible stories, pray with them and to play.

We are privileged to have a church on our grounds and we can access this whenever we wish, also inviting our kindergarten community. Congregation members help with gardens, dropping off mail, advising on matters and always supporting the kindy. The ministries of the church extend into the kindergarten with Girls Brigade, Boys Brigade, youth group and Christian summer school, all being accessible to the community. The kindergarten works with the groups helping with events or fundraising or accessing materials.



We have seen Pastor Joel in the role of rural fire fighter



Congregation members help with gardens



St John's serves the needs of a diverse kindy

We also extend though the wider community by sponsoring a child in Thailand. The children each year donate \$12 per family. We correspond with letters and pictures to Yermue. We also collect soup and blankets for 'Rosie's', an outreach program for the homeless and marginalised and toiletries for Mary and Martha's, a safe place for those suffering domestic violence. All this is done so easily with baskets labelled in the foyer for donations and giving our time once a month to go out on the street with Rosie's.

The extract below is from our recent newsletter that went to families.

Dear St Johns Community,

We would sincerely like to begin this by giving thanks to all the families of people who have given of their time, talents, energy and love to both our St Johns community and also to the wider community. At the start of the year, we talked about helping each other and it has been a true treasure of the Kindy to see those roles fulfilled with such enthusiasm and care. Whether it be the volunteers both at Kindy or at home, or the parent assistance in the library, or the gardener that maintains our beautiful facilities, or the teacher that spends extra time in assistance, or the educators who spend time listening and caring, or the student that perseveres and shows resilience in the face of difficulties; there have been many areas for which we should be truly grateful. It is obvious that we could never fully list all of the contributions within such a large and diverse community, but we would like to at least let you all know that every contribution is deeply appreciated and valued. We also know that the generosity that we experience at the

Kindergarten is motivated by a deep sense of belonging, the smile of appreciation from a child, the knowledge that engagement is a positive example to everyone who experiences it and the sheer goodness and joy that comes from deep investment in others.

Together we hope we can make a difference

St Mark's Early Learning Centre (ELC) is a 75 place long day care centre, associated with St Mark's Lutheran congregation. St Mark's is guided by Christian principles and values. We believe that God created each child with strengths and abilities that we can celebrate. This belief is reflected in the centre's supportive, loving and welcoming Christian environment, which acknowledges the enjoyment and importance of childhood.

Our centre offers 'Christ-centred' care. This reflects the Lutheran belief that God sent Jesus Christ into this world to reconnect humanity with the love and compassion of God.

St Mark's staff along with St. Mark's Lutheran Church, create a partnership, working together to enhance the Christian ethos amongst the staff, children and families.

Pastor Peter (Hage), Chaplain Jade and Sarah, from the congregation's children's ministry attend our centre on alternate days. Children are introduced and invited to celebrate peace and love through the stories and parables of the Bible and Christian songs. Pastor Peter will tell the children stories from the Bible and sing songs accompanied by his guitar. Our children are always very eager to share the stories they hear with their parents and sing the songs Pastor Peter has taught them.

Chaplain Jade reads us stories direct from the Bible and explains how God created our world. Sarah involves the children in interactive play. Bible stories are extended into real time, with the children playing roles and understanding through role-play, the feelings that those in Bible times, were experiencing. Our children are invited to express how they would have felt and how it makes them feel now.

We share grace with the children and families before eating and pray with Pastor Peter before most meetings. Pastor Peter is always available to help our families and staff with pastoral care or just a chat.

Our families are invited to attend the services at the church with times of the different services being advertised in the newsletters and church activities for families. Our celebrations are shared with the church community and in turn their celebrations are shared with us. They are invited to our special days, the ladies fellowship present gifts of Bibles to our 'graduating' kindergarten children. Our Christmas celebration is at the church with assistance from the congregation members. Our kindergarten children sing to the elderly in the congregation on these celebration days. Our children love to visit the church to hear the word of God.

Together we hope we can make a difference to the families and the community of St Mark's, to create a world filled with peace, love, compassion, safety, forgiveness and understanding. It all starts with the young developing a knowledge of God.

Fay Costi
Director



Pastor Adrian blessed the tree house and children made a cake to celebrate



Children are invited to celebrate peace and love through the stories of the Bible

Queensland Early Childhood Services continued

We give thanks for our college pastor

A college pastor leads a busy life with many demands on his time as he serves as worship leader for the school. Many situations need urgent attention and many requests for assistance are presented for consideration. There is usually never enough time in this busy schedule to do as much as one would like.

Trinity Lutheran College on the Gold Coast sits across two campuses and covers early learning to year 12, children from 2 to 18 years of age. The task of providing spiritual leadership and guidance to this diverse group of people is challenging and rewarding.

The links between the college pastor, Pastor Michael Alfson, and the early learning centre (ELC) and the outside school hours care (OSHC) service are integral to the spiritual development and support of all – children, families and staff. The assistance of Pastor Michael is valued and respected.

Underpinning this relationship with the ELC and OSHC is this text: *Jesus said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.* [Matthew 19:14]

Some of the ways that our strong Christian foundations are built and facilitated by Pastor Michael are through:

- » attendance at special events at the ELC, such as the fathers' night sausage sizzle and end of year concert where Pastor Michael mingles and chats with families
- » participation on the governance committee for the ELC and OSHC, providing guidance of a spiritual nature to the decisions of this committee

- » supporting the attendance of the children from the ELC at the early and junior years chapel each Friday where children experience the traditions of a church service, receive a spiritual message and enjoy the singing and actions of the Christian songs (which are eagerly practiced later)
- » children from the ELC participating in a Sunday church service on campus each term
- » the baptism of ELC children and siblings at these church services – what better way to share God's love than to welcome a new being into his midst!
- » supporting staff in their work with young children – ideas, stories, songs, visits
- » supporting staff in their spiritual growth – facilitating *Pathways* training; attending a staff meeting once per term to share a theological message that links to the mission of the college

Around Easter time this year some special events occurred that assisted the children to understand the Easter message:

- » at chapel, children listened to Pastor Michael explain about the Last Supper and how Jesus cares for his followers just as his followers care for him; he highlighted this message by washing the feet of an older student just as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples.
- » at another chapel service, Pastor Michael explained about Palm Sunday by using big palm leaves to illustrate how Jesus led his followers; the kindergarten children were fascinated by the older children as they performed the dances and helped Pastor Michael tell the story

- » OSHC children had questions about Easter and Pastor Michael came to talk to them about the Easter story by using a set of twelve special eggs, each with an artefact inside to illustrate one part of the story

Recently the children at the ELC asked some tough questions about God, following their daily devotions at the centre. Pastor Michael was invited to come and answer these queries and he told the children that God speaks to us in our heart, through the Bible and other people. He also explained how the world was created – God used his voice to make the world grow and created us as very special people. The children made some interesting connections to the postman and Santa while Pastor Michael asked how they thought God could deliver messages to us.

The ELC and OSHC are very appreciative of the leadership and guidance of Pastor Michael in supporting the spiritual development of the children, family and staff of these services.

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. [Isaiah 40:31]

Susan Shaw
Service Leader
(assisted by Sarah Carnell)

We have something special at Bethania!

Bethania Lutheran Kindergarten is a small service located at Bethania in Logan. We are co-located with Bethania Lutheran School, Bethania Lutheran Outside School Hours Care and Bethania Lutheran Church. We have two rooms within our service, catering for children aged 2.5 years through to 6 years and are



Pastor Michael visits the ELC



Pastor Michael baptises an ELC child

staffed by a team of six dedicated educators, including a kindergarten teacher. We are managed by QLECS.

Our service enjoys strong links with our local community and works with Bethania Lutheran School to ensure a smooth transition to school for the children who access our service. We hold regular campus meetings and our team of educators enjoy sharing professional development opportunities and participating in spiritual retreats with our school. Our children are invited to attend and participate in a variety of school events, including cross country, athletics carnivals, book week, NAIDOC week celebrations and other significant events. Bethania Lutheran School is very accommodating of the needs of our children and show great understanding of the occasional need to modify events to suit our age group. We share a special relationship with the school, who truly value early childhood education and all that our kindergarten brings to the community.

Our Christian ethos underpins all of our service operations and we see ourselves as a Christ-centred community that acknowledges children are a gift from God and should be encouraged, supported and nurtured to be successful in their own learning. The Lutheran Education Australia Christian Studies Curriculum Framework helps shape our curriculum decisions when planning the Christian Studies elements of our program. We consider the beginning strand in each of the key ideas and begin to introduce and explore key Christian concepts with the children, as well as begin to develop each child's understanding of, and relationship with, God.

Each day the children enjoy a devotional time prior to lunch where we will share Bible stories,

answer questions the children may have, we sing and dance and praise God. Our devotional times can be quiet and encourage reflection, or they can be noisy, filled with music, self-expression and joy. We close each devotion time with a short prayer where the children share what they would like to pray for. Our kindergarten group joins with Bethania Lutheran School each Friday during term time for a whole school worship. Bethania Lutheran School accommodate the kindy children sitting on the floor at the front of the chapel and encourage them to dance and sing during the songs. The kindergarten group enjoy participating in the services and there will often be great discussion afterwards about what the children have seen and the concepts explored by the class rostered to present. Once per year, our kindergarten group present chapel for the rest of the school, sharing a short drama or presentation, singing a song and sharing prayers with the school community, giving back to our community and thanking them for our inclusion.

Both of our rooms have a sacred space within their learning environment – a very special space within the room. These spaces house our Bible, our crosses and will change and grow throughout the year to reflect our children, our interests and the church (liturgical) seasons. Our sacred spaces remind us to take the time to connect with God and that he is present in all that we do.

As part of our service to our community, both our junior kindy and kindergarten class join with Bethania Lutheran School to raise money for a village in Cambodia through Australian Lutheran World Service. We hold special fundraising days and participate in the Walk for Cambodia organised by the year five students at the school. The Walk for Cambodia is a large

part of our school community calendar, with the children of the school, teachers, kindergarten children, family, friends and congregation members all banding together to raise money for those less fortunate than ourselves. It is so heart-warming to see a year five student take the hand of a three year old and walk laps with them to help them reach their fundraising goal. By walking with our kindergarten children, the older children aren't able to do as many laps themselves, however, they choose to help the little ones and the strong community spirit we have at Bethania shines through.

Our congregation is currently in the call process, however, we have previously enjoyed strong links with our pastor as well. Our pastor was always there to provide care and support for our team, and was always someone to talk to in times of both trouble and joy. During regular catch ups we would be challenged to consider different views and opinions while strengthening our faith and continuing to develop our personal relationship with God. We look forward to forming a relationship with our new pastor and including him in our kindergarten day.

Each of the four elements (kindergarten, OSHC, school, church) on our 'block' (our campus), respect what we each bring to our community. We support and complement each other, with the common thread of being in his service weaving us together. We have something pretty special here at Bethania!

Alicia McMurray
Director



Our children are invited to attend and participate in a variety of school events



Bethania is accommodating of the needs of our children and show great understanding of the occasional need to modify events for the age group.

Early childhood services in LSA

Sharing the gospel message through words and actions

Concordia Kindergarten was established in 1975 by the congregations of Christ Church and Holy Cross in Murray Bridge SA to offer a Christian education to preschool children in the community. The Lutheran congregations have been instrumental in the development of the kindergarten and have supported it enormously. Over the years the kindergarten has grown to its current enrolment of approximately 100 children. The families who choose to enrol their children at Concordia Kindergarten know we are a Christian kindergarten. Many of these families do not have any connection with a church community, or in fact, even declare any religious affiliation at their child's enrolment. What they don't realise is that this opens a huge door of opportunity for us at Concordia! During their twelve months at kindy, children are exposed to, and immersed in, a program where Christian education is evident in every aspect of our day.

What does this look like? As you walk into Concordia kindy you are confronted with a kindy busy with 50-60 children at any time. The children have creative art and craft activities that may be influenced by our Christian Studies current topic. On our bookshelves, easy fiction stories and Bible stories are side by side where children can choose an array of books to read. We also encourage our Bible story books to be borrowed and taken home. Songs are sung during the day which include a range of Christian songs as well. 'Learning stories' are

shared with parents that often include aspects of awe and wonder about God's world that their child has experienced.

An important characteristic of our kindy is having a staff team who are open to sharing their Christian faith with the children and families too. Christian Studies is planned for, using an enquiry based approach where children are encouraged to ask questions. Children are involved in 'Jesus time' each week on several occasions but the greatest learning about God comes from the questions and comments that come incidentally from the children during the day. The greatest joy as a teacher of these children is the opportunity to openly discuss their questions and to share in their moments of wondering.

Our kindy community is made up of families from Murray Bridge and from surrounding areas, some as far as 70 kms away. As families walk through our doors we want them to know we genuinely care for them. We also want them to experience the love of Jesus through us. Much of what we do is hard to put into words, as it is what is felt by families that is often commented on. We are truly blessed to have the opportunity to work with all families, even when sometimes this can be quite challenging. That's what makes it so rewarding. It is often the pastoral care for families that has the biggest impact, as many families try to juggle the pressures of work, family, finances, etc. We are blessed to have 'Mrs Heather' who works with us to provide support to the families. She is primarily

involved with the playgroup and gets to know the families well before their children actually start kindy. She comes into kindy weekly and interacts with the children, the staff and parents. Heather supports us with our 'card ministry' and also provides practical support with meals, etc for families. Her ministry is supported by one of the local Lutheran churches both financially and in practice.

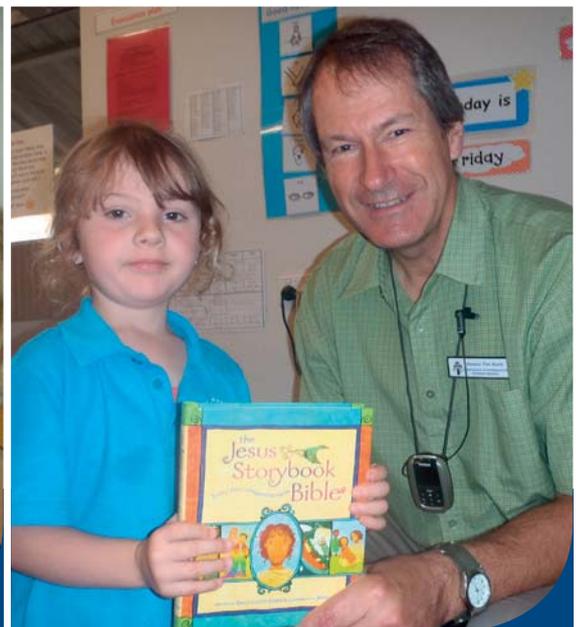
Each year the congregation members donate Bibles which are presented to every child attending kindy. This is another way to share the great news of Jesus with each child's family. The children's ministry programs of the congregations are also actively promoted through the kindergarten. The two pastors (Tim Koch and Greg Page) each come to kindy twice a week so the children have opportunities to talk and play with them, as well as listening to them sharing a 'kid's talk'. It is beautiful to see these relationships develop as the year unfolds.

In Matthew 19:14 Jesus said 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'. Every day I feel blessed to have the opportunity, with my colleagues, to share in the lives of these children and their families. It is a joy beyond words to share the gospel message through words, and more importantly, through our actions.

Lynette Schiller
Director



Children making a get well card



Pastor Tim Koch presenting a Bible

Sharing the love of Jesus with young children

For 41 years we have been sharing the love of Jesus with young children and their families.

Salisbury Lutheran Kindergarten's mission statement is: 'We will help children build a living future by creating a caring, nurturing and an educational learning environment based on God's love for everyone. We will support, encourage and help all families to provide for their children quality pre-school experiences in a Christian environment.' Our kindergarten is adjacent to the Salisbury Lutheran Church in Salisbury SA. We are open to all, inclusive of everyone. We welcome children and families from various cultures, and we encourage them to share their culture with us. Children with additional needs are also included, and staff members endeavour to meet every child's needs, engaging specialised assistance where needed. The kindergarten council carefully consider the fee structure, ensuring that fees are set as low as possible to be affordable for all families. We consider the needs of working families, accommodating parents by providing early / late care for half an hour before and after sessions when necessary.

We are a Christian kindergarten with strong links with the Salisbury Lutheran Church. The church community supports the kindergarten in many ways, including volunteering practical help with Play Group, maintenance, and making equipment for the kindergarten. The church team support the kindergarten staff, as they assist the teaching

staff with the Christian Studies program. They participate in the kindergarten church worship services and offer counselling for families. The church staff members also coordinate specific assistance for families including parenting courses and providing meals for families in difficult times.

When families communicate needs to kindergarten staff or struggle with crises, we respond with a card ministry to encourage families, and refer them to professionals as necessary. Each morning kindergarten staff members have devotions, where we pray for families in general as well as those in particular need, and we pray for individual children as we focus on them and prepare programs for them. Staff members are involved in staff Bible studies, as well as other church Bible studies in small groups, to keep our Christian faith alive and help us share our faith with children. Staff members have a strong prayer life, making devotion time a priority. Pastor Joel (Cramer) or Lyn Benger pray for each individual child during the year in our church visits.

Christian Studies is a major focus of our kindergarten, as we intentionally teach the core truths of the gospel – that God loves us and sent his Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice to save us, and he made us for the special purpose of loving and serving others. We have chosen important Christian themes to teach thoroughly, so that they are meaningful and memorable for the children. In Term 1 we concentrate on teaching who Jesus is, including his life, death and resurrection. In Term 2 we concentrate on God's

creation of the world and caring for his world including recycling. In Term 3 we concentrate on prayer, and God keeping us safe and making each person special and different. In Term 4 we concentrate on service, as we respond to his love and care for us, and reach out to help others. Last year we learned about the House of Hope in Indonesia and we raised money to assist the orphanage. We teach the children about serving and caring for others through mission projects.

We purposely teach Christian Studies lessons during small group times in hands-on enquiry style learning. We use visuals, props, songs and dramas to emphasise stories. We give children the opportunity to retell stories in a variety of ways, including drama and story tables. We culminate our Christian Studies learning with worship services in the church each fortnight, inviting parents to attend. We sing Christian songs that have been learnt, act out a Bible story with props, and have prayers. Each term we also have Church for Kids which is a special church service on Friday nights as part of the regular church worship, but specifically designed for children. It is a stimulating evening for children which includes songs, Bible readings, drama, puppets and clowns to convey the message.

We focus on prayer throughout the year including praying for the children individually, with adults modelling praying, and then children are invited to pray. Families are included, as we send prayer-pages home to prepare children to pray at kindergarten. Parents assist their child to paste photos / pictures, or draw pictures and write a prayer to say at kindergarten. To reach families in their homes, we give children LLL tracts on specific topics to take home.

In July 2015 Salisbury Lutheran Kindergarten celebrated its 40th birthday. We celebrated that Salisbury Lutheran Church decided to establish a kindergarten in order to reach out to the community with God's love. During the celebrations, many people paid tributes to their kindergarten experience. Stories were recalled about children attending kindergarten many years ago, becoming Christians and their family following Jesus, and then their children have also attended Salisbury Lutheran Kindergarten. For 41 years staff members have been sharing the love of Jesus with young children and their families in the Salisbury community. It has been a privilege to serve the community with quality Christian preschool education during this time. We praise God who has blessed and continues to bless our kindergarten.

Jenny Schapel
Director



It [is] a privilege to serve the community with quality Christian preschool education during this time.

LEVNT services

Building bridges at Hamilton

Good Shepherd Early Childhood Services includes a kindergarten and long day care (LDC) centre in Hamilton Victoria, located on the same site as Good Shepherd College Junior Campus. We currently offer 4-year-old kinder and 3-year-old kinder groups as well as three long day care rooms. At present we have 34 staff in our centre. As only a small proportion of our families are actively involved with local churches, our centre provides a great opportunity for children in our community to hear about Jesus and for families to develop an awareness of our faith and our church.

We are very fortunate to have a small but dedicated team from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Hamilton, led by Pastor David Wear, who plan and lead weekly 'Jesus time' for our 3-5 year-olds and kinder groups. Jesus time typically involves a Bible story, some songs and an activity or game. Often the children make something that they can take home and talk about with their families, and we hope that it might spark some discussion about what the children have been learning about Jesus in our centre.

Pastor David is a regular visitor to our centre and is well known by staff and children alike. The children enjoy it when he pops in, often on a Friday morning, and he also attends our centre staff meetings from time to time. Pastor David's contact details are included in our centre newsletter and his photo appears on the wall in our reception, so that he's seen as one of our team.

In recent times we have been looking at ways that we can embed our Christian identity into our practices and routines. Meryl Hill, our relief cook

(and congregation member) has put together for each room a book of 'Graces' that educators can refer to and use at mealtimes with their children. We have also purchased some devotion books that are suitable for our older groups. We have also put some effort into creating a sacred space for each room, where children can reflect on our Jesus or devotion times. One of our church members made candle holders and crosses for each of the rooms and we have children's Bibles and new kids' Christian music to share with our children. We try to make this space special and add ideas, pictures or objects in response to the Bible stories we read.

We are also trying to build closer links with Good Shepherd Junior School, which is just outside our gate (and yet classified as an excursion). In term 2 our kinder children began attending school chapel, which is another great opportunity to hear about Jesus in different ways from different people, as well as accessing the school library. We are looking to extend this to the 3-5 LDC group in the future.

We partner with the congregation in our Care Share program, where meals are prepared and frozen to be available to families (from our centre, congregation or community) at times of particular need. Our centre contributes to this program by freezing leftover meals from our kitchen which minimises waste and assists families in need.

We know that we are not yet where we'd like to be in our mission to our community, but we are working and making progress towards our goals! Good Shepherd Congregation has employed Steve Leibelt as a part time

layworker and he has started working in the service to enhance the development of relationships between the congregation, children and families in our centre. We are looking forward to some fresh ideas and taking further steps in reaching out to our community with the good news of God's love for them as well as supporting them in practical ways.

Christine Sanders
Director

God is ever present in our community

St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten is a stand-alone kindergarten located in Grovedale in Geelong. By stand-alone, I mean that it is not part of any cluster management system like the majority of kindergartens in Geelong. We are governed by a committee of management comprising five church and five parent members.

The kindergarten has close links with the congregation. Members from the church as well as the pastor deliver weekly 'Jesus time' for the 4/5 year kinder groups. During this time, the children listen to a Bible story, reflect on it and try to incorporate it in prayer time where they are able to nominate things they are thankful to God for. The children then sing a song chosen by the pastor or Sunday school teacher to practice for the term. Twice a year, the children have the opportunity to participate in a *Church for Kids* service at St Paul's church. This service is specifically geared towards children and can include puppets and re-enactments of stories by church members, and during the service, the children are invited to sing the song that they had been practicing.

St Paul's Lutheran Church has been involved in assisting refugee families in our community over recent years. The kindergarten has provided support by accepting the children from these families into the kindergarten to provide them with a safe, secure and caring environment to help them socialise with others and learn English before starting school. The kindergarten community has also undertaken to provide food hampers, clothing and other household items for these families.

Our kindergarten is inclusive of children from all cultural, social, economic and religious backgrounds and we aim to provide a respectful and tolerant education for all. Our committee of management, in conjunction with the congregation, has been able to provide all kinds of assistance for families in need over the years. The congregation set up an emergency support fund to provide financial assistance for fees, groceries or meals for families affected by illness



Sacred spaces have been created in every room

or similar hardship assistance, and a support worker for children in need at the kindergarten.

Our kindergarten philosophy reflects the Christian principles of the church. We practice kindness, forgiveness, respect for others, service to others and tolerance for all. This is evident in the staff interactions with children as they provide strong role models for the children during their time at kindergarten. We have achieved an exceeding rating in our Quality Area 5 which deals with relationships with children. Our strategies for behaviour management, conflict resolution and inclusiveness all reflect the above principles.

Parents and families are welcomed in our kindergarten in many different ways. Parents provide assistance during the kinder session and with morning tea and lunch. Parents are encouraged to share any special talents they may have and children enjoy having their parents and families as a part of their kinder journey. Parents have the opportunity to be a part of the Committee of Management or the parent auxiliary. The parent auxiliary is responsible for fundraising to assist with updating equipment for the children.

Within our kindergarten program, we celebrate religious occasions such as Easter, Christmas, Ash Wednesday and Shrove Tuesday. The children are provided with the true story of these occasions and our activity tables will reflect areas where children can process what they've learned through play. For example, we have a nativity set out over the Christmas period and during Easter we provide activities where children can explore how Jesus died on the cross and

was resurrected on Easter Sunday. We also tell regular Bible stories which are often followed up with play spaces for the children to explore and extend further. Before eating our snack and lunch at kinder, we always sing grace and give thanks for the food we are about to receive.

God is ever present in our community and often referred to by the children and staff during play and regular routines. Kindergarten is a way for the children to come to know Jesus in a supportive and nurturing environment.

Lynda Lehmann
Director

St Mary's Lutheran Kindergarten NSW

Pastor Boughen opened St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten at St Mary's in Western Sydney NSW in January 1973. It was established by the St Paul's Lutheran Church of St Marys to meet the needs of the growing community. St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten continues to serve its community after 43 years and continues to operate separately as a stand-alone kindergarten with a Kindergarten Council, elected by the congregation and parents.

We are committed to providing a high quality care and education program for all children attending our service. We ensure that all our programs are designed with activities that awaken a child's creative, imaginative and personal character. Our extensive educational programs have been created and developed on the philosophy that children learn through their individual interest and play. Unlike outdated programs of previous generations that expected all children to learn the same things at the

same time, St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten's programs are flexible, individual and engaging. We aim to offer every child a rich and unique learning experience that will give them the best possible start in life.

Children learn so much through play. It allows them to explore, discover, negotiate, take risks, create meaning and solve problems – all important foundations for developing literacy, numeracy and social skills. It is central to the Australian Government's Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and, while it may sound simple and easy, play-based learning is a complex form of natural enquiry that requires experienced educators to know the overall development, emerging strengths and interests of each child.

Pastor David Thompson visits the kindergarten every week. His arrival is inevitably hailed by the children crying out 'Pastor David is here, Pastor David is here'. This year we have continued with two small groups and the children sit attentively to hear pastor's many interesting stories ranging from friendship, trusting each other, sharing and relevant Bible stories. The children get great pleasure from these visits, singing along enthusiastically with happy, busy and active songs. Pastor David always finishes his group times by sharing high fives and a special blessing to each and every child. This year Pastor David has introduced his 'Pastor's monthly Citizenship/Kidabout Award'. In conjunction with Kidabout (a huge indoor playcentre), every month Pastor David and the educators choose a child that has shown kindness, friendship and empathy to their peers. Pastor comes in especially to present the award. There are lots of photos, a card of congratulations and a golden entry pass to Kidabout. The child's photo is displayed at the centre and at the church where the congregation is making a huge mural of all twelve children who have received this award.

The children also make special gifts to hand out to the congregation, especially during midweek Easter and Christmas services. The children take special delight in making and presenting their gifts. Whilst at the service the children will sing a song that they have been practising with Pastor David and join with the congregation for the rest of the service.

Every lunch time the children sing grace and give thanks for the food they receive. St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten St Mary's follows a Christian ethos and believes children should have the opportunity to learn about their creator and how much he loves them.

Susie Papadionisiou
Director



Pastor Colin Simpkin, Grovedale Congregation, visits the kindergarten regularly



Pastor David Thompson presents his Pastor's monthly Citizenship/Kidabout Award

The beginnings of Lutheran early childhood education

It is soon approaching sixty years since the first Lutheran early childhood centre commenced in Australia. This milestone will be reached in 2019 and should not be approached or pass unnoticed. Norlane, a 'commission' suburb full of post World War II migrants in Geelong Victoria was the site of St James Kindergarten. In fact from 1959-1969 eleven Lutheran early childhood centres began across Australia. Only since the year 2000 have we seen more significant growth in this important educational sector of the LCA – 27 early childhood services were established in these recent years. This represents more significant growth than the Lutheran schooling sector!

Back to Norlane where the local St James Congregation had a Sunday school in excess of 230 children each week. This is where the first Lutheran kindergarten in Australia commenced in 1959 and largely due to its success, seeded the beginning of a 'Lutheran Day School' at St Johns Geelong in 1962.

Lutheran Education Australia wishes to acknowledge the pioneers of St James Lutheran Kindergarten, Norlane, who included: Ennita Schultz (nee Traeger), Glenda Petts (nee Starick), Merrin Erhardt (nee Hartwich), Margaret Nagorka and Ingrid Weigl.

In recent correspondence the clear dedication of staff are evident in the following:

As I had no car, my only way to get around was to walk or public transport. It was quite common for me to visit some of our kinder parents at night on foot in the Norlane area which would be rather scary in today's climate of street violence. The annual salary was the princely sum of \$960 which also covered by board and lodging.

Merrin Erhardt, in recalling 1966, went on to say: *Apart from my kinder duties, I played the good old pedal organ for Sunday worship. Also I was involved with the St James Youth Group, Ladies Guild and Sunday School. Some Sunday afternoons, Pastor Wiebusch had church services in Colac, Camperdown and Werribee to which I accompanied him to play the organ/piano.*

LEA wishes to record the appreciation of the Lutheran Church of Australia, as well as all involved across Lutheran education, to the pioneers of Lutheran early childhood education, not just at St James Norlane, but also at the many other early childhood services that may have closed, and those that are still offering great early childhood education and care to their communities.

LEA also acknowledges today's early childhood educators who may not be doing exactly what Merrin Erhardt did in the mid 1960s, but still maintain a passion and commitment to the children in their care. Thank you for what you do, who you are and for educating the children so effectively. The pages of this edition of SchoolLink illustrate the outstanding work being carried out in our Lutheran early childhood services today.

The children who are educated and cared for in these places are hearing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Thank you to all of our staff who lead and serve faithfully. Your work is deeply valued and highly regarded.

With God's blessings and sincere thanks.

Stephen Rudolph
Executive Director
Lutheran Education Australia

Fast Facts

- » 73 Lutheran early childhood centres have operated across Australia since 1959
- » The first early childhood centres in each state and territory were:
 - Victoria: St James Lutheran Kindergarten, Norlane (Geelong) 1959-1984
 - South Australia: St Martins Lutheran Preschool Kindergarten, Mount Gambier (1963-)
 - Queensland: Nazareth Lutheran Kindergarten, Woolloongabba (Brisbane) (1964-2009)
 - New South Wales: Burrumbuttock Preschool Centre, Burrumbuttock (1972-1993)
 - Northern Territory: St Andrew Lutheran Child Care Centre, Nightcliff (Darwin) (1974-)
- » In 2016 there are 57 Lutheran early childhood services in operation across Australia
- » In 2015 Lutheran early childhood services enrolled around 4000 students across Australia
- » We recognise the Lutheran early childhood centres now closed:
 - **New South Wales:** Burrumbuttock (1972-1993)
 - **Queensland:** Nazareth Woolloongabba (1964-2009)
St Johns Corinda (1966-1979)
South Toowoomba (1967-1994)
Bethlehem Norwin (1973-1995)
 - **South Australia:** St Pauls Cleve (1966-1974)
St Pauls Cowell (1968-1974)
 - **Victoria:** St James Norlane (1959-1984)
Peace Nunawading (1966-1989)
Trinity Doncaster (1976-1998)
St Peters Frankston (1979-1995)
St James Moorabbin (1979-?)

