

# A Curriculum Audit Instrument

In 2002, Concordia Publishing House invited several consultants to develop a fresh set of principles for the evaluation of Christian education materials. These are the principles and criteria they determined to be most important in the selection (and in the production) of curricula for Sunday school and other agencies.

## Foundational Principles for Curriculum Evaluation

Anyone evaluating the appropriateness of a particular curriculum for use within their own LCMS congregation will want to look both for theological faithfulness and for excellent pedagogy. Keep these significant points in mind:

- While each of the specific criteria outlined below are important, applying them to the process of curriculum development will at times find them in seeming tension with one another. For example, some material may not excel in both age appropriateness and classical catechetical vocabulary.
- Not every curriculum can meet every congregation's expectations, nor can every lesson deal with every doctrine. The absence of specific doctrines does not necessarily imply a denial of those doctrines or a denial of their importance.
- While God's Word is inerrant, curriculum is not. No curriculum produced by sinful humans will incorporate all the principles outline below completely or perfectly.

## Core Evaluation Principles

1. **Truly Lutheran materials are Christ-centered rather than man-centered.** Every lesson ultimately is about Jesus' saving work. Lessons about great Bible figures (Abraham, Daniel, Paul) will point the learner to Jesus. Lessons must lead learners to see their need for Christ's forgiveness, love, and salvation (second use of the Law), rather than focusing on students' "felt needs" (which may actually be self-serving). The materials should help students know Christ as the One who perfectly kept God's Law in our place (active obedience), as well as "Christ and Him crucified" (passive obedience). Any visitor who hears God's Word only in this one lesson should hear enough Gospel to be saved.
2. **Lutheran materials must be true to the Scriptures in every sense.** They should be clearly based on confidence that the Bible is absolutely true and reliable in all matters, including faith, life, history, and science. Each lesson should present the Biblical texts on which it is based authentically and factually; doctrines should not be artificially overlaid on texts in which they do not naturally occur. (For example, not every Scripture that mentions wine deals with Holy Communion). Lesson activities should take learners into substantial portions of their Bibles in age-appropriate ways.
3. **Lutheran curricula apply Law and Gospel to life in a relevant way.** The content of each lesson should reflect an awareness of the "real life" situations of the learners and should help teachers apply Law and Gospel to learners in those situations. The many-splendored facets of the Gospel should be explored in depth, rather than superficially or glibly. Lessons should realistically depict the Christian's life as one of bearing the cross, rather than

promoting a “theology of glory.” “Christ for us” (justification) leads to “Christ in us” (sanctification; third use of the Law—Ephesians 2:8–12; Galatians 2:20–21).

4. **Lutheran materials clearly proclaim specific Law and specific Gospel.** The Law should be presented in its full sternness and the Gospel in its full sweetness. Sin should be treated as sin, as personally deadly. The Law should convict the individual learner rather than society or some mythical “other people.” The Gospel should declare God’s unconditional pardon in Christ boldly and lavishly. Each of the specific problems raised by the Law should be matched with specific solutions of Gospel (that is, sin needs to be answered by forgiveness, death answered by resurrection, helplessness answered by God’s strength, loneliness answered by reconciliation to God).
5. **Lutheran materials avoid any suggestion that we can help or cooperate with God toward our own conversion.** Since every unbeliever is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), no one can “decide to accept Jesus” or “ask Jesus into his heart.” The doctrine of original sin (our fallen state) leaves no room to assert that some goodness remains in the unconverted nature. The lessons should direct students to the means of Grace for assurance of salvation. Lutheran materials do not point learners to their own feelings, prayers, or striving against temptation, but rather to the cross of Christ.
6. **Lutheran materials seek to motivate good works solely by means of the Gospel.** While telling God’s people what they are to do is wholesome and necessary (so that they know what good works look like), only the Gospel message of Christ and His cross motivates good works and makes them possible. (The “third use of the Law” is only informational, never motivational or empowering.) Lutheran curricula will avoid offering checklists of behaviors (“What I should do this week to be a better Christian”). Christ Jesus will be clearly portrayed as Savior, rather than merely a commendable example.
7. **Lutheran materials clearly proclaim the Sacraments as God’s Means of Grace.** Since Baptism and Holy Communion, along with the Word itself, are the only means by which the Holy Spirit has promised to create and strengthen faith and empower good works, the Sacraments are a prominent feature in Lutheran materials. When the Sacraments can be appropriately educed from the Biblical text under study, Lutheran materials will highlight and fully integrate them into the lesson plan. Absolution, as a specialized form of the Word, should also be taught when appropriate. The Means of Grace, especially the Sacraments, should be proclaimed as Gospel. They are not behaviors by which we earn God’s blessing or avoid His displeasure, but are the very means whereby our Lord conveys His salvation, won by Christ, to His children.
8. **Materials appropriate for use in the Lutheran classrooms honor the traditions of Lutheran worship.** The liturgical forms handed down through the centuries continue to be both instructional and unifying. Curricular materials used in Lutheran classrooms should help students use and value the hymns and liturgies of the LCMS, incorporating them into the core of the lesson itself when appropriate to the Scripture under study. They should avoid songs and worship forms that promote false doctrine.
9. **Lutheran materials contribute to the “Lutheran ethos” of the congregation and synod.** Church history, including the history of Lutheranism, should be taught when appropriate. There should be a clear sense that we continue the apostolic, catholic tradition, and that it is relevant for faith and life today. Classic Lutheran resources (the Confessions, catechism, Luther, Walther, Pieper, and others) should be cited when relevant and age-appropriate.

10. **Lutheran materials exalt both the Office of the Holy Ministry and the priesthood of all believers.** All believers (the royal priesthood) should be encouraged in their God-given vocations as fathers, mothers, bankers, factory workers, lawyers, doctors, and so on. The Office of the Holy Ministry (pastors) should be honored, and pastors portrayed as the servants of Christ, stewards of “the mysteries of God”—the Word and Sacraments (1 Corinthians 4:1).
11. **Lutheran materials energetically promote the mission of the church.** Because Christ is the world’s only Savior, solidly Lutheran curricula accent and encourage Gospel-motivated outreach. Learners are encouraged to understand non-Christian religions and their errors, and are equipped to share the Gospel with others in a caring, respectful, and sensitive way. Curriculum materials should help teachers and other leaders connect visitors to the local congregation and to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.
12. **Lutheran curricula should promote unity in the church.** True spiritual unity comes to the people of God as His gift (John 17:20ff.). Outward unity is forged through the teaching of pure doctrine. Therefore, curriculum materials appropriate for use in the congregations of the Synod uphold the theological positions of the Synod.
13. **Lutheran curriculum should incorporate the very best in teaching methods, visual design, creativity, and lesson and course organization.** Recognizing the gifts God has given His Church in His creation, Lutheran educators expect to use these gifts as helps in instruction. Accordingly, lesson activities should be creative, varied, and age-appropriate. Lesson methodology should ignite learner interest. (Theologically substantive doesn’t mean mundane!) Teacher guides should give clear directions, and each lesson should accomplish its stated objectives. Given the sinful nature of all learners and all teachers, no lesson based on Scripture will ever be “easy to teach.” However, teachers should have a reasonable expectation that preparation time will be manageable and the lesson plan adaptable in many diverse educational and congregational settings.
14. **Curricula intended for use by children should, when possible, involve families, especially parents of non-member children.** Parents and children both should find take-home materials interesting and meaningful, written in ways that make both children and adults excited about sharing them.
15. **Lutheran curricula need to be cognizant of the unique strength and opportunities available to each of the major agencies of Christian education—day school, midweek school, Sunday school, and vacation Bible school.** Curricula appropriate for one agency may not be appropriate for others. Historically, day school materials have provided for the most thorough indoctrination in the faith, while VBS materials have been written for the purposes of outreach. Content appropriate for indoctrination in many cases will not speak to the unchurched in ways they can understand or appreciate.

## A Final Suggestion

Sunday school and VBS materials should coordinate the various lessons across age levels. This will facilitate meaningful teachers meetings, giving opportunities for all teachers to study the Bible texts together.

As you evaluate the material for use in your Sunday school, and in other Christian education activities of your congregation, consider these fifteen-plus criteria and what they bring to the quality of the educational experience. The materials produced by Concordia Publishing House have been created with these specific criteria in mind. You can use them with confidence!

This article is the product of the Curriculum Resource Department of Concordia Publishing House, which is responsible for the development of curriculum materials for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

## An Evaluation Instrument for Lutheran Sunday School Materials

As you review material for use in your Sunday school, keep these criteria in mind. Respond to each question based on the your review of the whole. See if you can find several examples of each principle.

1. Is this material *Christ-centered* rather than man-centered?

No 1          2          3          4          5          Yes

**Comments and examples:**

2. Is this material *Bible-based*, true to the Scriptures in every sense?

No 1          2          3          4          5          Yes

**Comments and examples:**

3. Is this material *Life-directed*? Does it apply Law and Gospel to life in a relevant way?

No 1          2          3          4          5          Yes

**Comments and examples:**

4. Does this material clearly proclaim specific Law and specific Gospel?

No 1          2          3          4          5          Yes

**Comments and examples:**

5. Does this material avoid any suggestion that we can help or cooperate with God toward our own conversion?

No 1          2          3          4          5          Yes

**Comments and examples:**

6. Does this material seek to motivate good works solely by means of the Gospel?

No 1          2          3          4          5          Yes

**Comments and examples:**

7. Does this material clearly proclaim the Sacraments as God's means of grace?

No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes

**Comments and examples:**

8. Does this material honor the traditions of Lutheran worship?

No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes

**Comments and examples:**

9. Does this material contribute to the "Lutheran ethos" of the congregation and synod?

No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes

**Comments and examples:**

10. Does this material exalt both the Office of the Holy Ministry and the priesthood of all believers?

No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes

**Comments and examples:**

11. Does this material energetically promote the mission of the Church?

No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes

**Comments and examples:**

12. Does this material promote unity in the church by teaching pure doctrine?

No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes

**Comments and examples:**

13. Does this material incorporate the very best in teaching methods, visual design, creativity, and lesson and course organization?

No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes

**Comments and examples:**

14. Does this material involve families, especially parents of non-member children, in meaningful ways?

No 1          2                  3                  4                  5                  Yes

**Comments and examples:**

15. Does this material recognize the unique strength and opportunities of Sunday school?

No 1          2                  3                  4                  5                  Yes

**Comments and examples:**

16. Does this material coordinate lessons across age-levels each Sunday to assist teacher training and at-home discussion?

No 1          2                  3                  4                  5                  Yes

**Comments and examples:**

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