

# **Lutheran Pioneers: *A Tool for Reaching the Lost***

*By Rev. Timothy R. Wagner*



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If you were to ask Pastor or Mr. Joe WELS what he thinks of when he hears “Lutheran Boy Pioneers,” he would probably mention camping, canoeing, fire building, knot tying, or Pinecar derby cars. He might look at the title of this paper and expect a discussion of compass and map reading skills—or even modern global positioning systems—that can be used to rescue someone who is stranded in the wilderness somewhere. One could debate whether his mental picture of Lutheran Pioneers is a caricature or an accurate portrayal of the purpose of the program in years gone by. However, even a cursory look at today’s Lutheran Pioneers and Lutheran Girl Pioneers will show that mental image to be only a small slice of what these two programs are all about now. This paper will show that the mission of the Pioneer programs<sup>1</sup> fits well into the mission of the entire congregation, while their ministries make them valuable tools for outreach to those who are truly lost in the wilderness of sin.

### ***The Mission of the Pioneers***

The mission statement of Lutheran Boy Pioneers reads:

*“Lutheran Pioneers exists to assist congregations in nurturing and training boys in the Lord so that they will remain faithful to Him and faithfully serve Him throughout their lives.”<sup>1</sup>*

The LGP mission statement reads:

*As an organization founded to keep our girls “Loyal to Christ,” Lutheran Girl Pioneers (LGP) shall strive to develop in each member her potential for leadership through personal interaction skills with others and promote service to the Lord and to the world around her. This will be accomplished through worship, evangelism, education, citizenship and recreational activities, all centered in God’s Word and consistent with the doctrine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod or of a Lutheran Church in doctrinal fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.<sup>2</sup>*

Ultimately, the mission of these two organizations is one and the same—to welcome souls into the kingdom of God and to nurture their faith through the use of the Means of Grace. Their mission bears a striking resemblance to that of our Wisconsin Synod:

*As men, women, and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God, the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod exists to make disciples throughout the world for time and for eternity, using the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to win the lost for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> From this point forward “Pioneers” or “Pioneer programs” will be used to refer to both programs, while Lutheran Pioneers (LP) will refer to the boys’ program and Lutheran Girl Pioneers (LGP) will refer to the girls’ program.

<sup>2</sup> *Lutheran Girl Pioneer Handbook* (LaCrosse, WI: Lutheran Girl Pioneers, Inc., 2002), Introduction-1 [emphasis added].

<sup>3</sup> “WELS Mission—Objectives—Vision,” <http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?2617&collectionID=808&contentID=165&shortcutID=5573>, accessed 15 February 2005.

Pioneers are not just niche programs whose only purpose is to provide recreation and skills training for the youth of our congregations. Pioneers are not just our private Boy or Girl Scouts, which hope to morally shape youth outside of the influence of scouts from other churches.<sup>4</sup> The Pioneer Programs are intended to be Christ-centered organizations not only with a genuine interest in the souls of the young members of our congregations but also with a genuine love for the lost.

One could perhaps make the case that not every local Pioneer Train or Caravan<sup>5</sup> has such a mission mindset. If this is the case, those groups are just providing another activity on the church calendar and are leaving out a vital aspect of the Pioneer mission. The pastor(s) and leaders of such a congregation need to meet with the leaders of that Train or Caravan to reevaluate and refocus their efforts. However, the local LP or LGP group that understands, adopts, and strives to carry out the Pioneer mission in all of its ministries is undoubtedly one that will play an important role in its congregation's outreach efforts.

### ***The Ministries of the Pioneers***

Now that we have examined the mission of the Pioneer programs, we need to take a look at their ministries. If their ministries were only Christ-centered camping, compass work, and canoeing, they would be valuable programs. However, their usefulness for outreach (or even "inreach") would be minimal because of their limited scope and target "audience." Many men and women have done a lot of work in both LP and LGP in the last fifteen years to revise and update the programs of each group. They have added units of study and activity that address a broad spectrum of life skills, hobbies, and interests.

The six major units that make up Lutheran Pioneers are God's Wonderful Creation, Christian Leadership and Citizenship, Camping, First Aid, Safety, and Skills for Independent Living.<sup>6</sup> The seven major units of Lutheran Girl Pioneers are Managing God's Gifts – Talents, Time and Treasures; God's Great Outdoors; Communication; Responsibility and Respect; Wellness; Ecology – Reduce, Recycle, Respect; and Safety.<sup>7</sup> Camping is only one unit of LP and not even mentioned for LGP (it is one section of the "God's Great Outdoors" unit). Dale Lorfeld, Executive Director of Lutheran Pioneers, Inc., noted that a major selling point of the program is that it "offers educational skills and opportunities, zeroing in on practical skills that may not be learned anywhere else."<sup>8</sup> In a society where one or more parents are absent from the home much or all of the time, the Pioneer programs provide training to children in some very basic but necessary skills. Its focus is not just on the child of God as he or she enjoys nature but on the whole child of God as he is a steward of *all* of God's gifts.

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<sup>4</sup> The mission statements of both the Boy Scouts of America ([www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org)) and the Girl Scouts of America ([www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org)) have moral and ethical development as their primary emphases. Their lack of concern for the source or motivation for those morals and ethics are what have led our Synod to determine that such groups fall outside of the realm of God-pleasing fellowship. However, the value of some of the activities and skills of the Scouting programs led Rev. Reuben O. Marti and Mr. Bruce Thompson to the creation of Lutheran Pioneers in 1951. Lutheran Pioneers is similar in some of its activities, but entirely different in its mission. For a more in-depth study of Lutheran Pioneers and Scouting organizations, the reader is directed to "Studies in Scouting and the Lutheran Pioneers," a series of essays published in April 1989 by Lutheran Pioneers, Inc., and available in the WLS Online Essay File at <http://www.wls.wels.net/library/Essays/Authors/PQ/PioneersScouting/PioneersScouting.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Local Lutheran Pioneer chapters are called "trains," while local Lutheran Girl Pioneer chapters are called "caravans."

<sup>6</sup> Tim Wagner, *A Boy's Handbook: Instructor's Manual* (Burlington, WI: Lutheran Pioneers, Inc., 2001), iii-iv. For a complete listing of the LP curriculum, see Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> *Lutheran Girl Pioneer Handbook*, Index. For a complete listing of the LGP curriculum, see Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup> Dale Lorfeld. Personal Interview. 17 February 2005.

Again, one could make the point that the Train and/or Caravan in their own congregation places a heavy emphasis on the outdoors-related portions of the Pioneer programs to the exclusion of some of these other units. In most communities, such a program would serve one small segment of the congregation very well but leave most disinterested in whatever else (if anything) the Pioneers have to offer. The current structure and programs of Pioneers should offer something for everyone.

### ***Strategies for Applying the Mission and Ministries of Pioneers toward Reaching the Lost***

In any program for evangelism to the unchurched, it is very important to intentionalize strategies to get the life-giving gospel to those who need to hear it. It is often easy for Christians to adopt the *Field of Dreams* approach to outreach—"If you build it, they will come." However, the unchurched have no reason to "come" unless they know what we are building and how what we are building applies to their lives. Before we discuss specific strategies for using Pioneers for outreach, it is important to be reminded that no one arm of the congregation can accomplish the entire mission of the congregation. Staff Minister Paul Lange said, "The important thing is to get every organization in the congregation to have an outreach mindset."<sup>9</sup> Unless the whole congregation is on board with a mission mindset, the greatest Pioneer programs will grow to become only great programs and will fail to connect the unchurched to the other ministries of the congregation. With that in mind, let us examine just a few ideas for making Lutheran Pioneers and Lutheran Girl Pioneers tools for reaching the lost.

Pastor Kurt Loescher writes: "I'm a huge advocate for using LP as outreach. It is the premier opportunity for friendship evangelism for men and boys that WELS churches have at their disposal."<sup>10</sup> Pastor Loescher hits on what is perhaps the most obvious use of the Pioneer programs for outreach to the unchurched—"friendship evangelism." Boys and girls who enjoy the Christ-centered activities that the Pioneers offer invite their unchurched friends or relatives to join in the activities. Perhaps you think that this is a no-brainer. However, well-meaning pastors and Pioneer leaders do not always see this opportunity as brightly as Pastor Loescher does. Some have restricted Pioneers to only those who attend Sunday School. Others say that the activities are off-limits to those who do not attend the meetings. A fortress mentality—hoping to protect our children from the outside influences of Scouts, Awana, and other organizations—rather than a mission mindset—seeing Pioneers as an open avenue to the community—hinders the opportunities for friendship evangelism.

In what practical ways can LP and LGP be used for friendship evangelism? Loescher offers his approach: "The simple strategies that I employ are keeping the program open to outsiders, encouraging inviting unchurched friends and making sure that the devotion leader is someone who can give a clear law/gospel message."<sup>11</sup> Once a Train or Caravan gets over any initial mindset hurdle, the next step is to encourage those who attend to bring their friends. Whether a congregation has a Lutheran Elementary School or not, chances are good that many of the Pioneers will have several friends who are either officially or unofficially unchurched. Children don't usually need to rack their brains as hard as adults to think of someone whom they might like to invite to church or Pioneers. They might think of a child in their LES classroom whose family would be classified as "prospects." They might think of public school classmates or teammates on their soccer or baseball team. Maybe their friends are their neighbors or children with whom they ride the bus. Given the encouragement to invite a friend, few children

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Lange. Personal Interview. 17 February 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Kurt Loescher <kloescher@nconnect.net> "LP as Outreach" Personal e-mail (16 February 2005).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

will pass up the opportunity. And, because Pioneers is less structured or formal than Sunday School or worship, the invitation will in many cases be more attractive to the unchurched friends and their parents.

The work of outreach and evangelism does not stop as soon as a friend attends a meeting or activity. What that friend sees or hears when he arrives gives an important first impression and can begin a relationship that lasts into eternity. Dale Lorfeld says, "One of the most important things is having good leaders who are confessional Lutheran."<sup>12</sup> A congregation should not just look for a warm body that is willing to keep kids entertained and teach them a few things. The principles that Paul presents in 1 Timothy 3 apply to these leaders of the youth of our congregations as well. Spirit-filled leaders will keep the mission of Pioneers and of the church always at the forefront of their labor for the Lord.

The unique value of the Pioneer programs is that they apply God's Word in a non-threatening atmosphere, often very far away from desks or pews. They apply God's Word in very concrete ways to the everyday activities that make up the curricula. The use of God's Word in a program whose mission is "to reach out to and nurture the youth of the world with the saving Gospel message of Jesus Christ" should not be limited to an opening devotion in a meeting night. It should be a part of every lesson and every activity.

*A Boy's Handbook: Instructor's Manual (ABHIM)* emphasizes how important it is for leaders to plan and deliver devotions very carefully:

"Devotions are not simply something we do to involve our pastor in the program or to please our pastor. If, in fact, the Pioneer mission is to preach the good news to all nations, that means that the devotion is an integral part of our program...By walking hand-in-hand with God through his preparation and presentation of the [devotional] material, the leader can be confident that God will always bless his work."<sup>13</sup>

For Pioneer leaders, who often volunteer because of their love for kids or their interest in particular activities, leading devotions or integrating God's Word into activities can be very intimidating. Fortunately, help is available. The pastor should be willing to train these volunteers in basic law/gospel devotions. It might even be wise for several of the Train or Caravan leaders to have a working knowledge of a presentation such as God's Great Exchange, so that they can share it with the families of their guests as they have opportunity. Both LP and LGP offer books of devotions for leaders to use. *ABHIM* offers three different styles of devotions that apply to each chapter, each based on a different portion of Scripture. These three styles vary from a full text to a very simple outline for the leader to study and expand. The leader who takes time to make God's Word an integral part of every lesson and activity will grow in faith himself and will have a program that both reaches out to and nurtures youth.

In addition to solid law/gospel devotions, leaders and Pioneers need to be ready in other ways for friends when they attend. Leaders should encourage their boys and girls to be welcoming to guests and to help make them feel comfortable. Leaders should have materials available for parents of guests who attend, so that they can explain the mission and ministries of their Train or Caravan as well as what their congregation is all about.<sup>14</sup> Pioneer programs that

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<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Wagner 0.1.3.

<sup>14</sup> Also consider the suggestion presented earlier, that leaders be prepared to present a simple law/gospel presentation to families who ask about their group or their church.

are serious about outreach should be ready to cover the costs for guests. Nothing should stand in the way of a genuinely interested guest and his/her family.

We should also remember that the Pioneer programs can indeed reach out to entire families. While the programs need not be tied directly together, quality programs for both the boys and the girls will keep families from staying home because they don't have something for Susie. We should not overlook the value of Lutheran Pioneers and Lutheran Girl Pioneers as a tool for outreach to adults. Whether they are the parents of children who are guests at a meeting or activity or an "expert presenter" who has been invited to help with a particular unit, these too are souls for whom Jesus died. Pastor Loescher writes:

"I have witnessed a number of opportunities...where unchurched or inactive fathers have heard the gospel around a campfire or at a meeting or pine car derby and either come to faith or grown in their relationship to Christ...Pioneers can be tailored to include activities and projects that capture any man's fancy and give them good time with their boys. When we don't hinder the unchurched from coming to meetings and even invite them to campouts, and then take seriously the opportunities to work in informal Scripture study and worship, we have a captive audience in a setting in which they are comfortable. When you see an unchurched dad take the gospel to heart in the glow of an evening campfire, you thank God for this opportunity that LP affords."

The same can certainly be said of LGP. The comfortable setting of the Pioneer programs and activities lend themselves to building relationships and creating opportunities to talk about your life and your Savior. Many of the boys and girls will do it naturally. The leaders of the groups should not hesitate to be just as welcoming and then to "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

## ***A Few Practical Considerations***

It is difficult to think of a situation where Lutheran Boy Pioneers and Lutheran Girl Pioneers would not be valuable tools for reaching the lost. Every congregation will have to examine how all of its ministries work together to determine how best to utilize the advantages that LBP and LGP offer.

Here are a some ideas that leaders and pastors have suggested to improve the outreach potential for the Pioneer programs:

### **Ideas for Preparing Your Pioneer Groups for Outreach**

1. Be sure that the Pioneer programs work closely with the evangelism committee and/or the pastor.
  - a Assures follow-up on any guests
  - b Provides a connection to the ministries of the church as a whole.
2. Publicize the activities of your Train or Caravan in your congregation.
  - a Members of the congregation can talk about, promote it, and feel comfortable inviting friends to attend.
3. Have your pastor conduct various Bible studies for leaders.
  - a Sharing the Gospel with adults and children.
  - b Correlating God's Word to various topics.
4. Consider teaching the boys themselves to talk about their faith with simple law/gospel presentations.
5. Adjust your program to fit your community. For example, schedule your campout after the baseball season; teach in short units, rather than in lessons that stretch out over weeks and do not allow for missed portions. Encourage participation whenever possible, no matter how rare.

### **Ideas for Bringing Children into Your Program**

1. Serve the Lord publicly with joy in community service projects.
2. Consider advertising in newspapers.
3. Participate in a parade.
  - a Handout Brochures available from the National Office.
  - b Make local business cards and hand them out.
  - c Borrow the banner from the National Office.
4. Have a display at your Lutheran Elementary School Open House.
  - a Brochures available from the National Office
  - b Pencils available from the National Office
  - c Local Train/Caravan calendars of events.
5. Have materials available at a booth your church may have at a local fair or event.
6. Invite boys and girls of the community to attend special events and/or regular meetings.
  - a Call it an "Invite a Friend" activity.

### **Ideas to Make Children Feel Welcome**

1. Have someone who knows the guest, introduce them to the group.
2. Include your guests in all activities.
3. Cover the costs (especially National and District fees) of the guests.
4. Put time and effort into the program, so that guests and parents can see that it is a meaningful, valuable ministry.
5. Invite the guests to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School.

### **Contact With Parents of Guests**

1. Meet with parents of guests to explain the Lutheran Pioneer program.
2. Prepare a packet of materials to distribute to parents of guests.
  - a Lutheran Boy/Girl Brochures
  - b A statement of our beliefs. (ex: "This We Believe")
  - c Information about your local congregation.
    - Time of Service
    - Bible Information Classes
3. Invite parents of guests to help with meetings, activities and projects.

The perception of Lutheran Boy Pioneers and Lutheran Girl Pioneers certainly varies from congregation to congregation and even from person to person. However, an organization that fulfills the mission that these programs have defined for themselves will certainly serve to fulfill Christ's Great Commission and serve in many ways to reach out to the lost. May God continue to bless the ministry of these organizations.

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## Appendix A

### LUTHERAN BOY PIONEERS CURRICULUM

#### **Unit One: God's Wonderful Creation**

Chapter 1: Awareness of  
Environment

Chapter 2: Recycling

#### **Unit Two: Christian Leadership and Citizenship**

Chapter 1: Lutheran Pioneer  
Organization

Chapter 2: Church Structure

Chapter 3: Citizenship

Chapter 4: Service

#### **Unit Three: Camping**

Chapter 1: Knots and Lashing

Chapter 2: Compass

Chapter 3: Mapping

Chapter 4: Measuring

Chapter 5: Firebuilding

Chapter 6: Camp Tools

Chapter 7: Camp Cooking

Chapter 8: Camping Sites and Equipment

Chapter 9: Hiking and Backpacking

Chapter 10: Canoeing

#### **Unit Four: First Aid**

#### **Unit Five: Safety**

Chapter 1: Bicycle Safety and  
Maintenance

Chapter 2: Fire Safety

Chapter 3: Water Safety

#### **Unit Six: Skills for Independent Living**

Chapter 1: Personal Cleanliness

Chapter 2: Clothing

Chapter 3: Cooking in the Home

Chapter 4: Home Repairs and  
Carpentry

Chapter 5: Budgeting

Chapter 6: Etiquette

Source: *A Boy's Handbook: Instructor's Manual*

## Appendix B

### LUTHERAN GIRL PIONEERS CURRICULUM

#### **Unit One: Managing God's Gifts – Talents, Time and Treasures**

- Section 1: Using Skills and Abilities Wisely
- Section 2: Time Management
- Section 3: Money Management

#### **Unit Two: God's Great Outdoors**

- Section 1: Nature – A Gift from God
- Section 2: Camping Skills

#### **Unit Three: Communication**

- Section 1: Christian
- Section 2: Self Awareness
- Section 3: People Skills

#### **Unit Four: Responsibility and Respect**

- Section 1: Family
- Section 2: Church
- Section 3: Community

#### **Unit Five: Wellness**

- Section 1: Nutrition and Food
- Section 2: Keeping Fit
- Section 3: First Aid

#### **Unit Six: Ecology – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Respect**

- Section 1: Identify Recyclable/ Reusable Materials
- Section 2: Composting

#### **Unit Seven: Safety**

- Section 1: Water Safety
- Section 2: Fire Safety
- Section 3: Bicycle Safety

#### **Special Achievements**

- Section 1: Art
- Section 2: Babysitting
- Section 3: Backpacking
- Section 4: Bicycling
- Section 5: Camping and Outdoors
- Section 6: Canoeing
- Section 7: Christian Responsibility
- Section 8: Drama
- Section 9: Ecology
- Section 10: Evangelism
- Section 11: First Aid
- Section 12: Food and Nutrition
- Section 13: Gardening and Horticulture
- Section 14: Genealogy
- Section 15: Handicraft
- Section 16: Independent Living
- Section 17: Hunting Safety
- Section 18: Leadership
- Section 19: Music
- Section 20: Nature
- Section 21: Personal Awareness
- Section 22: Photography
- Section 23: Sewing
- Section 24: Swimming
- Section 25: Transportation
- Section 26: Weather
- Section 27: Your Synod
- Section 28: Special Recognition Charms

Source: *Lutheran Girl Pioneer Handbook*