

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Kindergarten and Child Care Expansion

February 2021

Introduction: A special Voters Meeting has been called for Sunday, February 14 at 12:30 at Immanuel to consider a resolution enabling Immanuel Lutheran School to offer Kindergarten. The information below describes the reasons we believe this is necessary.

Immanuel and Zion Lutheran Churches have partnered for many years in providing Christian education and care to children. Both congregations share a deep commitment to the discipling of young children and their families. Each has offered ministries that have responded to needs of our congregations and community. Current opportunities and challenges have led us to discuss important expansions in our efforts, including the addition of a Kindergarten program at Immanuel Lutheran School and increased childcare capacity at Zion.

1. What are the Key issues?

- a. **Enrollment challenges at ILS and ZLS:** Over the last decade, there has been a reduction in student enrollment at both Zion and Immanuel. If not changed, these trends could undermine their effectiveness in serving children and their families. We need to consider different options if we desire better outcomes.
 - b. **Growing demand for Child Care, especially for infants and toddlers:** ILCCM opened an additional infant room in January 2021 for a total of three infant rooms with a combined capacity of 24 infants. The rooms are full, and we still have a waiting list. We do not have space to add more room without an expansion.
 - c. **Our historic partnership in Christ-centered nurture of children and families:** We believe the time is right to consider another development in our relationship with Zion that will allow us to address current challenges and opportunities that can not only benefit each entity, but more importantly can expand our ability to fulfill our mission and goals concerning Christian education and nurture.
2. **What is behind the enrollment changes?** Some factors are beyond our control, such as lower birth rate, some families moving too far away to utilize Immanuel and Zion, and options at community schools and day cares that may be less costly. We believe enrollment is also impacted by things we can address and change, described below.
3. **Why did Immanuel start a Child Care Ministry when Zion had a Preschool?** ILCCM was started to serve an unmet need in our community. Already a decade ago, Seymour was considered a “childcare desert” for infant care. In conversations between representatives of Immanuel and Zion, we encouraged Zion to add this ministry to their early childhood program. Zion chose not to, so Immanuel started ILCCM.
4. **How does Childcare affect School enrollment?** Two generations ago, Christian education usually started at 1st grade. One generation ago, Christian education started at Kindergarten. At the present, Christian education starts for many with infant care as early as 6 weeks of age. Parents who start their infant in a childcare expect that the care will continue as the child grows. The child makes friends, and the parents build relationships with staff and families. When infant care is provided outside the scope of our ministries, there is a significant reduction in students in Kindergarten and 1st Grade.

5. **Is Immanuel's Child Care Ministry the reason for Zion's declining numbers?** While both ministries provide care to young children, they appeal to different families. Our childcare ministries are not in competition with each other but provide options otherwise not available to parents to expand the number of children we can serve.
 - a. **ILCCM** is fulltime childcare that starts with infants as early as 6 weeks old and up to the time of Kindergarten. ILCCM serves children whose parents need care five full days each week. Woven into that fulltime care is a Christ-centered curriculum for the intellectual, social, physical, and spiritual development of children so they will be Kindergarten-ready. Parents pay the full childcare cost.
 - b. **Zion** offers a part-time, Christ-centered preschool using trained teachers, starting as early as two-year-old children. There is a wrap-around Extend Care program that can be chosen to provide fulltime childcare for families who desire it.
 - c. **While it is possible** that some in ILCCM's Little and Big Warrior classes for 3- and 4-year-old children could have gone to Zion, it is also possible that many of them would have stayed at whatever location they chose for infant care.
6. **Why is Immanuel adding a Kindergarten if Zion has one?** Immanuel has consistently chosen to support Zion Kindergarten as the next step for Big Warriors and the desired preparation site before ILS 1st grade. We have been and are the largest numeric and financial supporter of Zion Kindergarten. We now believe that the continued viability of ILS requires us to add Kindergarten for at least these reasons:
 - a. Families that start in a location with infant care have expressed their desire to continue the education experience on the same campus. That is an even stronger desire when they have children at various levels of care.
 - b. Immanuel families not in our Child Care Ministry have increasingly chosen kindergarten options other than Zion for a variety of reasons. Once those families go into such a program with the follow up of elementary grades, relationships, familiarity, and friendships often keep the student in that school, not ILS.
 - c. The very significant decline in numbers of students coming into first grade needs to be reversed, and this may be a tool to assist. In 2008, Zion had more than 50 students in Kindergarten, which supported 2-3 first grades at ILS. From 2009-2019, Zion Kindergarten graduated around 35 students each year. The number this year is less than 20, and the number for next year is estimated to be 16-18. ILC alone has 31 children eligible for 2021-22 Kindergarten that live in the area.
7. **What are the costs of starting a Kindergarten?** Because of the small projected 1st grade class this fall, Immanuel already has space for one or two Kindergarten classrooms within the new part of the building near the School office as well as faculty with experience to teach them. Since Immanuel already pays the tuition for our Kindergarten students at Zion, we believe this will be financially neutral if we start with around 15 students, and beneficial if we have 18 or more.
8. **What are the costs of not starting a Kindergarten?** Not starting a Kindergarten this year risks a continuing erosion of incoming student numbers to ILS, which means an ongoing reduction of staff at ILS and a significant loss in our capacity to provide Christian education.

- 9. Will starting a Kindergarten at Immanuel do away with Zion’s Kindergarten?** We believe that strong Kindergartens at Zion and Immanuel are **both necessary**. Since most parents express the desire for a continuity of care, those who choose Zion for preschool will likely choose Zion’s Kindergarten. Those who choose ILCCM for childcare will likely choose Immanuel’s Kindergarten. Immanuel would pay the tuition for its member families in either program. Both programs would prepare students for first grade. It would take 2-3 kindergarten classrooms for optimal enrollment at ILS.
- 10. How could this partnership benefit Zion?** Immanuel has expressed willingness to help Zion add infant care to what they provide. Zion already has ground-level space that could provide for the expansion of childcare for infants, which is in great demand, on their campus. While doing infant care is expensive, parents are willing to pay. Not doing it may be even more costly. While not all who desire infant and early childhood care will later enroll in Kindergarten or 1st grade, the chances are much better if we start with them early. Even if they don’t, we have valuable time to bear witness to Christian faith.
- 11. What about the new Child Care Center in Seymour?** Child Care Network, INC, is working on a child-care center in Seymour, including infant care, to address the childcare “desert” in Seymour and Jackson County. This could impact the population looking to Immanuel and Zion for childcare, but we have different models and approaches that should make our ministries attractive to those looking for a Christ-centered environment.
- 12. Why are we discussing these proposals with Zion?** Zion and Immanuel could address independently the threats and opportunities we face, but that would miss the opportunity for synergy and harmony. It is good for Zion that Immanuel is healthy, it is good for Immanuel that Zion is healthy, and it is good for the community and the Kingdom if we can partner in helping each other. We share a common Lutheran faith and a love for children and families. We share a history of quality education and care, and we have demonstrated our ability to work together as partners.

Resolution for Voters

- Whereas** Immanuel Lutheran School, Immanuel Lutheran Child Care Ministry, and Zion Lutheran School are committed to the Christ-centered care of children, and
- Whereas** An increasing demand for childcare beginning with infants at 6 weeks provides an opportunity to increase the number of children and families being served by Zion and Immanuel; and
- Whereas** Families from Immanuel have been increasingly enrolling children in Kindergartens other than Zion, and families using ILCCM have expressed their desire to keep their children together at Immanuel for Kindergarten; and
- Whereas** It is likely that more families could be served by Kindergarten programs both at Zion and Immanuel, leading to larger incoming ILS 1st grades, and
- Whereas** Adding Kindergarten to Immanuel allows us to keep staff, utilize available space, and increase the number of students we can serve in 1st grade; therefore, be it
- Resolved** That Immanuel Lutheran School be authorized to offer Kindergarten in August 2021.