

HARVESTING HOUSEHOLDS: A STUDY OF THE PASTOR'S ROLE IN THE HARVEST
STRATEGY OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Several congregations in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have created early childhood ministries (ECMs). While these schools teach Christ's love to children, they have the potential to act as an arm for outreach extending from the congregation to the families of students. This study gathers information from various pastors in ministry settings of a congregation working with an ECM who have implemented harvest strategies to reach school families with the gospel. The goal of these interviews was to learn what principles and tactics of harvest strategies were effective in different ministry settings. While there is no specific harvest strategy that works for every ministry setting, several trends of successful principles and tactics were identified throughout the interviews.

INTRODUCTION

Greg Finke compares the reality of modern American spirituality to a bridge and a river. He uses the imagery of a bridge in Honduras that stands not *over* a river but *beside* a river. This peculiarity was not because the bridge had been built in the wrong place, but because the river had been moved during a hurricane. He says, “For a very long time the U.S. church was well-built, well-positioned and doing an excellent job of meeting the spiritual needs of a largely churched culture. We could say the church was ‘spanning the river’ of the U.S. culture at that time. . . . For the first time in U.S. history, congregations can no longer rely on a strategy of attracting people to religious services as being the best means of introducing people to the Gospel.”¹

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) churches have tried various methods or strategies to attract the unchurched to their campuses, and one of the most commonly seen opportunities is through a school. While Lutheran elementary schools have had a recent shift in the percentage of students being unchurched, and therefore the mission of many elementary schools now includes an emphasis in outreach, Early Childhood Ministries (ECMs) have often always drawn unchurched families.² While historically in the Wisconsin Synod there have been few adult confirmations through ECMs for most churches, a recent movement can be seen in the

1. Greg Finke, *Joining Jesus on his Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary* (Elgin, IL: Tenth Power, 2014), 39.

2. Paul Patterson, interview with author, October 2, 2025.

WELS toward intentionally using these ministries for outreach. With that movement has come the encouragement to practice a harvest strategy: an intentional way to connect families from the school ministry with the means of grace with the hope that they will confess faith in their Savior and, ultimately, join the church.

“Harvest strategy” has become a popular phrase in the WELS over the last several years in presentations by pastors or synod representatives, and many faithful leaders and members have worked hard to train ministries in implementing a harvest strategy. Many churches that have implemented harvest strategies have seen success in the harvest among ECM families. This is not because they simply put ideas and principles on a piece of paper, but because they intentionally planned and practiced a strategy to reap the harvest that is coming to their church doorstep. A pastor has specific roles within this harvest strategy.

This paper aims to identify harvest strategy principles, tactics, and practices that have been used in different ministry settings to some degree of success. In short, it finds that while there is no “one-size-fits-all” harvest strategy for every ECM, there are trends of successful harvest strategy practices that may be implemented by different churches with an ECM. Christians recognize that faith comes from hearing the message about Christ (Rom 10:17), and they know that sin leaves a human reluctant to hear that message. Some degree of intentional outreach must be implemented to break down those barriers to the gospel, and ECMs have potential to share the message about Christ with those who do not know it.

RESEARCH METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The research conducted for this paper consisted primarily of video interviews and literature research. Considering there is not a large amount of literature on this topic of using schools, especially ECMs, as outreach, the literature research consisted of books on evangelism in general, papers written about using Christian schools as an arm for outreach, and different presentations or articles written by WELS pastors and other workers on this topic. The goal of the interviews was to hear from pastors practicing a harvest strategy about their experiences and encouragements for the principles, practices, and tactics they carry out in their harvest strategies. All the pastors are WELS pastors who serve congregations that have a standalone ECM. An interview was also conducted with two administrators from the Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS). CLS is a WELS organization that assists WELS ECMs and schools. They explain their purpose in their mission statement: “to guide and assist congregations in advancing the gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening Lutheran schools.”³

Research Methods

3. WELS Resource Center, accessed November 18, 2025, <https://cls.welsrc.net>.

The pastors who were interviewed were recommended primarily by CLS, along with recommendations from other pastors and peers. The pastors and ministries were recommended mostly on account of the success they had found in their congregations with bringing ECM families into their church, but some were recommended simply because of their intentional practice of a harvest strategy. These are not the “top five” ECMs that produce adult confirmations but simply five examples of ministries that are actively practicing harvest strategies and experiencing God’s blessing of their work with adult confirmations.

After the interviewees accepted the invitation to conduct an interview, the interviewer sent them a Google Meet link, an informed consent form, and the general discussion points of the interview. All interviews were recorded and were transcribed on the interviewer’s computer using Otter.ai software.

The interviews consisted of five main discussion points and an optional sixth point that was not discussed in every interview. The first discussion point asked the participant to share a “brief background” on their ministry setting (How long has the ECM been active, how long have you been there, etc.). This question simply sought to give the interviewer a clearer understanding of the ministry setting. The second point asked the interviewee to “define a harvest strategy (about one or two sentences). What is it and what is it not?” The third point asked what was the “experience with ‘getting people on board.’ (Was your staff always practicing the Harvest Strategy? What was the experience getting the congregation behind the mission?)” The goal with this question was to discover any encouragements the interviewee may have wanted to share for getting a harvest strategy implemented. The fourth and fifth points were asked together: “Relating to the pastor's role, what *principles* should there be in a Harvest Strategy? Relating to the pastor's role, what *specific strategies or practices* have you implemented with the harvest

strategy?” The sixth optional discussion point asked, “How much of the harvest strategy's ‘success’ is dependent on the personality of the pastor? How would you encourage other pastors who maybe struggle in certain areas socially? Have you struggled socially, and how did you overcome those challenges?” Only three of the five pastors were asked this question because of time limitations. The emphasis of discussion points three through five was specifically about the *pastor’s* role in carrying out the harvest strategy, as the focus of this paper is on principles and tactics of a harvest strategy regarding the pastor’s role.

Descriptions of the Participants

The participants are left anonymous, but a description of their specific ministry setting is given for understanding the contexts from which respondents’ answers come and to assist readers in applying principles and tactics to their own ministry settings. The descriptions will also include information on some of the methodology and opinions on the pastor’s role in the harvest strategy in a standalone ECM. Most of this information came from the pastors’ descriptions of their ministry settings in the first discussion point of each interview.

Pastor A

Pastor A serves at a congregation with a ten-year-old ECM. The ECM began shortly after the building of their new sanctuary. The ECM has seen growth, beginning with just six children and now enrolling twenty-seven children. All the students fall into a three and four-year-old program, with two classrooms of mixed ages. Their ECM operates three days per week for three hours in the morning. They found a niche in the community for families that often had a stay-at-home

parent and were not ready to send their children to preschool five days per week, while several schools in the area offered a five-days-per-week program. The staff consists of one director and several part-time teachers. None of the staff is called, but all the staff are members of the congregation. The congregation had 228 members as of 2024.⁴ Part of Pastor A's vision for the pastor's role is regular personal communication and relationship building with families.

Pastor B

When Pastor B accepted the call to his current congregation, it was operating a K–8 school. Eventually, the school closed and transitioned to an ECM. The ECM has been operating for about twenty years, and in 2017, added an emphasis to set itself apart from other early childhood programs in the area. Enrollment is capped at thirty-six, serving students ages three through five. The ECM operates three days per week with a morning session and an afternoon session. The staff of the ECM consists of one called teacher who is also the director, three hired aides, and six volunteers. One of the three aides and one of the six volunteers are not members of the congregation. The congregation consisted of 310 souls as of 2024.⁵ A major part of Pastor B's vision for the pastor's role is building personal relationships. He also emphasizes making families comfortable with sending their children to the ECM by offering quality and friendly care.

4. "Yearbook," WELS, accessed November 11, 2025, <https://yearbook.wels.net/unitsearch>.

5. "Yearbook," WELS.

Pastor C

Pastor C serves at a congregation with an ECM that began in 2018. Pastor C arrived at this congregation after the ECM opened, and he was the impetus in starting an intentional harvest strategy. There are around eighty students from infants through preschool age. The ECM runs year-round, five days per week, offering full-day daycare. There are twenty-six teachers on staff, two of which are members of the congregation, and one of those members is a called director. The congregation had 391 members as of 2024.⁶ Pastor C admits that the harvest strategy has not produced much fruit in terms of adult confirmations since the creation of the harvest strategy. However, in 2025, he implemented a new practice of intentionally targeting families that may be more open to spiritual conversation. He views the pastor's role as personally building relationships with ECM families.

Pastor D

Pastor D began serving at his congregation before the ECM began. The ECM was opened shortly after the building of the new church building just under twenty years ago. The ECM began only for preschoolers, but since then, has enrolled down to infants. The staff is entirely filled by WELS members, with twelve of the twenty-one being members of their own congregation. They have one called director and no other called workers. However, four teachers have training from Martin Luther College either through synod certification or on-campus classes and choose to remain as hired instead of called. They have around eighty students enrolled. Care is offered five days per week for eleven and a half hours each day, with formal school in the middle of the day

6. "Yearbook," WELS.

and before-care and after-care offered as well. As of 2024, the congregation has 1688 members.⁷ Pastor D's role at his congregation is not directly connected with outreach, but he is the education pastor, so he oversees the school. In his interview, Pastor D referenced the work of the former outreach pastor at their congregation and the work he did. Much of what he referenced with the outreach pastor showed the pastor's role as a personal relationship builder.

Pastor E

The ECM at Pastor E's congregation began in the early 2000s attached to a mission church that began six years prior. Pastor E has been with the ECM since before the ECM opened. The ECM has 105 students ages two through four, with eleven part-time staff members who are all members of the congregation, yet none of teachers are called workers. They offer care five days per week for four hours each day. They offer half-day care to target families that have one stay-at-home parent who does not need to rush from dropping off their child to work, allowing for relationships to form. As of 2024, the congregation consisted of 694 members.⁸ Pastor E's view on the role of a pastor in the harvest strategy is angled more as the leader of the harvest strategy. Pastor E has found success in training his staff to be the primary relationship builders at the school, while he waits until events, worship, and worship follow-up to begin most of his personal relationship building.

7. "Yearbook," WELS.

8. "Yearbook," WELS.

DEFINING A HARVEST STRATEGY

All the participants were asked early in the interview to briefly define a harvest strategy. The question sought to discuss what a harvest strategy *is* and what it *is not*. Not every participant went into detail on what it *is not*.

What a Harvest Strategy Is

Confessional Lutherans may be tempted to cringe when they hear the phrase “harvest strategy.” They may fear that those practicing a harvest strategy are putting too much emphasis on the work of humans and not enough on the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word. Others may be concerned that a harvest strategy is inauthentic, simply a bait-and-switch to get ECM families to join their church. However, when properly understood and practiced, a harvest strategy can be a beneficial tool for sharing the means of grace.

Pastor C commented simply on harvest strategies, “What are the ways that you are intentionally building relationships and connecting people with the gospel?”⁹ Ultimately, the goal of a harvest strategy is to connect people with the gospel, the means through which God has promised to work. Pastor C also identifies another major theme throughout this paper: the importance of building relationships. In a country where individualism and isolation are

9. Pastor C, interview with author, October 21, 2025.

consistent themes, relationships will often need to be built first before an unbeliever will want to hear the gospel.

Pastor A builds on this by saying that a big part of relationship building in a harvest strategy is earning the right to be heard.¹⁰ There needs to be an amount of trust built between two people before one person will listen and appreciate what someone is sharing with them, especially if the thing being shared is something significant to their current lifestyle, such as religion.

Two of the pastors explained succinctly how the harvest strategy is preparatory work to get unchurched people in connection with the means of grace. Pastor B describes a harvest strategy as “intentional planning and actions that provide opportunities to unchurched families to make relationships with God’s people and hear the good news of forgiveness.”¹¹ Pastor E says it differently, that a harvest strategy provides “a taxonomy of outreach experiences meant to connect every family in the preschool with opportunities to be intersected by the means of grace.”¹² The harvest strategy does not take the place of the work of the Spirit, nor is the harvest strategy a clever way to trick people into coming to church, it is simply removing the barriers that Satan puts up between the gospel and people and preparing the way for the Holy Spirit to do his work.

Pastor D explains the practical aspect of a harvest strategy. “Ultimately, your hope is they become confirmed members of our church, and if that doesn’t happen, at least (we hope) that

10. Pastor A, interview with author, October 10, 2025.

11. Pastor B, interview with author, October 14, 2025.

12. Pastor E, interview with author, October 30, 2025.

they've come to know who Jesus is, and they believe in him.”¹³ WELS Christians recognize that the invisible church is larger than just the WELS, and they rejoice knowing that other Christians will be in heaven with them, but WELS Christians also understand the importance of continued education in God's Word and the importance of faith being fed regularly. One of the goals of a harvest strategy is to bring souls into the care of the congregation. Through intentional relationship building and gospel sharing, the Holy Spirit can still work faith in the heart through that gospel, even if the people the harvest strategy serves do not join the church.

Pastor Elton Stroh offered, “Harvest strategies are intentional plans designed to connect school families to the Gospel and the broader mission of the church through the ministry of the church.”¹⁴ He connects the harvest strategy directly with the mission and ministry of the church itself. Pastor E spoke with a similar sentiment, “I think a harvest strategy shouldn't exist by itself. I think churches that look at a preschool as, ‘this is a sign, this is going to be our outreach’ are going to struggle with it. I think a church that has a vibrant outreach program that adds early childhood is going to see more harvest than a church that doesn't have a vibrant congregational outreach strategy.” There may be a temptation for congregations to start an ECM as the sole outreach plan that is going to instantly bring in new members and will fix any of the problems with evangelism that a congregation has. However, a church also needs a bigger picture of a outreach as a congregation instead of solely relying on the ECM.

Valleskey speaks to this point as well: “This (making a school *one* outreach arm of the congregation), in general, seems to be a healthier approach rather than staking the congregation's

13. Pastor D, interview with author, October 14, 2025.

14. Elton Stroh, “Harvest Strategies: The Heart Behind Them and the Hurdles in the Way,” unpublished blog, PDF document, 1.

whole outreach program on the school. A congregation should not be led to think that the congregation's total work of outreach evangelism is being done by the school."¹⁵ While Valleskey is writing specifically about elementary schools, the point can be made for ECMs as well. If the congregation does not have an outreach culture or plan outside of the harvest strategy, integrating prospects from the ECM into the church can be challenging.

What a Harvest Strategy *Is Not*

It is important for congregations implementing harvest strategies to identify potential pitfalls and to avoid them. Pastor A said that a harvest strategy “isn’t something on paper that’s never put into practice. It isn’t building a preschool and expecting, ‘somehow, some way, I got them in the doors so they’ll, therefore, naturally come to church.’ It isn’t, ‘well, we taught them about Jesus so we’re good to go.’” A consistent theme throughout the interviews was the necessity of being intentional with a harvest strategy. Simply talking about a harvest strategy will not be effective if it is not put into practice. Jamie Walta with CLS also spoke about the truth that it is not a one or a two-person job; several people should be involved for new ideas and to keep each other accountable in practicing the harvest strategy.¹⁶ The role of outreach in a congregation does not start and end with just the pastor. Several people should be involved in carrying out the harvest strategy with the mission of the church on the minds of the staff and congregation.

Pastor C offered another encouragement: the harvest strategy is not how many members a church gains. There is a temptation to look at the success of a harvest strategy merely by the

15. David Valleskey, “An Evangelism Perspective of the Lutheran Elementary School,” essay presented at WELS Symposium on the Lutheran Elementary School and Evangelism, April 1987, 9, WLS Essay File.

16. Jamie Walta, interview with author, October 22, 2025.

numbers. While the number of adult confirmations through the harvest strategy can be useful in gauging the effectiveness of a harvest strategy, harvest strategy users remember that God's Word will work where God wills it. This certainly is not an excuse to become complacent with ministry and a church's harvest strategy, but it is an important reminder so a congregation does not fall into despair.

ESTABLISHING A HARVEST STRATEGY AND A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

The author took intentional time in the interviews to discuss the experience of each pastor with creating and implementing the harvest strategy into the ECM and congregation. The participants also shared some of their experience with the harvest strategy gaining traction among the staff and the congregation.

Creating a Harvest Strategy

While the process of creating a harvest strategy was not a specific discussion point in the interviews, several participants shared thoughts throughout the interviews on their experience in simply creating a harvest strategy. A harvest strategy will inevitably undergo several changes if the ministry continues to operate. This should come as no surprise considering there will be several successes and failures with each attempt at a harvest strategy. Pastor C and Pastor E shared that they had created several harvest strategies over the course of their ministries as different principles and strategies succeeded and failed. At the time of the interview, Pastor C explained how he had recently adapted their harvest strategy at the beginning of the school year, and there had already been fruit directly connected with that change. Pastor B did not speak specifically to changing the harvest strategy itself, but he explained how over the course of his ministry, he has had to intentionally adapt his practices to new generations as those new generations entered his ECM.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” harvest strategy that promises success to every church and ECM that practices it. However, there is value in asking other ministries how they practice their harvest strategies. Several of the pastoral participants referenced each other as they created their own harvest strategies.

Getting the Staff On Board

Inevitably, one of the pastor’s roles with a harvest strategy is teaching the harvest strategy to the staff and encouraging them to practice it. A pastor will face challenges in attempting to carry out a harvest strategy on his own. Various circumstances in different ministry settings may affect how a pastor teaches and implements the harvest strategy with his staff.

One of those factors is the makeup of the staff. The composition of an ECM staff may depend on the ministry circumstances. This is an important thing to consider when opening an ECM. Three of the ministries had one called worker, and each called worker served as the director. However, two of these ministries also hired non-member staff as well. The two ministries with no called workers had a staff entirely of members. Various factors affected the decisions on the staff make-up: size of the school, number of hours of care each day offered by the school, financial considerations, etc.

This is an important consideration when starting an ECM harvest strategy because it can affect how that strategy is carried out. Pastor A, who has no called staff, but all the staff are members, explained that you are starting from scratch in a way when it comes to implementing the harvest strategy compared to having called teachers. Called teachers are often taught and trained with a mission mindset while hired staff may need some additional training. However, this is not an insurmountable problem. Pastor A explained, “We’ll sit down with the preschool

staff at the beginning of every year and say, ‘Let’s remember what the goal is here: it’s not just to educate the mind, it is to enlighten the heart, and you get to be a role in this.’” He emphasizes the great privilege it is for those members who serve as ECM staff to share the gospel with those who may not know it. Pastor A also conducts weekly staff devotions where he continues to encourage the staff in the mission of the ECM. Pastor E, whose staff makeup is similar to that of Pastor A though on a larger scale—no called workers but all members—walks through the harvest strategy every year at orientation, no matter how long a teacher has been working there. He also reviews it with the staff halfway through the year before big events.

Of the interviewed pastors, Pastor C has the most non-members on staff at the ECM where he serves, and he explained that while this may produce challenges because much of the staff does not have the same mission, this opens a new harvest field to those non-member teachers. Pastor C has a called director who is deeply involved in the planning and practicing of the harvest strategy with the pastor. Pastor D, who serves in an ECM with a called director and all member staff, explains the importance of supporting that director and keeping the mission mindset on the minds of the staff. He meets with the director every week and emphasizes how he intentionally assures her that she has authority with the staff and that he will back her in that authority.

The make-up of staff in an ECM is critical when planning an ECM and harvest strategy. However, regardless of what that staff make-up is, the pastor has an important role in being an example to that staff in carrying out the harvest strategy. “I think it’s imperative, a pastor’s role, if you’re going to see your school or your preschool as an outreach opportunity, you have to be bought into it, and you have to, in some ways, you get to set the pace, because your staff is going to see what their pastor is or isn’t doing. The parents are going to see what the pastor is or isn’t

doing, and it's going to have a profound impact" (Pastor A). Exemplifying the harvest strategy may manifest itself in different ways, but the importance is that the pastor must be bought in to the harvest strategy and mission and encouraging to the staff. That may not always mean a hands-on approach, where the pastor is regularly in the school interacting with ECM families. Pastor E described his specific role as a cheerleader, leader, and trainer of the harvest strategy rather than a hands-on participant in the harvest strategy.

Getting the Congregation on Board

Each pastor had a different experience with exposing the congregation to the concept of an ECM as an arm for outreach as well as implementing a harvest strategy. None of the pastors expressed any challenges with the congregation supporting the ECM and its mission.

Pastors A, D, and E had a similar experience with getting the congregation "on board" with the ECM and harvest strategy. All three were able to work an ECM into changes that were happening in their congregations. Pastors A and E were both called to serve at mission congregations where a mission-minded culture was already in place, and it was time to look at options for their future ministries. Pastor A explained, "In our setting, I think it was a little bit easier, because it's like driving a jet ski. You can turn the group a lot faster, because you're small and you're growing the congregation." Pastor E expressed a similar sentiment as the preschool began essentially at the beginning of the mission's ministry. Pastor D's congregation was building a new sanctuary, which was already planned to include several Sunday school classrooms. The congregation decided that creating an ECM would be a good opportunity for outreach as well.

Pastor C was called to his congregation after the ECM had already begun; however, the church did not have an explicit harvest strategy. Pastor C took it upon himself to craft a harvest strategy for the ECM and the congregation. He admitted that currently there is not a large movement and focus on the harvest strategy at his congregation, but there is certainly no pushback either. He suggested, “It really takes one person who’s excited about [the harvest strategy] and is running with it and owning it. And then, the question is: who should be the one to own it? Should it be your evangelism board chairman? Should it be your pastor? Should it be the early childhood director? And my philosophy is: Who’s excited about it?” While the ultimate goal is to get everyone in the congregation and staff behind the harvest strategy to some degree, there may be a time in a congregation where an individual or a committee needs to take ownership in creating a harvest strategy.

Several of the pastors acknowledged that the harvest strategy and the ECM are not always on the forefront of the minds of the congregation members. That does not have to be a negative thing. In fact, it can be positive as there are other aspects of ministry that the members are active in. However, the ideal is that the congregation is aware and supportive of the ECM and the mission behind the harvest strategy.

That support of the congregation may take different forms, especially financially. There were differing opinions on this specific matter. The ECM at Pastor E’s congregation is entirely self-supported financially, and he thinks this can prevent additional tension within the congregation. He explained that the congregation and ECM had to make certain decisions in the early years of the ECM if the ECM was going to be self-supporting. An example he gave was the decision not to have called teachers which would be a challenge for a self-supporting ECM to financially support. Pastor D faces a similar circumstance with his ECM being self-supported

financially as well. However, he is confident that the congregation is also willing to support the ECM financially if an opportunity would arise.

Pastor B had a different opinion about the importance of the ECM being self-supported. He said, “I never wanted the school to support itself, because if the congregation wants this, I always wanted them to have skin in the game.” He told a story about how in a sermon, he explained how the congregation supports a large percentage of the tuition of each student, and after the sermon, the congregation wanted to offer even more support. While this may not always be the reaction of a congregation with an ECM, there can be a benefit with providing the congregation members a passive way to support the ministry of the ECM. This also can be important in keeping unity between the congregation and ECM, preventing them from drifting apart into two separate entities.

Both opinions have potential benefits and potential pitfalls. Any congregation seeking to open an ECM and implement a harvest strategy ought to consider the financial aspect as it influences the congregation as a whole, and it can affect the model and staff make-up of the ECM.

A final trend that was evident in many of the interviews was the importance of the congregation being ready to welcome guests from the ECM. This is an important role of the pastor in training the congregation and cultivating an outreach culture, because this has an impact on the effectiveness of the harvest strategy. Pastor A recognized, “You have to take additional measures in communication to the congregation (as it grows).” The ECM may fall to the congregation’s peripheral as the congregation grows and other ministries are introduced, so there is a need for regular communication. His point especially was towards the reality that if the congregation hopes to have families from the ECM in church, there will probably be some noisy

kids during worship. How the congregation reacts to this change in worship is dependent on how well the pastor is communicating and encouraging his congregation.

Pastor D suggested, in his large congregation, that perhaps “the better thing (than getting members and families together at events, etc.) is to train your congregation to be loving towards all unbelievers, no matter who they are.” Part of the rationale behind this comment comes from Pastor D reflecting on how upset some members were when they saw ECM families leaving church with their kids as soon as the kids were done singing, missing most of the worship service. He explained that it is important to teach members that they ought to be loving to these people and welcoming, because odds are, the unchurched ECM families are not familiar with church and even what is taught in church. Should a Christian expect anything different from an unbeliever? This takes consistent and intentional teaching on the part of the pastor.

Paul Patterson, who serves on the WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools, summarized the pastor’s role in this regard in this way:

The pastor has to be a leader of the congregation and prepping them and teaching them how to be a welcoming congregation to these families who are probably going to break norms. And if the pastor isn’t being aggressive in teaching the congregation that, and the congregation has that experience with the preschool families, and they’re not prepped, many times those congregation members, not all, but some will actually hurt the cause of connecting to the congregation.”

Pastor C compared the impact of the congregation on first-time visitors in worship to the lawn in front of a house: the lawn may not be the thing that leads a person to buy the house, but it certainly makes an impression. The members of the congregation have an important role with the harvest strategy, even if they are not directly involved with it. As unchurched people come to church for possibly the first time, it is crucial for members to be welcoming and loving to them. This takes work from the pastor in cultivating an outreach mindset and welcoming attitude in each of his members.

Pastor B commented on the importance and the benefits of getting all the members of the congregation in the same direction regarding an evangelism culture. He reflected on the last ten years of the ECM and congregation and has seen “the river flowing in the right way.” As new members have joined his congregation, especially from the ECM, there has been an increase in inertia toward evangelism throughout the congregation that has been effective. One way he encourages pastors to get members on board is by having a written harvest strategy document to go through the various principles regularly with those who are involved with the harvest strategy.

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF A HARVEST STRATEGY

The participants were asked to share the principles of their own harvest strategies as well as the practices and tactics employed to carry out those specific principles. The emphasis was intended to gather information specifically regarding the pastor's role in each principle and practices. Naturally, several of these principles and practices also relate to staff and congregation members. Several trends can be noted from all the pastors, while some differing experiences and encouragements are shared. Many of the practices are unique on account of the various ministry situations and models. The purpose for this section of the paper is for ministries to consider how they may best implement various principles and practices in their specific ministry settings.

Pastor as the Leader of the Harvest Strategy

Pastor E summarized much of his role in the harvest strategy as being the leader, cheerleader, and trainer to the staff regarding the harvest strategy. Depending on the size of enrollment at the school, there may be too many families for the pastor alone to make strong relationships. That is one of the main reasons Pastor E emphasized the importance of training the staff, who in his setting are also members of the church, to build those initial strong relationships. Pastor A explained the importance of the pastor leading by example as the staff sees the pastor's attitude and investment. Pastor A, along with other interviewed pastors, have a hands-on role where they are regularly visible to the children and staff. He sees value in leading by example for his staff

and serving as a guide to them. On the other hand, Pastor E practices a more hands-off model where he has successfully trained his staff to do the relationship building at a high level. Regardless of how a pastor carries out this principle, it is critical for a pastor to be involved as a leader for the staff regarding the harvest strategy.

One important aspect of the pastor's role as the leader of the harvest strategy is by regularly reminding the staff of the missional purpose of the ECM. Pastor A explained how he reminds his staff at the beginning of every school year the mission of the school as it relates to the church through the harvest strategy. He also conducts weekly staff devotions to "empower them with the gospel to let that gospel light shine." Finally, he speaks of the importance of supporting and encouraging the staff in the difficult moments that they run into with children or parents.

Pastor E also conducts weekly devotions where the harvest strategy often is discussed. He also has several harvest strategy refreshers throughout the year: at orientation and before large events where the purpose of events is to extend invitations to worship. In Pastor C's setting, he has one called director and two congregation members on staff out of the twenty-plus teachers. Every year, he does a four-lesson simplified Bible information class with all the staff to share the gospel with unchurched staff. While the non-member staff may not be carrying out the harvest strategy, the pastor wants to be sure that the non-member staff is not working against the harvest strategy. Pastor B also encourages his staff regularly in remembering the harvest strategy, and one tactic that he has found useful is going through an evangelism book with the staff while encouraging them to look for opportunities to let their light shine that appear right in front of them.

Pastor E included an additional thought when serving as the leader of the harvest strategy. He explains that, at times, the pastor must be the one to “hold the line” in keeping the mission and harvest strategy at the forefront of the ECM. He gave an example of the desire from the ECM parents to have curbside drop-off for their children. It would be an easy change, and all the other area schools practice this, but it would take away from a crucial part of the harvest strategy: parents building face-to-face relationships with the teachers. Some of the teachers have even suggested this as a good idea. However, Pastor E explains that part of his job is to protect the harvest strategy by holding the line in certain areas. He summarizes, “We don’t allow any of our practices or our policies to degrade from [the harvest strategy].” If a pastor is serving as the leader or the cheerleader of the harvest strategy for the staff, he ought to think carefully about different decisions that are made regarding the ECM, even when they may seem insignificant.

Relationships

The importance of building relationships was the most prevalent harvest strategy principle mentioned by the participants. Christians will typically need to build some level of trust before they can hope for an unchurched person to listen to a gospel presentation. Rick Richardson writes, “The first key to activating the receptivity of unchurched individuals is trust. . . . As Christians, we must reach out in friendship to unchurched individuals around us and find ways to build trust in all arenas of life.”¹⁷ He continues by pointing to Paul’s tactic of evangelism in Athens (Acts 17). This is especially important for nominal Christians, along with Americans who

17. Rick Richardson, *You Found Me* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 95.

do not associate with any specific religion. With a level of trust built, and even an amount of affirmation toward the beliefs of the unchurched person, a bridge of trust is opened and opportunities for a gospel presentation may become available.

Pastor A reflected on the opportunity presented to pastors and congregations with an ECM:

In the early days of starting a church, you fought tooth and nail to get some to come to church, whether it was a postcard, whether it was one visit, two visits, ten visits, whatever it was, and then they showed up on the doorstep. And the worst thing that we could do is not welcome them in the doors. How cool is it that they're already coming through (the doors of the preschool). We don't have to do anything to get them in the doors. How about we just enjoy them and enjoy the opportunity we have to reach somebody who's coming from a different background or upbringing, or whatever it is, and getting to be the face of Christ to them. . . . Let's not miss the low-hanging fruit.

The unchurched are coming to the campus of the congregation through the ECM. This is an opportunity to build relationships that, God-willing, will lead to spiritual conversations and invitations to church.

Walta explained that the relationships must be authentic and genuine. Pastor C expressed a similar sentiment: "People will sense if all you're doing is building a relationship with them so that you'll come to church." The relationships being built with unchurched ECM families are not a "bait-and-switch" tactic, where a pastor is only building that relationship with the purpose of getting them into church. Perhaps, the unchurched families are already on guard supposing that the pastor is only being friendly because he wants them in church. While this is certainly the goal, there should also be the goal to simply build a relationship and let Christian light shine as a pastor would with anybody they meet.

Several pastors also emphasized "the long game" regarding relationship building in the harvest strategy. Pastor E explained that implementing a harvest strategy for outreach is different than talking to someone on the front porch in an evangelism call. With an ECM, a pastor will

have several months up to several years to build and work the relationships with different ECM families, and it might take several years before there is a spiritual interest in a family or individual.

Multiple pastors also expressed warnings about forgetting to be patient. Pastor B encouraged pastors and anyone involved with the harvest strategy not to be too forceful with the gospel too early. Pastor E, when asked if he meets with new ECM families when they first enroll, warned against “pulling the relationship forward.” Instead, he suggests waiting to have a spiritual conversation with an ECM family until they are ready and looking forward to one. Pastor C added another encouragement and warning not to get frustrated about the lack of membership growth from the harvest strategy. As with any human relationship, it often takes time for trust to be built before an individual will show interest in something as important as spiritual life, and pastors ought to remember this when they build relationships with ECM families.

Regular Contact with ECM Families

Part of building relationships is making contact in conversation with people. Pastors will attempt to increase the number of contacts with individual ECM families in the school building, at events, and with ECM families that come to worship. Valleskey writes, “The pastor *makes* time and *takes* time, not under compulsion, but because of a love for souls, to get out of the privacy of his study on a regular basis to mingle with the children and, as possible, their parents.”¹⁸

18. David Valleskey, “Outreach and our Lutheran Elementary Schools and Pre-Schools,” essay presented at Ohio Pastor/Teacher/Delegate Conference, January 2014, 22, WLS Essay File.

Greeting Families at Pick-up and Drop-off

Pick-up and drop-off are two times each school day where there are opportunities for relationships to grow between ECM families and the pastor and staff. This does not specifically mean that the pastor *must* take time at drop-off and pick-up, though this may be a good opportunity, but the pastor intentionally finds time to build relationships with ECM families. Pastors A, B, and C all encouraged the practice of being present at pick-up and drop-off. Pastor A emphasized this importance by making an intentional effort to be at the entry point of the school every day at pick-up and drop-off. In his setting, parents will sign up to drop off their children, so there is often a line where he has a chance to chat with the families. Pastor C agreed that this practice is very important, but a challenge in his ECM setting is that they have all-day care, so parents are dropping off and picking up their children over the span of several hours. A pastor may not be able to spend that much time each day greeting families, but he makes an effort to be visible often, even occasionally bringing his sermon work out with him as he greets families, which has proven to be an effective conversation starter.

Pastor B practices a more passive approach initially. He does not go outside to greet the families until several weeks of the school year have gone by after relationships have been built. However, he does still greet the children in the mornings, which parents can see through the windows. Pastor D did not comment on this specifically for his own practice, but this would be one of the areas of the outreach pastor at his congregation. Pastor E has a different approach to this tactic, as he does not personally spend time greeting families at drop-off and pick-up. He feels strongly that this is more naturally the job of the teachers. This is consistent with the model of Pastor E's harvest strategy where the staff, who are all members, do much of the relationship building with the families directly connected with the school while pastor is beginning those

relationships typically at events and especially when following up with worship visitors. One of the pastoral principles for Pastor E is primarily serving as the cheerleader and leader for the staff regarding the harvest strategy, so he intentionally trains his staff to carry out this work. Part of this is due to the size of his ECM: “We’ve got 105 families, it’s hard to get 105 relationships built with one person, but we’ve got 13 others (staff).”

Whether a pastor personally greets families at drop-off and pick-up or not, it is crucial that the pastor, a teacher, or a member who understands the harvest strategy is intentionally building those relationships. The reality is that pastors have full schedules and may not be able to dedicate time to greeting families personally every day. However, staff trained on the harvest strategy can overcome this challenge.

Relationships with the Children

Building relationships with the children of an ECM will often happen inevitably if the pastor is regularly around the school during operating hours. While congregations recognize that the harvest strategy is primarily intended for the parents of the ECM, there can be value in building relationships with the children.

A regularly scheduled chapel is one opportunity for the pastor to build relationships with the children and even the parents depending on the circumstances at an ECM. Most importantly, the children are learning about their Savior and growing in faith, but chapel can also serve as an avenue for the children to know the pastor. Pastor D explained how through his weekly chapels, the ECM children have grown to know him well and has even led to children identifying him and talking with him outside of the school itself. Once per month, Pastor A invites ECM parents to

chapel along with members from the congregation, providing an opportunity for relationships to grow further.

Pastor B commented on the additional benefits of building relationships with the ECM children:

We do object lessons every Tuesday morning and afternoon so that the kids get to know us, that is extremely important . . . because there's going to be different parent events. And so, what I want to happen is when I step into the room (at the event), the kids will come up to me, usually hug my leg or give me a high five, and that just breaks down the barriers with the parents, they're like, "Okay, this dude knows our kids."

A relationship with the children can often assist in building trust and relationships with the parents as well.

Pastor D shared that he will occasionally eat lunch with the children, and Pastor C will even join the children on the playground during the school day. Each ministry situation will be different, and different models for ECM will have an impact. Pastor E does not typically spend time with the students, especially in the classrooms, with similar reasons for not greeting families at pick-up and drop-off regularly: he envisions that this role more naturally fits with the teachers and staff. He also recognizes that, at times, it can be a distraction in the classroom with pastor potentially interrupting. However, Pastor E has intentionally and successfully trained his teachers to perform these tasks at a high level and has seen a high level of success regarding adult confirmations in his congregation.

Pastor C also recognized the need for balance when it comes to time spent with the children and ECM and his other pastoral work. He reasoned that the more effective way to carry out the harvest strategy, at times, is by spending extra effort on a sermon or other pastoral work for parents and visitors to hear in worship.

Remembering Names and Important Information

Pastors A, B, C, and E all commented on the concept of specifically remembering names and information of ECM families. Pastors A and B have an intentional practice of printing binders full of pictures and names of each ECM family at the beginning of each school year for the pastor and anyone else connected closely with the harvest strategy to study. Pastor C, when greeting families at drop-off and pick-up, will even take notes on his phone about specific information that children or parents share so he can reference it again next time. This practice can have a tremendous impact on families by showing a sincere care for them. This is especially important when families confide in the pastor with personal struggles that they may be experiencing. Offering a prayer on site can be powerful and following up with a family about a specific life challenge shows genuine care.

Pastor A explained an additional benefit to strong relationship building. He referenced several instances where an ECM family would age out of the preschool without ever joining the church. However, they would recommend their friends to the ECM and even the church because they were greatly impacted by the sincere kindness and care of the pastor and staff.

Flexibility

Whenever a pastor is doing any form of evangelism and outreach, there is an amount of flexibility that may be necessary. For example, a follow-up call with a first-time visitor may lead to a longer conversation than was initially planned on the schedule.

Pastor D reflected on the former outreach pastor at his congregation who would, at times, have Bible information classes on multiple days of the week with various families. Depending on the type of families the ECM serves (e.g. two-parent working homes or stay-at-home mothers,

etc.) Bible information classes may be scheduled at various times in various locations. Even if a congregation has scheduled Bible information classes, there will likely be make-up lessons scheduled for families that miss the originally scheduled times.

Two pastors also expressed the potential need for flexibility when ECM families invite the pastor to different events. Pastor A attempts to attend birthday parties, sporting events, and other occasions when he is invited by ECM families. Pastor D expressed this point more strongly, “If any parent invites you to their home, you got to do it. Or they invited you out to eat or whatever, you do it.” There are always limits to how often a pastor can attend events like these, but accepting an invitation from an ECM prospect family can be an opportunity to deepen the relationship or have a spiritual conversation.

Related to the concept of the pastor’s flexibility is the pastor making himself accessible. While not explicitly discussed in the interviews, some pastors will intentionally have their office in the school building, offering an open door to any ECM family that would like to talk. Pastor D shares his practice of letting families know early in the relationship that he would be happy to simply sit down and talk with them. He found that many families accepted that offer. Walta offered a practice of pastor doing informal “check-ins” with parents, especially families that were new to the ECM. The conversation would simply be asking how the school year was going for their children and if they had any questions at this point. While the pastor of an ECM may not explicitly be the pastor of a particular ECM family, he shows genuine and authentic care by his willingness to have conversations with prospect families.

Intentional “Targeting” of ECM Families

One practice adopted by two of the participants is an intentional “targeting” of certain families. There were various responses and attitudes to this practice by the other interviewed pastors as well. Pastor C has made this change in his harvest strategy this past school year. This change was a response to the lack of fruit produced in the harvest strategy over the past five years. Included in registration for the ECM is a questionnaire about spiritual health including questions about the family’s church home, interest in baptism, and interest in church. This allows Pastor C to identify those who might be particularly receptive to a spiritual conversation, and he has already had opportunities for those spiritual conversations in the first few months after this tactic was enacted. Pastor B has a similar practice of learning the spiritual health and life of new ECM families and reflecting those responses in a tiered prospect list that several staff and members have access to. Of course, this does not mean that the rest of the families only receive a half-measure of the harvest strategy and pastor’s attention, but additional focus can be placed on those who have expressed interest in church.

Pastor A has intentionally not implemented this practice of targeting families into his harvest strategy to avoid placing a stigma or emphasis on one family instead of another. He shared a story about a family that already had a church home when they joined the preschool, but when they had issues with that other church, they joined Pastor A’s Bible information class because strong relationships had been built. That family would not necessarily have been a “targeted prospect” simply because they already had a church, but the relationship that had been built led to spiritual conversations. Pastor E also does not practice targeting families. Instead, one of the major principles of his congregation’s harvest strategy is emphasizing opportunities for *every* ECM family to encounter the means of grace.

Whether a harvest strategy attempts to target unchurched and interested families or not, it is important for pastors to remember that they cannot forget about the other families that do have a church home or do not have interest in church. Those people who may not be initially targeted may still become real prospects through various life circumstances. However, so long as a pastor does not forget the importance of *all* the ECM families, conducting a spiritual life questionnaire to target certain families can be a useful tool.

ECM Events

Several of the pastors shared their personal practices with events. They spoke about the intentional shaping of these events to build relationships and lead to intersections with the means of grace. Patterson explained,

It doesn't matter as much what events . . . that you're doing. . . . Those things [examples of types of events] are all good and I wouldn't say one is more successful than the other, but [what is more important is] the relationships prior to the events so that people are willing to come, the relationships at the event, and then figuring out a clever way to connect whatever you're doing to an invitation to come to worship.

While the specific events that a congregation and ECM host may not matter, there are practical factors that may help in the planning process of the events. Pastor C recognized that simply having too many events may lead to burnout among members and staff, so he suggests creating the events to build off each other. He has two major “build-ups” each school year, one in the fall leading to Christmas and the second after the new year leading to Easter and the end of the year picnic. In the fall, his congregation hosts a fall festival with the sole purpose of building relationships with ECM families with no law and gospel presentation at this first event. This then builds up to a Thanksgiving meal with ECM families to build further on those relationships, where Pastor C does provide a law and gospel presentation. The culmination of this first build-up

is a midweek Christmas service where the children sing. This final event takes place in the sanctuary with another Law and Gospel presentation and a gathering after the service where relationships continue to build. He has a similar pattern after Christmas beginning with a chili cookoff that leads to a Palm Sunday service and Easter Sunday as well as an end-of-the-year picnic.

Pastor E has a similar model with the events at his congregation. They have four major events: fall festival, Christmas, Easter, and a soccer camp. Before each of these four major events, the ECM hosts parties just before the event where the purpose of each party is to build relationships and give explicit invitations to each of the four major events which are worship opportunities. He chooses Christmas and Easter as major events and invitation opportunities because if the unchurched will go to church on a specific day, it is most likely Christmas or Easter. He chooses the fall festival and soccer camp because they are specifically geared toward the children of ECM families. He recognizes the reality that unchurched families may not come to the fall festival or worship after the soccer camp if all that is offered is worship. His congregation combats this by making these events aimed toward fun for the kids to bring the families to worship where there is an intersection with the means of grace. He conducts follow-ups with these ECM visitors, which has shown success in bringing families back for more worship opportunities.

Pastor B did not provide a comprehensive explanation on his congregation's practice with events, but he shared some of his principles and practices. His congregation has conducted various workshops such as parenting, anxiety, and marriage where the primary goal is to build relationships. He also led a "Great Exchange" night where the congregation catered a nice meal, and he gave a Law and Gospel presentation to share with prospects what the Bible teaches. Part

of his event model is based on a survey that was conducted with the parents of the ECM where they expressed a desire for low-commitment-level workshops and events.

A common trend mentioned by all the pastors was the importance for pastors to be present at these events. The goal of these events is to build relationships that may lead to spiritual conversations or worship invitations. A tactic that is practiced by several of the pastors is that the pastors and the staff are not allowed to talk with each other for the entirety of the event. This is a practical tactic to encourage staff to spend intentional time with the ECM families. In a similar vein, nobody is allowed to take down the event or clean until all the ECM families are gone. Pastor B has a regular practice at the end of each event to talk with members and staff about discussions that each had with different ECM families that may be beneficial for the group to know. This provides an opportunity to debrief and share if there are any ECM families that had certain questions about church or other ministries that take place at the congregation.

Two of the pastors shared a similar tactic geared toward children that aged out of the preschool. The soccer camp that Pastor E's congregation hosts every summer is intended for those who just graduate preschool and enter early elementary age. This allows for continued contact with ECM families after their children graduate preschool. Pastor C's congregation has an elementary-age youth group that has produced a solid turnout from children and families who, after graduation, miss the community the preschool provided.

Explicit Invitations

Pastors and ECM staff may craft their harvest strategy to build relationships with the goal of intersecting families with the means of grace, but, at times, a challenging point may be taking the

next step and explicitly inviting the families to church. The pastors who were interviewed had various tactics and strategies regarding explicit invitations.

Pastor C will often conduct one of his first invitations with a new ECM family early in the relationship. After introducing himself and explaining that he is the pastor, he says, “It would be rude of me not to invite you to church.” His rationale is: if I am a pastor, and I like my church, then I should invite someone I meet to my church. This is not his only invitation to worship; it is one way where he intentionally makes an invitation. Pastor D shared a similar practice that the outreach pastor at his congregation would do early in the relationship. He would simply say “I’d like to just at least let you know what our church is about and what it is that we offer you.” While these approaches may seem forward in the relationship, both can be taught to staff and members when offering explicit invitations. Perhaps, these invitations will not be offered as early in the relationship, but they can be simple ways to teach members and staff to invite to worship those they have built relationships with.

Pastor E encourages his staff to save the major invitations for the four main events explained earlier. He explained his rationale: “The first invitation we’re going to make to these parents is going to invite them to church for something that has a lot to do with their children. There’s going to be pony rides and all that other stuff, but we’re going to give them a reason to stay at church that all centers in Christ.” Naturally, the teachers are not restricted from extending invitations to worship wherever it seems appropriate, but this is where he heavily encourages his staff and himself to make explicit invitations to ECM families.

Ideally, an invitation to worship comes naturally when a prospect expresses interest in worship or confides in a pastor or member about a particular life challenge that may be helped by hearing God’s Word in worship. However, the reality is that pastors, staff, and members may

need to be creative in offering explicit worship invitations. The long game of relationship building and evangelism ought to be kept in mind when it comes to extending invitations because a Christian will want to use caution in inviting a prospect to worship before an opportune time.

Quality Care

Offering quality early childhood care was another topic discussed explicitly by two of the pastors. The ECM at Pastor B's congregation emphasizes this uniquely by having a specialized emphasis to their ECM that sets them apart from other preschools in the area. They have professionally trained teachers in different areas of their emphasis. He also spoke about the importance of quality care to make the ECM families comfortable with their children attending the school. He portrays this at the opening orientation of the school year by sharing who he is as the pastor and assuring the families that they can feel comfortable with their ECM.

Pastor C explained why providing quality care is important:

If our purpose is to provide a service to the community, we want to reflect and give glory to God in the way that we serve our communities. I want to have an early childhood center where not a single parent is worried about dropping off their kid for the day as we care for them. We've had to fire teachers because we couldn't trust them carefully. It's hard to do, but we had to do it, and the families appreciated that we have that standard of care.

Pastor B shared that a big principle of his congregation's harvest strategy is acting as "obstacle removers to the gospel." One big obstacle can be early childhood care that is low in quality. The quality of care may not bring ECM families into church, but it can certainly keep those same families away from church. Genuine care for the children of ECM families can be crucial in building strong relationships of trust.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to lay out for the reader various principles and tactics of harvest strategy as practiced by congregations with standalone ECMs. While there are trends of common principles and tactics, congregations have found success with their harvest strategies using different techniques. Most of the principles were consistent among the interviewed pastors, but the specific tactics varied.

The research conducted was narrowed to specifically congregations with standalone ECMs. This was intentional, as an ECM with an elementary school may have differences in principles and tactics in a harvest strategy. The research was also limited specifically to the pastor's role in the harvest strategy. While two non-pastors with CLS were interviewed, the rest of the qualitative research was conducted from the pastors themselves.

There may be varying opinions on the pastor's role in a harvest strategy, or a harvest strategy in general, from the perspective of other ECM directors, teachers, and staff. These were not researched for this paper. Further research may be done on harvest strategies from the perspective of ECM staff and the differences in a harvest strategy with a standalone elementary school as well as a preschool through eighth-grade ministry. The paper does not provide a comprehensive list of every principle or tactic practiced at each interviewed pastor's congregation, but the purpose was for ministries doing this well to share their experience and insight.

“Do you not say, ‘Four more months and the harvest will be here? Pay attention to what I am telling you. Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are already ripe for the harvest’” (John 4:35 EHV). Twenty-first-century confessional Lutherans are no strangers to the reality that there are millions around them who do not know their Savior. Twenty-first-century confessional Lutherans are also familiar with their mission: to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Throughout the history of the church, there have been various methods and practices of intentional outreach. Lutheran schools, especially ECMs, provide a congregation with opportunities for intentional outreach. One way to ensure that outreach in that ECM is remaining intentional is by implementing a harvest strategy.

Christians recognize that it is the Holy Spirit and the Word that create the faith, that make the harvest ripe (Isa 55:10–11; 1 Cor 3:6). The role of the church and the harvest strategy is to present the Word to those who are lost so the Holy Spirit can do his work. There is no “one-size-fits-all” harvest strategy that will work with every congregation and ECM; however, this paper may help congregations in these ministry settings think about different ways they may carry out the mission of the church through their ECM. Each ministry setting will be different, and those who may use this research will intentionally consider how these principles and practices may assist their own ministry setting. As new attention is placed on ECMs as arms for outreach, gospel-sharing opportunities will continue to present themselves, and an intentional harvest strategy can assist a congregation in providing intersection points between ECM families and the means of grace.

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Harvesting Households: A Study of the Pastor's Role in the Harvest Strategy of an Early

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