

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

The Wordless Book and the Baptized Child

Why Child Evangelism Fellowship Cannot Be Made Lutheran

Essay · By **Larry Herzog Jr.** · *Ordinary Means*
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The most unobjectionable thing in the world

A Good News Club is very hard to be against.

The volunteers are earnest. They have passed background checks. They meet with written parental permission, in a school cafeteria or a fellowship hall, for one fast hour a week. There are songs. There are memory verses — real ones, from the real Bible, memorized by real children who will carry them into adulthood. There is a Bible lesson told with skill by someone who practiced it at her kitchen table. There is a review game. Nobody is paid much of anything. When the club ends in May, the teachers cry.

So when a Lutheran says his congregation should not partner with, sponsor, staff, or recommend one, he sounds like a man who has found a way to object to children hearing about Jesus. He sounds cold. He sounds like the sort of person who would rather be right than see a child saved. In a congregation with any pietist memory at all — and in the AFLC we have a great deal of it, and I do not think we should be ashamed of it — that is a very expensive thing to sound like.

I want to make the argument anyway, and I want to make it in a particular way: entirely out of documents Child Evangelism Fellowship publishes about itself.

That constraint matters. It is easy to object to a parachurch ministry by describing the worst thing you ever saw a volunteer do, and it is worthless, because the organization will rightly answer that this is not what they teach. So I am not going to argue from anecdote, from the club down in the next county, or from what someone's cousin remembers from 1987. Everything load-bearing below comes from CEF's own Statement of Faith, its own published instruction on how to counsel a child for salvation, and its own materials for partnering with churches. Where CEF is more careful than its critics allege, I will say so, and there are at least three places where it is.

The argument still holds. That is the point of making it this way.

What CEF is, stated fairly

Child Evangelism Fellowship was founded in 1937 by Jesse Irvin Overholtzer, a pastor, and is headquartered in Warrenton, Missouri. It describes itself as the largest children's evangelism organization in the world. Its flagship program is the Good News Club; it also runs 5-Day Clubs, camps, fair and open-air ministries, and correspondence courses, and it publishes curriculum through CEF Press. In *Good News Club v. Milford Central School* (2001),

the Supreme Court held that excluding a club from an after-school limited public forum because of its religious viewpoint violated the Free Speech Clause. That decision helped make the subsequent expansion of clubs in public elementary schools possible.

The founding story CEF tells about itself is worth knowing, because everything downstream follows from it. Overholtzer was told as a boy that he was too young to understand religion, and did not come to faith until college. Later, as a pastor, he read a line from Spurgeon to the effect that a child of five, properly instructed, can as truly believe and be regenerated as an adult. He concluded that the church had been culpably negligent toward children and built an organization on the premise that a young child can understand the gospel and should be called to trust Christ.

CEF is deliberately interdenominational. Its Statement of Faith runs to fifteen articles, and Good News Club workers are required to reaffirm a Ministry Compliance Agreement annually, agreeing to teach within that statement and the approved CEF curriculum. That last detail is not trivia. It is the hinge of this essay.

And let me say plainly what is good in the document, because I want to be trusted when I get to what is not. CEF confesses the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the true deity and true humanity of Christ, His substitutionary death for the sins of the whole world, His bodily resurrection and ascension, and justification received by faith alone apart from any merit of our own. Article six says, in so many words, that no repentance, no feeling, no faith, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts can add anything to the value of Christ's blood. Article five says man totally lost all spiritual life in the fall, is dead in trespasses and sins, and cannot see or enter the kingdom of God until he is born again by the Holy Spirit. That is stronger language about human inability than you will hear in a lot of Lutheran congregations on a given Sunday.

I am not dealing with a cult. I am dealing with orthodox evangelicals who have written down, carefully, a doctrine of salvation that excludes the sacraments.

When I use the language of decision below, I am not claiming that CEF teaches an unaided human will can convert itself. Article five denies human spiritual ability and assigns the new birth to the Holy Spirit through the Word. I mean the pastoral relocation of the identifiable beginning of the Christian life to a conscious moment of trust and response. The sacramental disagreement is sufficient; there is no need to accuse CEF of a synergism its own statement disavows.

The sentence

Here is the rest of article five, immediately after the part about the new birth. CEF confesses that no reformation, no morality, no culture, no humanitarian scheme —

no baptism or other ordinance however administered, can help the sinner take even one step toward Heaven.

That is the sentence. Everything else in this essay is commentary on it.

Read what it does. It does not omit baptism. It does not leave baptism to the denominations. It names baptism specifically, sweeps in every mode and every administration with *however administered* — so no one can escape by saying “they only mean the Baptist kind” — and denies that it moves the sinner one step. The Statement’s only reference to water Baptism places it in a list of things that do not save. Article nine also speaks of believers being baptized into Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit, but that is precisely not the sacrament under dispute.

And notice the proof text. Article five’s clause on baptism closes with a string of Scripture citations, and the last of them is Titus 3:5 — the *washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*. That is the very verse the Small Catechism sets at the center of its own teaching on baptism: the water is “a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit,” *as St. Paul says, Titus, chapter three*. We build the sacrament on this text; they lean on it to deny the sacrament. The same verse, confessed in opposite directions. After that, no neutral reading of CEF’s statement is available.

Now set beside it what our congregations have bound themselves to teach. The Augsburg Confession, Article IX: baptism is necessary to salvation, the grace of God is offered through baptism, children are to be baptized, and those who reject the baptism of children are condemned. Article II: the disease of original sin condemns and brings eternal death to those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. The Small Catechism, on the Sacrament of Holy Baptism: it works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this. Article V of the Augsburg Confession, on the ministry: through the Word *and Sacraments*, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith where and when it pleases God.

Note carefully where the collision is and where it is not. CEF says the new life is implanted by the Holy Spirit *through the Word*. So this is not the old quarrel with the enthusiasts who expected the Spirit apart from any external means. CEF confesses the Spirit’s work through the Word. We confess the Word and Sacraments as instruments through which the Spirit gives faith. The disagreement is precise and total at the point in question:

CEF denies that Baptism is such a saving instrument, while we confess that Christ joined His Word and promise to the water and included infants in His gift.

Two churches can differ about a great many things. They cannot both be right about whether Baptism — water joined to Christ’s Word and promise — saves.

And here is what this means concretely for a Lutheran congregation. A member of ours who signs on as a Good News Club worker will be asked to reaffirm that doctrinal agreement every year. He will be asked to affirm, in writing, annually, that the sacrament in which his own children were made heirs of eternal life cannot help a sinner take one step toward heaven. Whatever else that is, it is not a scheduling question, and it is not a matter of Christian liberty. It is a subscription to a contrary confession, required as a condition of service.

Ask the plainest possible version of the question. Would our congregation call a man to teach its children who told the board, in writing, that baptism does not move a sinner one step? Then we cannot commend to our children a program that requires its teachers to say it.

Where the child’s assurance ends up

The strongest part of this essay is not a doctrinal comparison. It is a pastoral one, and it comes from CEF’s own step-by-step instruction for counseling a child for salvation.

Their method, as they publish it, runs like this. The counselor prays for the Holy Spirit’s help and asks the child questions to see whether he understands sin, who Jesus is, and what He did on the cross. The counselor is told he will need the Spirit’s wisdom in discerning what the child understands and *whether he is sincere*. If a child will not admit she has sinned, the counselor is told not to press — a good instinct — but to conclude that she is not yet ready for a Savior, give her a gospel tract, and pray that God would reveal the truth to her later. If the child does admit sin and shows understanding, then, in their words, comes the most important part: the invitation. The counselor reads a verse such as Acts 16:31 from an open Bible, asks the child whether he believes, and if the child says yes, invites him to tell God so in prayer.

Then the counselor gives assurance. And here is exactly how CEF instructs him to do it: reread the invitation verse, reminding the child that *if he believed in Jesus, then he is saved*. Explain that when he *truly believes*, the Holy Spirit is with him always.

I want to be scrupulously fair here, because CEF is more careful than the caricature. They explicitly warn their workers not to use unscriptural language like “ask Jesus into your

heart.” They explicitly warn against giving the impression that saying a prayer is what saves. They warn against pressure and against playing the Holy Spirit. Their Statement of Faith even says that the Spirit seeks to occupy believers with Christ rather than with themselves or their experiences. If you came to this essay expecting me to mock a room full of children reciting a magic formula, I cannot give you that, because CEF has already ruled it out in print.

The problem survives all of it.

Look at the shape of the assurance. *If you believed, then you are saved.* That is a valid syllogism with a major premise straight from Scripture, and it hands the child the minor premise to supply about himself. Did I believe? Do I *truly* believe? God’s promise is certain; my possession of the thing the promise is conditioned on is the very item in question. The child has been given a true statement and pointed at his own interior to complete it.

Now follow that child forward twenty years, because the night is coming when he will need this. At three in the morning, under accusation, the question is always the same: *are you really a Christian?* And a boy raised on that syllogism has been trained to answer it by auditing himself. Did I understand it? Was I sincere — the counselor was watching for sincerity, so it must matter. Was I old enough? Did I mean it, or did I say yes because Miss Karen was smiling at me and the other children had already gone to the snack table? Was it a *true* believing or only the other kind?

There is no floor under those questions. That is the anxious bench, scaled down, made age-appropriate, and given a snack. It can produce either a hardened presumption that files the transaction away and never returns, or a cycle of re-deciding and re-dedicating and quietly wondering whether it took. CEF does not intend either result. The structure of the assurance nevertheless leaves room for both.

Compare the baptismal answer: *I am baptized.* God did something to me in water and Word, on a date that can be looked up, in front of witnesses. His promise does not rest on the vividness of my memory or the measurable strength of my believing. The Large Catechism tells the troubled Christian to take comfort in precisely this: “Nevertheless I am baptized.” In the same passage Luther says that the soul receives the promise through the Word it believes.

That qualification matters. Baptism does not save apart from faith; the Small Catechism says that it gives salvation to all who believe this, and Augsburg XIII says that the Sacraments are to be used with faith that believes the promises offered through them. Nor does Lutheran theology teach that a baptized person cannot fall away. Augsburg XII speaks expressly of those who fall after Baptism and return through repentance and faith. The ad-

vantage is not that faith disappears, but that faith has an external object. I need not certify the quality of my believing. I return in repentance and faith to a promise God has not revoked, resting not on my act of believing but on His Word in the water.

One more thing about the readiness gate, and then I will move on. A child who will not say she is a sinner is sent home with a tract as not yet ready for a Savior. I understand the pastoral reasoning and I do not think it is cruel. A Lutheran pastor would not give easy assurance to an older child who knowingly denied her sin; he would continue to apply the law and call her to repentance. But hold the language of readiness next to the font. At the font, God acts upon an infant who cannot admit anything, cannot answer any question, cannot demonstrate understanding, and cannot be assessed for sincerity — and He puts His name on her anyway. Infant Baptism proves that intellectual capacity and an assessable conversion experience are not prerequisites for the gift. When that child grows, she is to be taught to live in her Baptism through daily contrition and faith; and if she falls away, she is to be called back to the promise already addressed to her.

The objection is not to lay teachers

Now I have to be very clear, because this is where an argument like mine usually goes wrong and does real damage on the way.

Our congregation's children's Sunday school is taught by members of the congregation. Not by the pastor, not by seminary graduates — by farmers and nurses and grandmothers. This is right. Lay catechesis is not alien to Lutheran practice: the Small Catechism addresses itself in the plainest domestic terms to the head of the household teaching his own family, and a congregation may entrust defined teaching responsibilities to qualified members. If Luther expected fathers to catechize at the supper table, no one can pretend that every act of teaching the faith requires a collar.

So nothing in this essay is an argument that only called and ordained men may teach children. Let me state positively the four features that govern our arrangement, and then compare them with the limits of a CEF partnership:

Our teachers serve according to the congregation's own order. They are selected by the Board of Deacons acting under the congregation's constitution, and they are known to the body whose children they teach.

They are accountable within the congregation. The deacons share responsibility for the congregation's spiritual care, the Sunday school included, and the pastor serves with the congregation's boards and committees. If something is taught amiss, the teacher can be

corrected and the material changed. The line of responsibility is short and it actually exists.

They teach under our confession, not another one. Our constitution binds all preaching and teaching among us to the three ecumenical creeds, the unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism. A volunteer who comes to us from a Baptist or evangelical background — and many do, and thank God for them — is not given a doctrinal blank check. He is asked to teach in conformity with that standard, and the congregation helps him do it.

They use material the congregation has approved. The curriculum is answerable to the same standard as the teacher.

This arrangement follows our congregation's own confessional duty and order. Augsburg XIV guards the public ministry of Word and Sacrament by requiring a rightful call; it need not be stretched into the claim that every Sunday school assignment is an instance of the ordained office. The immediate point here is simpler: a congregation is responsible for the teaching it places before its children.

Now compare a Good News Club partnership. CEF says that a team may come from the participating church, so it is possible for the congregation to have a hand in selecting the workers. But the decisive boundaries belong to CEF: the team is trained by CEF, uses CEF's plan and approved curriculum, is screened under CEF's policy, receives CEF coaching and mentoring, and annually reaffirms CEF's doctrinal agreement. Our pastor retains authority to admonish a member, and the congregation can withdraw from the program. What neither can do is amend the curriculum to teach baptismal grace and still operate the club under CEF's confession and name.

That is the distinction. Not lay versus clergy, and not simply ours versus theirs. The question is which confession governs the teaching and who has final curricular authority.

What hosting actually commits us to

There is a version of this conversation in which someone says: we would only be lending the building. Nobody is being asked to believe anything. It is a room.

A genuinely neutral facility rental is a different question. If a congregation rents rooms to community groups under a general policy, makes no endorsement, provides no workers, and plainly identifies the tenant as independent, the mere use of the room does not by itself make the tenant's doctrine the congregation's confession. That arrangement would need to be judged on its own facts and on the congregation's facility-use policy.

But that is not the relationship CEF proposes to churches in its published partnership materials. It presents itself as coming alongside the congregation with a strategic plan, training, screening, curriculum, coaching, and mentoring so that a team from the local church can run the club; its stated aim in partnering is to help establish children in a church. It even encourages congregations to *adopt* a nearby public school. When our congregation's name goes on the program, our members staff it, our families are encouraged to send their children, and it is announced as a ministry we support, this is a partnership and an endorsement, not a neutral lease.

So the practical question before the congregation must be stated accurately. If the proposal is merely a room rental, say so and structure it honestly as one. If it is the partnership CEF advertises, the question is whether to place our name and our children under a curriculum we do not finally control and a confession we do not hold.

If the matter comes to a meeting, these are the questions I would want asked of the CEF representative, in front of everyone, and they are all fair questions because they are all about published policy:

1. Will our members who serve be required to sign the Ministry Compliance Agreement, which commits them to the Statement of Faith, and to renew it annually?
2. Does article five mean what it says about baptism, including infant baptism rightly administered?
3. May our pastor review, approve, or amend the curriculum used with our children?
4. If a teacher tells one of our baptized children that his baptism did not help him toward heaven, to whom does that child's father complain, and who has authority to require a correction?
5. How does CEF distinguish a baptized, catechized child who presently confesses Christ from a child it regards as unsaved, and may a worker speak of the promises given in Baptism when counseling that child?

I do not expect hostile answers. I expect honest ones, and I expect them to settle the question. CEF has never hidden any of this; they published all of it. The failure would be ours if we did not read it.

Objections worth answering

“But the children are hearing the Bible.” They are, and it is real Scripture, well told. But content arrives inside a frame, and the frame is also teaching. CEF says every club includes a clear presentation of the gospel and an opportunity for children to trust Jesus as Savior; in its counseling sequence, it calls the invitation the most important part. The

program also includes discipleship instruction for children it regards as saved, and that should be acknowledged. Still, a child does not absorb Bible stories neutrally and later decide what they are for; he learns what they are *for* from the shape of the hour.

“It is off-site and after school. It is not our teaching.” Location does not decide the matter. If we staff, endorse, announce, or encourage our families to attend a club as a ministry of this congregation, people will reasonably understand that we stand behind what it teaches. That is what an endorsement is. A neutral room rental, clearly identified as such, is another question; an advertised ministry partnership is not.

“We will use the materials but leave out the decision part.” Not while retaining the CEF name and partnership. CEF describes every club as including a gospel presentation and an opportunity to trust Christ, requires workers to stay within its approved curriculum, and trains them in its counseling method. Remove that structure and you are no longer running the program CEF authorizes. Retain it and the doctrinal conflict remains, especially in the moment a child lingers after the review game and asks a question.

“You are just being sectarian. Article nine of their statement even warns against denominational bigotry.” It does, and I have read it, and I want to answer it rather than dodge it. Their article nine defines the church as all who truly believe, holds that every believer is baptized into Christ’s body by the Spirit, and calls us to rise above sectarian prejudice. I agree with more of that than they may expect. But notice that the appeal to unity is made from within a document that has already excluded the sacrament from salvation, and that is the difficulty. Augsburg VII says that for true unity of the church it is *enough* to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. That famous *satis est* sets a floor, but it also names the subject.

Augsburg VII is not a rule against every form of cooperation with Christians outside our confession. Lutherans can work beside other Christians in many civic and charitable endeavors without pretending to have achieved church unity. But a Good News Club partnership is not merely civic cooperation. It is a continuing work of public religious teaching, staffed and commended by congregations, under a doctrinal agreement that excludes baptismal grace. Shared enthusiasm and shared volunteers cannot substitute for agreement about what gospel is being taught and how Christ gives it.

“Are you saying these children aren’t Christians? That CEF workers aren’t Christians?” No, and I want no part of that. God is not bound by our tidiness and has saved many people through preaching far worse than this. The question is never what God *can* do; it is what He has *promised* to do and where He has promised to do it. I am not adjudicating anyone’s soul. I am saying that a congregation may not commend to its children a program that requires its workers to deny what that congregation confesses.

“You just don’t care whether children are saved.” This is the one that actually lands in a congregation with our history, so let me answer it rather than wave it off. The instinct behind CEF is not a wicked instinct. It is a response to something genuinely awful — dead formalism, congregations full of baptized people who were never told what their baptism means, families who appear for confirmation and are never seen again. That is a real disease. The men who built the revival machinery were reacting to a real corpse, and our own Haugean fathers were reacting to the same thing, and they were not wrong to react.

But the answer to a church that has stopped preaching to its baptized is not a program that has written down that baptism cannot help a sinner take one step. It is a church that preaches to its baptized. The remedy for cold formalism is not a decision; it is catechesis, absolution, the Supper, and a pastor who tells the people what God has given them and calls them to receive it in faith. I want unbaptized children brought to Christ through His Word and Baptism. I want baptized children awakened to daily repentance and faith, and those who have fallen away restored. I want all of this done by the Holy Spirit through the means Christ actually instituted, with assurance resting on His promise rather than on the quality of an experience.

A smaller matter, honestly labeled

One observation I hold more loosely than the rest, offered as a caution rather than a charge.

Because Good News Clubs need public school access and community goodwill, CEF’s public materials commend the program by its civic fruits — that it teaches morals and respect, builds character, helps schools, and improves behavior, with testimonials from principals and bus drivers. I do not doubt the reports and I do not question the motive; you cannot get into a school building by promising to preach justification.

But watch what happens to the categories when the gospel is commended by its measurable effect on second-grade conduct. Given a room of children and forty minutes, moralism is the path of least resistance for anyone, Lutheran or not. It is the natural gravity of children’s ministry everywhere. One chief safeguard against it is a teacher drilled in the distinction between law and gospel. CEF does not train its workers in the specifically Lutheran form of that distinction, because it is not a Lutheran organization and has no reason to.

I would also note, for whatever it is worth, the shape of the Statement of Faith itself. Fifteen articles. Three of them on the last things. One calls believers to avoid worldly and sinful practices, including amusements and habits that cause others to stumble or bring

reproach on Christ. None teaches the saving use of the sacraments; the only mention of water Baptism says that it does not help.

What to do instead

Criticism without an alternative is complaining, and the people who bring these programs forward are usually the only ones in the congregation volunteering to do anything for children at all. So:

Catechize, and mean it. The Small Catechism was written for exactly this, by a man who thought most pastors were doing a miserable job of it. Six chief parts, memorized, explained, repeated for years. It is not a fallback. It is the thing.

Point them to the font constantly. Make the baptismal date a household holiday. Show the child the font and the register with her name in it. Teach her to answer the accusation with *I am baptized* — and teach her what the Catechism means by it: God's promise is received in faith and lived through daily contrition and repentance. Baptism is not magic, and it is not a dead event in the past. It is the external promise to which faith continually returns.

Run our own children's outreach if we want one. Weekday club, summer week, whatever shape fits — staffed by members serving under this congregation's own order, accountable within the congregation, and using material answerable to our confession. The children still get the games, the snacks, the memory verses, and the songs. Nothing worth keeping in a Good News Club requires CEF's doctrine of conversion.

Equip the parents, who have a particular God-given vocation here. Many Lutheran parents have never been shown how to lead ten minutes of catechism at a kitchen table, and are quietly relieved when a program offers to do it for them. That relief is a large part of the program's appeal.

Be gentle with the people who proposed this. They are not villains. They signed up because they love children and want them to hear about Jesus, which is more than most of the congregation has done lately. Give them something better to do and most of them will do it gladly.

The sentence she already has

A counselor kneels beside a girl who stayed behind after the review game. She has heard the weekly opportunity to trust Christ and has begun to wonder whether she has ever

truly believed. If she is treated under CEF's procedure for a child seeking salvation, the counselor does everything the training asks, and does it kindly: she prays for the Spirit's help, establishes that the child knows she is a sinner, reads Acts 16:31 out of an open Bible so the child can see that the words are God's, asks whether she believes, and invites her to tell God so. Now comes the assurance, and the counselor gives it exactly as she was taught. *If you believed in Jesus, then you are saved. That is God's promise.*

Every word of that is true. CEF intends to direct her to Christ and to the biblical promise, not to a feeling or a prayer, and that deserves to be said. Yet the promise reaches her in conditional form, and the child is left to determine whether the believing she has just performed was the true kind.

She has been baptized since she was three weeks old. Her name is in a book in the back of a church. Water was poured on her head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and there she was clothed with Christ, buried and raised with Him, given the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. She supplied no merit or capacity; even faith is God's gift. This does not mean that Baptism saves her apart from faith or that she cannot reject the gift. It means that Christ's promise came to her from outside herself before she could construct a testimony, and it remains the promise to which she is called to cling.

A Lutheran counselor need not dismiss her question or assume that an entry in a register proves her present faith. He should hear her confession, apply law and gospel, and call her to repentance and faith. But he should not relocate the beginning of God's dealing with her to this afternoon. He can tell her that Christ has already addressed her by name, and that her faith does not manufacture the gift or make the promise true. Faith receives what God has given.

The better place to stand is not the strength of a testimony, the intensity of a feeling, or the clarity of a childhood memory. It is God's external pledge, to which faith can say:

I am baptized. Christ's promise is for me.

Do not trade that pledge for an audit of the child's interior. Teach her to believe it.

Where these claims come from

Every characterization of CEF above is drawn from material CEF publishes about itself, so that anyone may check it:

- **Statement of Faith** — the fifteen articles; article five's clause on baptism and ordinances; article six on merit; article eight on the moment of trust; article nine on the church and denominational bigotry; and article ten on worldly and sinful practices.

- **Annual Ministry Compliance Agreement** — the annual reaffirmation required of CEF workers, the commitment to the Statement of Faith and approved curriculum, and the exclusion of workers who cannot adhere to the agreement.
- **“How to Lead a Child to Christ: Counseling for Salvation”** — the counseling sequence, the discernment of sincerity, the child said to be not yet ready for a Savior, the invitation as the most important part of that sequence, the assurance drawn from rereading the invitation verse, and the cautions against “ask Jesus into your heart” and against implying that a prayer saves.
- **For Churches / RCM Method** and **Adopt a Public School** — the partnership model, the provision of plan, training, screening, curriculum, coaching and mentoring, and the encouragement to adopt a public school.
- **CEF’s description of a Good News Club** — the gospel presentation and opportunity to trust Christ in each club, the discipleship component, worker training, and subscription to CEF’s Statement of Faith.
- **CEF press and promotional material** — the civic-benefit framing of Good News Clubs and the testimonials from school personnel.
- **Good News Club v. Milford Central School**, 533 U.S. 98 (2001).

Confessional citations are to the Augsburg Confession, the Small Catechism, and the Large Catechism. Our congregation’s formal subscription names the three ecumenical creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther’s Small Catechism. The Large Catechism is cited here as a witness to the wider Lutheran confessional tradition, not as an additional document our constitution formally names. The AFLC’s published declaration of faith and model congregational constitution provide the denominational context for those claims. The AFLC tract **“Baptism Is Not Magic”** supplies a concise warning against treating Baptism as an unconditional guarantee apart from continuing faith.