Guidelines for Culturally Responsive Support: Working with Refugee and Immigrant Children and Youth with Limited English Proficiency

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The Purpose:

This document outlines strategies and supports to ensure children with limited English proficiency can fully engage in the NAC USA Sunday School, Religious Instruction, and Youth curriculum. These practices, though not exhaustive, seek to actively encourage participation in congregational life, ensure access to the teaching of the gospel and the New Apostolic doctrine in a comprehensive way, while providing robust support to the children/youth during their transition to the NAC USA. We aim to honor each person's culture, without any intention of taking it away. Our purpose is to embrace and cherish every soul, fostering a loving environment where the sharing of cultures becomes a supportive element in our collective journey towards becoming the bride of Christ.

Things to Consider:

- What language(s) is spoken?
- What language proficiency is each child/youth exhibiting?
    - non-English speaker – uses no English
    - limited-English speaker – can communicate basic needs in English
    - fluent-English speaker – communicates mostly in English
- What is the literacy level of adults?
- What are the ages of the children/youth?
- What are the children/youth interests?
- How many teachers / volunteers do you have that speak the native language only and that speak both English and the native language?

Information gathered from the questions above will be useful when creating groups, determining resources, and making program decisions that will support learning and integration into the congregation. All program decisions should be made by the local Children's / Youth Ministry team in collaboration with the rector and align with the congregational goals and needs.

Resources / Teaching Tools:

- Music – in native language or English - Swahili Song Book
- Sunday School and Religious Instruction lessons are available in English, Spanish, and Swahili (the Swahili lesson has been translated using Google Translate)
    - Sunday School
    - Religious Instruction
- THRIVE Small Group discussion guides are available in English and Spanish
    - THRIVE Small Group - English
    - THRIVE Small Group - Spanish
- Picture Bible or picture books of Bible stories
- Hands on games and activities that require minimal use of language
- Teacher / volunteer who speaks the native language
- Pictures, visuals, videos and / or objects for teaching Bible lessons

Strategies and Supports:

Ensure that the practice of grouping children is exclusively reserved for the delivery of the core Bible lesson only. This approach guarantees that all children can access the information in a comprehensible manner. All games, crafts, snacks, videos, additional activities etc. should be taught as a whole group, in English.

- **Grouping Options: Whole Group = All children or the entire class / Small Group = a subset of all children or the class**
    - **Small Group Option -** group children by their language proficiency (non-English speaker, limited-English speaker, fluent-English speaker) when teaching the core Bible lesson and use a translated lesson for the non-English speaking group. A volunteer who is proficient in the native language should teach the core Bible lesson using the translated materials. This is the only time the children/youth should be taught in a separate group. As children become more proficient in English, the separate groups should fade and children should be taught together.
    - **Small Group Option -** If classes are normally grouped by age/grade (K-2nd grade class, 3rd-5th grade class, etc.) then the same groupings (for the teaching of the core Bible lesson only) mentioned above would occur within those age/grade grouped rooms, if there is an ample number of volunteers who speak the native language.
    - **Small Group Option -** If there are not enough volunteers who speak the native language, the core Bible lesson can be taught in rotations (one group is taught the core Bible lesson while the other group is doing a craft, game, or activity, and then the other group is taught the core Bible lesson while the first group does a craft, game, or activity).
    - **Whole Group Option –** Headsets for the non-English speakers and a translator could be used if the preference is to teach the core Bible lesson in a whole group.
    - **Whole Group Option -** A partial translation of the key points into the native language is recommended if the preference is to teach the core Bible lesson in a whole group and headsets are not available. Delayed translation (English is spoken and then a direct translation into the native language is spoken) is not recommended with young children.

- **Sample Schedule Using Grouping:**
    - Music (15 min): Music is always taught as a **whole group** using songs in English and in the native language.
    - Check In / Welcome (5 min): is always taught as a **whole group** w/ translation assistance as needed.
    - Core Bible Lesson (20 min): is taught in **small groups** (grouped by language proficiency) by a native speaker using translated materials.
    - Games, Crafts, Activities (10 min): is always taught as a **whole group** w/ translation assistance as needed.
    - Wrap Up / Closing (5 min): is always taught as a **whole group** w/ translation assistance as needed.

- **Teaching Tips:**
    - Get to know each child and their English language level proficiency so you can appropriately support them and group/pair them with other children **(non-English speaker, limited-English speaker, fluent-English speaker)**
    - Integrate real-life contexts and authentic materials into your lessons. This helps students connect what's being taught to everyday situations, making the lesson more relevant and meaningful. – **use lots of pictures, visuals, objects, gestures, and video whenever possible.**
    - Incorporate culturally relevant content in your lessons to make the learning experience more relatable and engaging. This includes using **literature, media, and examples that reflect their cultural backgrounds.**
    - Prioritize the gospel. Choose games, crafts, or activities that encourage meaningful interactions, experiences, and universal messages **but do not require a lot of language use.**
    - Pair children together during games, crafts, snacks, videos, additional activities etc. Pair fluent-English speakers with non-English speakers or limited-English speakers. This way each non/limited-English speaker has a peer to help and support them.
    - Leverage technology to enhance learning. Use **videos, pictures, maps, music, and translation apps** to enhance the learning experience.
    - Foster peer collaboration and **pair/group work**. This not only provides opportunities for language practice but also creates a supportive learning community where children/youth can learn from each other.
    - **Be culturally sensitive and promote inclusivity** in the classroom. Acknowledge and celebrate the diverse backgrounds of refugee and immigrant children/youth. Create an environment where everyone feels respected and valued. **Sing songs from both cultures, play games from both cultures, learn dances from both cultures etc..**
    - Be willing to **adapt the environment or the teaching** to the needs of the children/youth.
    - Utilize **pictures, drawings, and other visual aids** to help convey the meaning of words and concepts.
    - Use a **whiteboard or flipchart** to illustrate key points.

- Learn a few basic phrases in the children/youth's native language to create a sense of familiarity and comfort. **Knowing simple greetings, expressions, and common words can go a long way in building rapport.**
- **Use simple language** to facilitate better understanding. Avoid figurative language, euphemisms, and sarcasm.
- **Break down instructions** into smaller, manageable segments.
- Engage in **hands-on activities that don't heavily rely on language**, such as crafts, games, and interactive learning.
- Allow and **encourage non-verbal communication**, such as gestures, drawings, and expressions.
- **Create an atmosphere where children feel comfortable** expressing themselves in various ways.
- **Repeat key instructions and concepts** multiple times.
- **Create visual schedules** for the Sunday school activities to help children understand the flow of the class. This can reduce anxiety and help children feel like they belong.
- **Be culturally sensitive and aware** of different customs and traditions. Be sure all children know where the bathroom is located, what the expectation is when a child needs to use the bathroom (do they ask the teacher, do they just go to the bathroom, etc.).
- **Communicate regularly with parents or guardians** to understand the child's background and any specific needs or concerns.
- **Collaborate with families** to create a supportive learning environment. A meeting with all parents where expectations are shared in a clear and loving way is a wonderful way to begin building relationships with parents.
- Embrace **and celebrate the diversity** within your class.
- **Highlight similarities and differences in a positive way** to foster a sense of belonging. Allow children to share games, songs, snacks etc. from their native country.
- **Teachers have the freedom** to adjust the schedule and the order of the required elements of the SS & RI lessons or the THRIVE small group discussion materials to fit the needs of the class or congregation.

Remember to be patient, flexible, and understanding. Creating an inclusive and supportive environment will not only help children and Youth learn but also contribute to their overall positive experience in Sunday School and Youth and to building a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can using native language support in Sunday School help children with limited English proficiency understand the core messages of the gospel and New Apostolic doctrine more deeply?

2. What are effective strategies for teaching the gospel to mixed-language groups while ensuring that all children, regardless of their English proficiency, can grasp the spiritual lessons?

3. How can integrating culturally relevant content and activities into the gospel lessons make the teachings more relatable and meaningful for children from diverse backgrounds?

4. In what ways can peer collaboration and group work be leveraged to deepen children’s understanding of the gospel, fostering a sense of community and shared faith?

5. How can teachers and volunteers use visual aids, music, and hands-on activities to communicate the key messages of the gospel to children with limited English proficiency?