

Report of the Faith Formation Task Force
to
Messiah Lutheran Church Council

August 10, 2020

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Faith Formation Charter

Messiah Lutheran Church Council invited congregants to submit their names to participate in a task force to look at Faith Formation at Messiah Lutheran Church. The following was the charge given to them:

Name: Messiah Youth and Family Ministry / Faith Formation Task Force

Reports to: Messiah Lutheran Church Council

Context: Ministry with youth and their families, along with an emphasis on the life-long formation of faith from cradle to grave, has been a hallmark of Messiah Lutheran Church. In the context of Deacon Traci Vatne's retirement from faith formation and broad cultural shifts, Messiah's Church Council is authorizing a task force to explore future directions and practices for faith formation (including youth and family ministry) at Messiah.

Purpose: The task force's purpose is fourfold:

1. Provide the church council with an understanding of current and emerging trends in both youth and family and life-long faith formation ministry, with an emphasis on how these two ministries are understood to overlap and/or diverge
2. Document current and emerging faith formation practices in congregations that emphasize faith formation as a "life-long" pursuit
3. Recommend potential goals for these ministries in alignment with Messiah's currently stated vision and mission priorities
4. Recommend potential staffing models which can support a future-oriented faith formation ministry.

Tasks: The primary tasks of this task force will include:

1. Assess current literature informing the practice of both youth and family ministry and life-long faith formation ministry and present a summary to the church council
2. Engage in conversation with leaders and practitioners of these ministries to ascertain trends, challenges, and opportunities for congregations and incorporate insights from these conversations in the above summary. This should include other ELCA congregations as well as other denominations.
3. Gather, summarize, and present to the church council key internal attitudes and values regarding these ministries within Messiah Lutheran and compare them with learnings from both task 1 and task 2
4. Identify key demographic trends in the greater Auburn area that might inform both the challenges and opportunities for the future of these ministries and present to the church council
5. Identify potential future partners beyond the congregation who might become allies in these ministries and open new avenues for their practice and present to the church council
6. Draft a future vision and goals for these ministries that the church council and congregation can use when making decisions about the ongoing direction of

these ministries. These should align with Messiah's current vision and mission priorities.

7. Explore various program models of these ministries as implemented within congregational contexts beyond Messiah and evaluate their applicability to Messiah's context
8. Make written recommendations of various staffing configurations that might support the above vision, goals, and models of these ministries including job descriptions and salary ranges.

The following report contains the findings of the Faith Formation Task Force and recommendations for Messiah Lutheran Church.

Vision for Faith Formation

The Faith Formation task force spent time working on a vision for Faith Formation at Messiah Lutheran Church. In 2015, the ELCA published "A Framework for Faith Formation in the ELCA." We recommend that Messiah seek to align its faith formation efforts with the framework established by the ELCA.

Faith Formation in the ELCA is grounded in five values.

Recognizing the church's critical role in faith formation, our mission is to cultivate a dynamic culture of faith formation within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

This mission is guided by five values.

1. Faith formation is a **shared calling** of the church best carried out when all expressions work in concert with one another.
2. Faith formation calls us, personally and communally, to **collaboration and cooperation**. Relational in nature, faith formation thrives as people with diverse gifts and passions come together around this shared calling.
3. Faith formation in the **first third of life is a critical ministry** of the church. Attending to faith formation in the early years of life has a greater impact on the life of an individual, a greater chance of being integrated into a person's everyday living throughout their lifetime, and is part of the promise faith communities make at baptism.
4. Faith formation is a **lifelong journey**. As A Social Statement on: Our Calling in Education states faith formation is for all people at all ages in all stages of life.¹³ Each stage of life has opportunities and challenges for claiming our identity as a child of God and living in response to our trust in God. Therefore, attending to faith formation in the second and third chapters of life is important.
5. Faith formation invites **creativity and compassion**. Nurturing faith and trust in a living God provides the opportunity for God's people to embody God's creative and redemptive love in the world as they carry out this calling.

The ELCA's **VISION** for faith formation is grounded in **four central components** that are applied to each stage in a person's life. The age groupings include: Children on the Way/Infants, Preschool-Kindergarten, Grades 1-5, Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12, Young Adults, and Middle-Senior Adults. A copy of this document can be found as Appendix A.

1. ***Spiritual Practices*** are activities undertaken with intentional awareness of the presence of the Holy. Individuals and communities use these practices to revere and rest in the mystery of the Divine. Used repeatedly, they foster a habit of attention to oneself, God, and neighbor. We would add that worship is a central focus of spiritual practices.
2. ***Respectful Relationships*** can be formed with family, friends, church staff, lay mentors, spiritual directors, and coaches. Healthy relationships always include trust, listening, challenge, compassion, and commitment to one another. Each person's location on her faith journey (e.g., wilderness or mountaintop) guides the interactions.
3. ***Guided Learning*** happens when we visit and revisit Biblical stories, or hear and share each other's faith stories, with a sense of wonder and discovery. Guided learning is not simply about garnering knowledge, but also about wrestling with how to live faithfully each day.
4. ***Faith-filled Service*** recognizes the need to act on behalf of one's beliefs. Whether or not the work is done outwardly in Jesus's name, the faith underlying the service makes it a demonstration of love for God and neighbor.

We recommend that Messiah adopt the ELCA's vision and four components of faith formation and the building blocks for faith formation at Messiah. As Messiah considers what Faith Formation looks like for each stage in a person's life, we should apply each of these four components. This will align Messiah with the larger church and enable us to utilize and integrate faith formation material produced by the ELCA.

We recommend that Messiah commit to providing organized and guided Faith Formation to individuals in every age and stage in their life. We should also recognize "Faith formation in the **first third of life is a critical ministry** of the church ... and is part of the promise faith communities make at baptism."

What Does Faith Formation Look Like at Messiah Today?

At the time of this report, Messiah has two full time staff positions of 1) Director of Faith Formation and 2) Associate Director of Faith Formation and Partnerships.

The Director of Faith formation is responsible for oversight of the faith formation program to include children, youth, young adults, and families. The Director of Faith Formation provides direct programming targeted at high school and middle school aged children. Examples are weekly youth group meetings for these groups, the affirmation of baptism program (confirmation), off site weekend youth retreats, regular family and all ages events (truck or treat, ice skating, talent nights, family camp, hang night, etc.), local and regional mission trips, a yearly summer camp at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp in Lakeside Montana. They build relationships with children, youth, and families and minister to their needs. They participate in worship leadership including preaching as well as responsibility for the weekly children's message (either directly or recruiting others.) They recruit, screen, train, and supervise volunteers who are involved in the

Faith Formation program. They lead all fundraising for children and youth programming and manage the accompanying budget. They supervise the associate director of faith formation as well as the nursery staff.

The Associate Director of Faith Formation and Partnerships is responsible for helping the congregation develop lively growth in faith and foster both internal and external partnerships that serve the greater Auburn community. This full-time position is designed to work in conjunction with church staff and congregation members and friends to 1) nurture growth in faith for our youngest children through youth in 6th grade and their families and 2) build both internal and external partnerships that allow the congregation to accompany those in need. They supervise and coordinate volunteers to organize Sunday school for middle school and younger children, coordinate vacation bible school in the summer. They also spend about half time coordinating, developing, presenting and guiding opportunities for service as well as creating and supporting networks of mission compatible partners.

The committee was unable to identify who is currently responsible for organizing and overseeing adult education. This was previously part of the associate pastor's job description. Our former associate pastor set up the 2019-20 Sunday morning adult education. After her departure, the assistant director of faith formation implemented that plan until the pandemic started.

The committee was also unable to identify who is currently responsible for organizing and overseeing small groups. This was also part of the associate pastor's job description. With the resignations of our most recent associate pastor, it appears small groups are primarily responsible for supervising themselves and there is no unifying or organizing theme or guidance to the small group programming.

The committee discussed each of the four components of faith formation in regard to what they looked like at Messiah across all age groups. Here are our thoughts.

Spiritual Practices:

Strengths:

- Baptism celebrated in worship services
- Weekly communion
- Importance of offering discussed with both children and adults
- Strong programs of “spiritual mountaintop experiences” for youth, including FLBC, mission trips, and events like the ELCA Gatherings
- Lay leadership in worship
- Small groups and Bible studies

Weaknesses

- Engaging people in small groups
- Many of “spiritual mountaintop experiences” focused on youth and not across all ages
- Many attend worship only sporadically
- Little discussion/instruction/guidance on spiritual practices that can be done in different settings (individual, couples, families, in the home, etc.)
- Providing concrete examples rather than just generalities
- A wide variety of activities on Sunday mornings for all age groups.
- We need more multi-generational mentoring (grandparents of parents, grandparents to kids)
- Multi-generational activities are lacking
- Being able to speak truth across generations

- Knowing each other (lack of nametags, etc.) across large building so that we can acknowledge and guide each other
- Intentional welcoming
- If we want to encourage more family worship, running Sunday School at the same time as worship works against this

Respectful Relationships:

Strengths:

- This is the basis of the whole youth and family programs. The work that our current staff is doing goes way beyond the “programmed activities” to engage with children, youth, and their families in life.
- FaithWalk program
- Godparents as part of baptism
- Two-year Sunday School program so strong relationships are able to be built - strong continuity in people engaged in VBS and other youth activities
- Celebration of children and youth in worship including AOB Sunday, Senior Sunday, Bible presentations
- Relationships of members within small groups

Weaknesses:

- Can be hard to “break into” many of the groups that are already formed and strong at Messiah
- Still a very homogeneous congregation - those who are not White, Northern Europeans aren’t always welcomed (People welcome people who look like them, those who “fit in.”)
- Youth and family programs operate as self-contained, but don’t always connect youth to congregation once they “age out” or in ways other than youth events.
- Need to acknowledge/provide opportunities for contributions/ideas of the entire range of people to be valued/listened to
- Few opportunities to build relationships with people outside one’s circle of friends.
- Number of children and youth in worship
- Addition of middle service changed the opportunity for families to worship together
- Being a welcoming organization takes a lot of concerted effort- we need a structure built around this (intentional effort / teach how to do it and let people know the expectations)

Guided Learning:

Strengths:

- Strong children and youth program that involves Sunday School, AOB, VBS, Youth Group, etc.
- Overnight camps and retreats focused on Bible learning
- Selection of Confirmation Verse
- Small Groups doing Bible studies together
- Daily devotionals on Zoom
- Feminist Book Club
- Adult Forums

Weaknesses:

- Especially with adults, smaller numbers are aware of or participate in guided learning through church
- No new member classes
- Adult groups need pastoral guidance/interaction.

- Many adults without church background do not know basics of Bible, Lutheran theology
- Leadership, cohesion of various groups (most group learning is not connected to greater Messiah community but operates as satellite.)
- General congregational attitude that learning is over after AOB.
- Importance of seeing adults engaged in Faith Formation Services - creating space for all to be educated
- Adult retreats, family retreats, women's retreats, men's retreats -- need to expand way outside of youth - different configurations
- No real path to connecting with small groups - need to do real detective work to find out what groups are available
- Looking at tackling small groups because of limitations around large group activities in the post-COVID-19 world
- Gap in focus of guided learning between AOB and when they come back from college as well young singles and young marrieds (model of St. Mark's by the Narrows)
- Need to increase the quality of Adult Education

Faith-filled Service:

Strengths:

- Multi-generational service activities to engage the congregation such as God's Work our Hands, sock drive
- Community Supper, Food Bank and other service activities
- Mission Sunday
- Hampers
- Quilters and Knitters
- Mission Trips and Mission Minis (for youth)
- Prison Ministry

Weaknesses:

- Small percentage of the congregation actively engages in service activities through the church (they may be doing them outside of the church)
- People don't know how to connect to service opportunities within church.
- People are not connected to "Faith Partners" or other opportunities in community for service.
- New ideas/leadership is not encouraged, solicited, or trained.
- Few opportunities are open to participate in committees/teams (Maybe open up more things to volunteers rather than just picking people.)
- No Mission Trips for adults
- Could be regular opportunities like Northwest Harvest -- don't necessarily need to be a big annual project

What Does Our Community Look Like Today?

(Who is Our Neighbor?)

In 2015, the City of Auburn published its most recent Comprehensive Plan¹. This is an expansive document the City produces to understand what its community looks like and to plan for its current and future needs. The two most relevant demographic categories are Racial and Ethnic Characteristics and Age.

These demographics should be considered against the background that Auburn is a growing community. By 2030, the City's comprehensive plan estimates the population will be 90,000 (compared to 75,759 in the most recent census estimate).

Racial and Ethnic Characteristics

- Auburn has seen significant demographic changes over the last decade.
- According to the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 70.5% of Auburn's population is White/Non-Hispanic; data from the 2000 Census reported the white population in Auburn at 79%.
- In 1990, the white population was roughly 90%. What this means is that Auburn has grown significantly more diverse in a 25-year period.
- As of 2013 estimates:
 - The overall white population is just under 50,000 at 49,238. This means that approximately 68.5% of Auburn's population is white.
 - 7,400 residents were Asian, which is just over 10% of the total population.
 - Blacks or African Americans account for about 5.5% of the population (3,932 residents)
 - American Indians account for another 2.0% (just under 1500 people).
 - Hispanics or Latinos are 13% of the population, though they are an ethnic, not a racial group. There are approximately 9,300 Hispanic or Latino residents in Auburn.

These demographic shifts point toward a more diverse Auburn. As a result of these changes in racial and ethnic makeup, the amount of people speaking a diverse number of languages have expanded dramatically.

Age Characteristics

The City's Comprehensive Plan's analysis of the age profile of the City concludes that Auburn is a statistically younger community than the state as a whole and has grown significantly younger over the last 15 years. This has been caused by growth in the number of working aged adults who have children.

¹ https://www.auburnwa.gov/city_hall/community_development/zoning_land_use/auburn_s_comprehensive_plan

AGE	TOTAL NUMBER	GROUPING	PERCENT
0-4	6,200	preschool	8%
5-9	6,100	elementary	8%
10-14	5,400	adolescents	7%
15-19	4,800	teens	6%
20-24	5,300	young adults	29%
25-29	5,500		
30-34	5,500		
35-39	5,500		
40-44	4,900	mid-life adults	28%
45-49	4,800		
50-54	5,400		
55-59	5,800		
60-64	4,500	senior adults	12%
65-69	2,600		
70-74	2,190		
75-79	1,617	elderly adults	4%
80-89	1,012		
90-100	640		
TOTAL POPULATION: 74,759			100%

In 2016, the percentage of Messiah’s members 65 and over was 40%. 59% of the congregation is over the age of 55.

The number of children in the community is growing at a rapid rate. In 2014-15, there were 15,687 students enrolled in the Auburn School District². For the 2019-20 school year, there were 18,009 students enrolled.

The diversity of the students in the district has increased as well.

Student Demographic	2014-15	2017-18	2019-20
American Indian / Alaskan Native	221 (1.4%)	197 (1.2%)	207 (1.1%)
Asian	1,194 (7.6%)	1,520 (8.9%)	1,849 (10.3%)
Black / African American	1,063 (6.8%)	1,257 (7.4%)	1,412 (7.8%)
Hispanic / Latino of any race(s)	4,150 (26.5%)	5,115 (29.9%)	5,493 (30.5%)
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	530 (3.4%)	687 (4.0%)	826 (4.6%)
Two or More Races	1,444 (9.2%)	1,662 (9.7%)	1,796 (10.0%)
White	7,081 (41.5%)	6,655 (38.9%)	6,426 (35.7%)

When we look at the demographics of the two schools that are located within three blocks Messiah Lutheran Church, we see that the demographics of our neighborhood are very diverse.

² <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/100016>

Student Demographic	Washington Elementary	Auburn High School
American Indian / Alaskan Native	0	37 (2.1%)
Asian	31 (5.0%)	154 (8.7%)
Black / African American	58 (9.3%)	162 (9.1%)
Hispanic / Latino of any race(s)	222 (35.6%)	616 (34.7%)
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	64 (10.3%)	101 (5.7%)
Two or More Races	88 (14.1%)	144 (8.1%)
White	160 (25.7%)	562 (31.6%)

Yet, at the same time, Messiah Lutheran Church remains a homogenous congregation. Most of the people attending the church, including children, are white.

We also acknowledge that demographic data of our congregation shows that our congregants are coming from a wide geographic area. In 2016, when the Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) survey was done, the distance people traveled to attend church at Messiah was diverse. 81% of the congregation traveled at least 3 miles to church while 27% are traveling more than 10 miles.

Under 4 blocks	5 – 8 blocks	1 – 2 miles	3 – 4 miles	5 – 9 miles	10 – 15 miles	Over 15 miles
0%	5%	14%	26%	28%	18%	9%

Income

In the most recent census data available, Auburn’s median household income (in 2018 dollars) was \$68,947. In the 2016 CAT, Messiah members reported a median household income of \$100,406.

Education

According to the most recent census data available, 24% of Auburn residents had a bachelor’s degree or higher. In the 2016 CAT, 53% of Messiah members had a bachelor’s degree or higher. 20% of members have a graduate degree.

How does this information impact Faith Formation at Messiah considering its own mission and vision?

The Faith Formation Task Force again reviewed the mission and vision of Messiah Lutheran Church (listed below) and believes that our recommendations are in line with the direction that the congregation set.

GUIDING VISION

We are an inclusive community following Jesus, worshiping God, striving side by side, and mending the broken places in all creation.

SIGNATURE VERSE

Micah 6:8

What does the LORD

require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

MISSION

The Mission of Messiah Lutheran Church is to:

- **Embrace** create a culture where everyone feels welcome
- **Engage** develop quality relationships with partners in a changing community
- **Enhance** provide numerous ways to live into God's call
- **Explore** cultivate abundant opportunities to grow in faith

As we look at Messiah, we see that compared to the Auburn community, the congregation is significantly older, whiter, wealthier, and more educated.

The defining demographic trends in Auburn are:

- The population is growing by adding families with children.
- Increasing racial and ethnic diversity.

As we look at faith formation in the context of our larger community, Messiah has a unique opportunity to fulfill a substantial community need by serving families with children.

Priorities:

The Faith Formation Task Force sees the following areas as priorities to be led by staff at Messiah Lutheran Church and provided with program funding:

- Children and Youth Programming – a relationally-focused program that has a solid Lutheran theological basis
- Adult Faith Formation – a robust program that engages our more educated congregation
- Small Group³ Ministry – coordination of various small groups including provision of materials, leadership training, and resources.
- Care of members (especially those dealing with illness, personal crisis, death, loss of job, and other issues.)
- Worship – spirit-filled worship services

Recommendations:

³ *Small Group Ministry is defined as study and support groups. While we recognize there are many other small groups in the church (quilters, knitters, etc.), for purposes of this report, we are defining small groups as those that meet around Bible study and relational support.*

The Faith Formation Task Force makes the following recommendations:

1. As listed above, **we recommend that Messiah adopt the ELCA's vision and four components of faith formation and the building blocks for faith formation at Messiah.** As Messiah considers what Faith Formation looks like for each stage in a person's life, we should apply each of these four components. This will align Messiah with the larger church and enable us to utilize and integrate faith formation material produced by the ELCA.
2. **We recommend that Messiah commit to providing organized and guided Faith Formation to individuals in every age and stage in their life.** We should also recognize "Faith formation in the **first third of life is a *critical* ministry** of the church ... and is part of the promise faith communities make at baptism."
3. **We recommend that the council initiate, with the Southwestern Washington Synod, a process to call a rostered, full time equivalent pastor or deacon with a primary focus on faith formation of children and youth..** They should provide direct programming targeted at high school and middle school aged children. They recruit, screen, train, and supervise volunteers who are involved in the Faith Formation program. They supervise and coordinate volunteers to organize Sunday school for middle school and younger children, coordinate vacation bible school in the summer. They provide support in worship and pastoral duties to allow our senior pastor time and opportunity to coordinate and provide direct service to adult faith formation. Finally, they have knowledge and experience in implementing congregation-wide spiritual practices and assist the Senior Pastor in creating a culture of spiritual practices throughout the life of the congregation. This person should be called to ministry at Messiah using the synod guidelines for compensation.

Recognizing the limited staffing resources available, we must set priorities for staff time. We acknowledge the ELCA's commitment to the faith formation of children and youth. "Faith formation in the **first third of life is a *critical* ministry** of the church ... and is part of the promise faith communities make at baptism."

We believe this call to action is particularly relevant in our community because the number of families with children is growing much faster than other communities in the state. By reaching out to those families and supporting them we are meeting a critical community need.

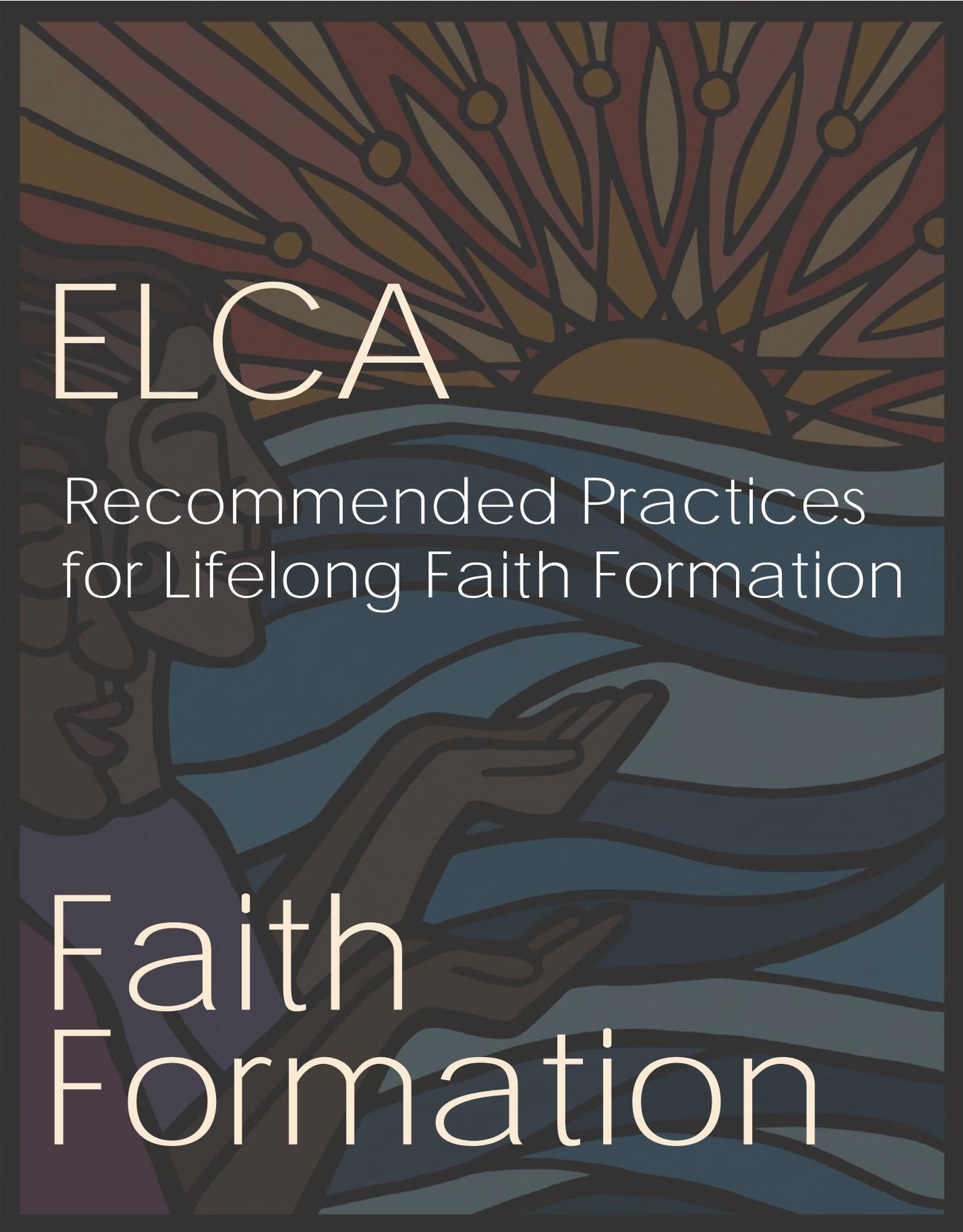
4. We also believe that adult faith formation and lifelong learning have not received appropriate emphasis in the past. This should change. **We recommend that the responsibility for coordination of adult faith formation (including both adult faith formation classes and small group ministries) become part of the job description of our senior pastor.** The first two values of faith formation in the ELCA are a shared calling and collaboration and cooperation. These are relational values which point to including more volunteer voices in the planning and implementation of Faith Formation. Messiah has the potential to develop a very robust and meaningful faith formation programs for adults young and old with strong staff leadership and a budget for speakers in partnership with volunteer support.
5. To show the importance of faith formation for all ages and stages of life and to **increase participation**, we recommend that the education hour not conflict with a church service. We want to create a structure where generations can participate in faith formation programs and also encourage multi-generational worship. This would allow more opportunities for the pastor to participate directly in faith formation programs.

6. Considering current budget constraints and our belief in the importance of faith formation for all ages at Messiah, **we recommend that we redirect resources from our partnership program to faith formation.** Currently, Messiah funds a .5 FTE focused in building and maintaining partnerships with other like-minded, mission-oriented organization in our community. We believe that this work is important. However, we believe that this work could be coordinated by volunteers with coordination with staff oversight or engagement. Therefore, our recommendation is to take the funds currently designated for partnerships and move it to help fund the full-time pastor or deacon responsible for faith formation of children and youth.

Items that came up but were out of scope:

The following items were discussed by the task force as potential recommendations. However, they were outside of the scope of what the council has asked of us. However, we wanted to include them as we believe they are important items for the council to consider.

1. The church should consider bringing back a part-time pastor of caring ministries to help coordinate care team ministry and support our members in crisis. We feel this is an important role that is not currently being filled at Messiah.
2. The council should relook at the job priorities of the Senior Pastor and his letter of call to readjust his priorities. The suggested addition of adult faith formation to his job description will take a significant amount of time. Additionally, the staffing of Messiah has changed quite a bit since his call.
3. The church council or senior pastor should make sure that all staff members have accurate job descriptions. It was difficult not to be able to access a job description for the Director of Faith Formation.



ELCA

Recommended Practices
for Lifelong Faith Formation

Faith
Formation

Dear Faith Practitioner,

Perhaps you find yourself entering into a new faith community, or you've been a part of one your whole life. Wherever you find yourself, the Good News is that Jesus is there with you. And Jesus invites us to practice faith on a daily basis. We may never get it *all* right, but with Jesus by our side, we trust we won't get it all wrong, either. Our hope is that within this short booklet, you find practical resources for your ongoing faith journey whether you are an individual, a household, a congregation, or another faith-filled community. Please keep in mind these are RECOMMENDED PRACTICES so when using any suggestions adapt them freely to your situation and setting.

Tips for use: *This handbook gives concrete, easily accessible touchpoints for faith formation, but these are just a few examples. We encourage use of elca.org and ministrylinks.online for more comprehensive resources.



1

*The age brackets in the following material are meant for quick accessibility and not to limit the scope of where you might be in faith. Several of these practices you might already be doing, while the less familiar might stretch you--let the Spirit guide where to start.

*This resource also seeks to be gender inclusive with alternating uses of her/his/their so that we might all envision ourselves as faith formation participants.

Blessings to you as you live out your faith, claim your Christian identity, and share God's love in the world in creative and unique ways.²

Together in ministry,



The Reverend Janelle Rozek Hooper

Program Director for Ministry with Children on behalf of the Domestic Mission Unit

Background

For years Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations have taught Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* as central to the rite of Confirmation, a traditional benchmark in faith formation. The fourfold **ELCA Recommended Practices for Lifelong Faith Formation** broaden our tradition beyond just goals for confirmation youth but for people of all ages in diverse ministry settings, including, but not limited to, congregations, campus ministries, Christian schools, outdoor ministries, and households/the domestic church.^{3 4}

Congregations, for the most part, teach us Christians beliefs and provide safe spaces to wrestle with them through worship services, education, acts of justice, and a variety of programming. As effective as church programming can be, it cannot replace home lives filled with faith conversations, rituals, and service to others.^{5 6} Whether we are “young” or not, daily connections to faith with the support of others exponentially strengthen us in our faith journeys.

These journeys are ongoing and build upon previous knowledge and experiences. So how can anyone else know where you are on the journey, and what you need to move forward? Conversations and questions are key.

ELCA Recommended Practices for Lifelong Faith Formation provides quick reference points for guidance when in-depth questions arise (e.g., “Should I ask my fourth grader to give to the offering?”). Answers may vary, so this handbook encourages faith-filled questioning and wondering while providing basic guidance for lifelong faith formation in four specific areas: spiritual practices, respectful relationships, guided learning, and faith-filled service.



Biblical Grounding:

In the book of Acts, Lydia engaged in a **spiritual practice** by regularly joining Paul’s Christian community at the river to pray. There by the water, Paul and Silas engaged with Lydia, a worshipper of God, in a mutually **respectful relationship**. With trust established, Lydia experienced the Good News of Jesus through Paul’s **guided learning**. She then decided that she and her household should be baptized in that very river. Immediately Lydia invited Paul and Silas back to her house for hospitality in **faith-filled service** to God’s ministry.⁷

ELCA Vision

The ELCA⁸ has a vision for lifelong faith formation⁹ that is grounded in biblical stories such as Lydia's, where four central faith formation components stand out.¹⁰

Spiritual Practices



Respectful Relationships



Guided Learning



Faith-filled Service



Spiritual Practices are activities undertaken with intentional awareness of the presence of the Holy. Individuals and communities use these practices to revere and rest in the mystery of the Divine. Used repeatedly, they foster a habit of attention to oneself, God, and neighbor.

Respectful Relationships can be formed with family, friends, church staff, lay mentors, spiritual directors, and coaches. Healthy relationships always include trust, listening, challenge, compassion, and commitment to one another. Each person's location on her faith journey (e.g., wilderness or mountaintop) guides the interactions.

Guided Learning happens when we visit and revisit Biblical stories, or hear and share each other's faith stories, with a sense of wonder and discovery. Guided learning is not simply about garnering knowledge, but also about wrestling with how to live faithfully each day.

Faith-filled Service recognizes the need to act on behalf of one's beliefs. Whether or not the work is done outwardly in Jesus's name, the faith underlying the service makes it a demonstration of love for God and neighbor.

Children on the Way/Infants¹¹



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray for the entirety of the child's life in faith, even from before birth.
- Have the child baptized.
- Play Christian children's music.



Respectful Relationships:

- Build trust through "attuned attention, engagement, smiling, holding, rocking, and singing."¹⁰
- Grandparents: pray, participate in the child's life, tell them stories, and be physically affectionate.
- Godparents: pray and attend church with the child, light baptismal candle yearly together.



Guided Learning:

- Read sacred stories and sing beloved hymns to the child while cuddling, building trust, familiarity with stories, and love for reading and music.
- Consider ELCA preschools.
- Join a parent group and/or Bible study group to grow in your parenting skills and your own relationship with God.



Faith-filled Service:

- When nursing and/or feeding the baby, view time together as a holy gift.
- When bathing or changing the child, stay present to her in the moment.
- Be aware of growth in your own spiritual gifts (such as patience) when the child awakens you in the night.

Preschool–Kindergarten



Spiritual Practices:

- Experiment with prayer with pictures.
- Start to learn liturgical responses (e.g., “Amen,” “Thanks be to God”).
- Become aware that the baptismal waters claim him with God’s love, make the sign of the cross on her forehead.
- Come to the communion table for the elements and/or a blessing, understanding that we come because Jesus welcomes us all to the table.



Respectful Relationships:

- Develop an awareness that God loves her deeply.
- Claim themselves as created and beloved by God.
- Converse about faith as a lived practice when at home.
- Know name of her church, pastor(s), and/or teacher(s).



Guided Learning:

- Attend Bible class (e.g., Sunday school, Godly Play).
- Learn about Moses; Eve and Adam; Jonah; Jesus, born of Mary and Joseph; and Jesus’ death and resurrection. Familiarity can come through listening to stories or music, whether at home or church.
- Participate in day camps like Vacation Bible School.
- Experience church as a warm, welcoming, worship-filled community where they can wonder about God.



Faith-filled Service:

- Help at home: set the table, put away clothes, care for the family pet.
- Help at church: sing in children’s choir, usher.
- Bring canned goods to the church or a local charity.

Grades 1-5



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray at mealtimes and/or before bed.
- Give a regular offering.
- Pray the Lord's Prayer by heart.



Respectful Relationships:

- Know by name and receive support from at least three Christian adults other than parents and grandparents (e.g., pastor, teacher, neighbor).
- Understand the body as created in the image of God therefore worthy of love, claim private body parts as private.
- Start to do more on her own with supportive supervision.



Guided Learning:

- Retell the basics of core Bible stories in his own words (e.g., the creation story, Sarah and Abraham, Moses, Mary Magdalene and Jesus).
- Read Bible storybooks and Psalters related to these stories.
- Attend day or overnight church camp (e.g., family camp for two to four nights).



Faith-filled Service:

- Serve at church as an acolyte, reader, altar guild member, vocalist, or instrumentalist.
- Be responsible for household cleaning tasks (e.g., setting the table, taking out the trash).
- Perform acts of kindness towards grandparents.

Grades 6-8



Spiritual Practices:

- Curious about God and engaging more in conversational prayers.
- Say Lord's Prayer or impromptu prayer.
- Fast for age-appropriate amount of time (e.g., one meal a week with family).
- Participate regularly in Sunday offerings (e.g., use church envelopes).



Respectful Relationships:

- Receive acknowledgment from congregational/community leaders.
- Develop a mentorship relationship with a congregation member.
- Help lead VBS or Sunday School.
- Show awareness of one's own gender and form appropriate relationships with people of other genders.



Guided Learning:

- Attend church camp.
- Come up with his own favorite Bible verse.
- Know a sacred story that most closely relates to her personal story.
- Learn about available resources (e.g., prayer book, faith website).



Faith-filled Service:

- Help a neighbor by bringing a meal, mowing the lawn, or babysitting.
- Volunteer at food bank.
- Serve as a eucharistic minister (e.g., bring communion to the homebound with a parent's help).
- Serve on a youth committee, in the church nursery or for a service organization.

Grades 9-12



Spiritual Practices:

- Become comfortable leading prayers and mentioning friends and family in petitions.
- Continue to give to the church and to causes that are important to her.
- Serve in worship leadership roles (e.g., reader, communion/worship assistant).
- Participate in a “spiritual mountaintop experience,” perhaps the ELCA Youth Gathering, a service trip, or a summer camp.



Respectful Relationships:

- Be in a mentor-mentee relationship with at least one faithful, trustworthy adult.
- Mentor younger youth as camp counselor or nursery worker.
- Develop positive friendships that are encouraging and countercultural, particularly in their exclusion of gossiping and competition.
- Remain aware of changes in the body, discussing with a trusted adult the sexual aspects of dating life.



Guided Learning:

- Attend a Bible study with peers or adults.
- Dive deeper into Lutheran theology by learning more about the Reformation.
- Share his faith story (written or oral) with a group of peers or the congregation.
- Learn about other Christian denominations and religions and how they compare to the ELCA.



Faith-filled Service:

- Be involved with a congregational committee or team.
- Volunteer regularly in the community.
- Go on a domestic or international service trip.
- Lead or participate in a fundraising event for a local individual, charity, or cause.

Young Adults



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray for the needs of the world.
- Share sacred traditions, particularly around the holidays.
- Lead worship.
- Give to the church as well as to charities that are clear about their mission.



Respectful Relationships:

- Form intimate relationships shaped by faith, seeing the body as a gift from God and treating other people's bodies with respect.
- Maintain transparency and authenticity with at least one peer/adult in her life (e.g., former youth leader/pastor).
- Appreciate and respect other faith and religious traditions.
- Support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people and relationships.



Guided Learning:

- Recognize the historical context of the Bible as the inspired word of God.
- Read books related to faith.
- Ask questions and wrestle with his faith/life in an open/nonjudgmental setting.
- Develop a personalized faith narrative drawn from tradition and reflection that strengthens her identity and quality of life.



Faith-filled Service:

- Engage in advocacy for justice and societal transformation (e.g., speak out on social media, march for a cause).
- Care for creation (e.g., recycling, shopping local).
- Utilize faith embodied in leadership gifts in or outside of church.
- Serve in global mission, in campus ministry, or as a camp counselor.

Middle-Senior Adult



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray regularly with friends/spouse/children/grandchildren.
- Budget responsibly so that she can both save and share with the church and other charities (even sharing sacrificially).
- Study the Bible outside of church, using commentaries/devotionals.
- Worship with the church community most weeks and invite friends along.



Respectful Relationships:

- Encourage faith-filled wondering in others, journey alongside godchildren/children/grandchildren/children of the congregation.
- Model Christ's welcome, respecting those who are "different" in race, ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, sexual orientation, and/or religion.
- Support the person he/she is in a dating or committed relationship with, sharing in faith conversations and prayers for one another.
- Seek to make all groups inclusive and welcoming of newcomers.



Guided Learning:

- Become comfortable with learning and discussing the devotional, literary, historical, and theological dimensions of a biblical passage.
- Seek out movies, videos, and books with religious themes and reflect on how they relate to his own belief system.
- Model openness to learning, especially during times of transition, by hearing all sides and supporting the church's mission.
- Show familiarity with the lectionary, Creation, Exodus, the prophets, Psalms, Jesus' life, the early church, the Reformation, and salvation as a gift from God.



Faith-filled Service:

- Use talents and gifts to help others (e.g., teach English as a second language).
- Volunteer in the community (e.g., PTA, scouts, local government).
- Serve consistently in some role(s) in the congregation, intentionally welcome and train others to participate in the ministry.
- Pass on faith stories, perhaps in one-to-one interactions (e.g., as a parent,

Sources

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 3. Kehrwald, Leif, et al. *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Connecticut: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016. 85. Print.
 4. Keep in mind the context of your specific setting for best use of these broad ranging practices.
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 7. Acts 16 as retold by Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper.
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 9. “Lifelong faith formation in the ELCA is guided by our baptismal covenant and the Holy Spirit’s ongoing guidance as we live among God’s faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 2006. 227. Print.
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Additional Resources

A Framework for Faith Formation in the ELCA Fall 2015

Introduction

“All have faith in something; the question is,
is it trust in the living God or in something else?”

Will our children be nurtured and transformed

by the faith and community that trust and confess the God who calls us?

Few questions are more urgent and significant for this church’s life and mission.”¹

Social Statement on: Our Calling in Education, 2007

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is a church committed to active involvement in nurturing faith and trust in the living God. This commitment is grounded in our baptismal covenant to grow in faith, love, and obedience to the will of God, as we also love our neighbor and seek justice in the world.² This call is not new, yet today many of the challenges and opportunities the church faces are. Navigating these changes while remaining faithful to our call requires direction and vision.

The Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, Elizabeth Eaton, has named four emphases for our church as a way of focusing our work. They are:

1. We are church
2. We are Lutheran
3. We are church together
4. We are church for the sake of the world.³

As leaders in the ELCA with deep commitments to living out this baptismal covenant of growing in faith we want to honor these four emphases, integrate them into our work, and propose a shared vision for this calling.

Lutherans believe “[f]aith formation is a gift of the Holy Spirit that continues throughout life.”⁴ Communities of faith join the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit by engaging in faith practices and educational ministries. Recognizing and attending to both God’s presence *and* Christian community is necessary for lifelong formation and transformation to occur. What does attending to faith formation within a Lutheran frame for the sake of the world look like? And what does it mean for our ELCA ministries?

This document offers a framework for faith formation in the ELCA and a vision to guide our future. Developed out of conversation with faith formation ministry leaders, current research, and congregational practices, this framework offers direction as it proposes a theological grounding, description of effective faith formation, and mission, values, and vision for faith formation in the ELCA. Its spirit

¹ *A Social Statement on: Our Calling in Education in the ELCA* amended and adopted by the Churchwide Assembly, August 10, 2007, p. 12.

² ELW baptismal service.

³ See the ELCA website for more:

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ClaimedGatheredSent_AGuideForConversation.pdf?_ga=1.50351081.1163565321.1395237646. Accessed March 10, 2015.

⁴ *A Social Statement on: Our Calling in Education*, 13.

is one of collaboration with a desire for orienting faith formation and creating a movement within the ELCA.

Section 1: Theological Framework through a Lutheran Lens

Faith formation in the ELCA is grounded in Lutheran theology. Seven commitments are vital to this calling and our shared work.

1. As Lutheran Christians, faith formation is rooted in the recognition that **faith is a gift** from God guided by the Holy Spirit and made evident in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This gift, available to each person, is formed over time, in community, and in our encounters in the world.⁵
2. This gift of faith shapes our **baptismal identity** as children of God and our view of others. Claimed as subjects of God's love, Christians come to see all people as beloved by God and are united by the Holy Spirit.⁶
3. "Faith is a living, **bold trust in God's grace.**" This statement of Martin Luther is a reminder that faith is dynamic, personal, and to be integrated into daily living.⁷
4. Faith is shaped and formed in community. As Word and sacrament centers communities of faith, it too orients faith formation. **God's living Word** continually forms and informs our lives and communities, and the sacraments provide tangible expressions of God's mystery and grace.⁸
5. Faith formation is a **shared calling** of the church, households, and other faith communities. Each have many expressions and faith formation is most vibrant when all expressions connect and collaborate.⁹
6. Faith has an outward expression. God's people and communities of faith are **expressions of God's love in the world** so all may experience and come to know God's love.¹⁰
7. Faith offers **hope** and gives individuals and communities eyes to see a new future.¹¹

Section 2: Faith Formation Framework

Faith forms as a person discovers trust in a living God, claims their identity as a beloved child of God, and boldly follows Jesus.

⁵ As noted in Ephesians 2:8, Romans 5:1-8, Colossians 2:6-15, Augsburg Confession Article 9, and in *Social Statement on Our Calling in Education*, 13.

⁶ As noted in Galatians 3:25-27, Ephesians 4:5, 1 Peter 1:3-9.

⁷ Martin Luther's Definition of Faith: An excerpt from "An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," Luther's German Bible of 1522 by Martin Luther, 1483-1546 Translated by Rev. Robert E. Smith from DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S VERMISCHTE DEUTSCHE SCHRIFTEN. Johann K. Irmischer, ed. Vol. 63 (Erlangen: Heyder and Zimmer, 1854), pp.124-125. [EA 63:124-125] August 1994 <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-faith.txt> accessed March 13, 2015.

⁸ As noted in *Augsburg Confession*, especially Articles 5, 7, 9, 10, and 13.

⁹ As noted in 2 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2 Timothy 1:5.

¹⁰ As noted in Micah 6:8, Romans 10:10-15 and James 2:22.

¹¹ As noted in Colossians 1:3-6, and Hebrews 11.

Joining the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, faith formation requires intentionality. Communities of faith are intentional as they are thoughtful and reflective on their faith formation perspective, practices, and orientation. Intentionally nurturing faith over time allows it to mature and become integrated into everyday living.

Effective Faith Formation:¹²

Perspective

Effective faith formation perspectives include:

- Integrating **all generations**,
- Developing **over a lifetime**,
- Attending to **personal and communal aspects**, and
- Being open to and discerning the **work of the Spirit**.

Practices

Effective faith formation practices include:

- Engaging **Christian faith practices**,
- Placing faith formation at the **intersection of God's story and our story**,
- Articulating the **language of faith with a Lutheran understanding**, and
- Integrating **faith into daily life**.

Orientation

Effective faith formation orientation include:

- Loving and serving our **neighbor**,
- Engaging **contextual realities**,
- **Forming culturally competent leaders**, and
- Being **reflective** on how people are growing in faith.

Section 3: Mission, Values, and Vision

Recognizing the church's critical role in faith formation, **our mission** is to cultivate a dynamic culture of faith formation within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

This mission is guided by five **values**.

1. Faith formation is a **shared calling** of the church best carried out when all expressions work in concert with one another.
2. Faith formation calls us, personally and communally, to **collaboration and cooperation**. Relational in nature, faith formation thrives as people with diverse gifts and passions come together around this shared calling.

¹² Some sources highlighting these aspects of faith formation include: Ivy Beckworth, *Postmodern Children's Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2004), Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Roland Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto, *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*, (St. Paul, MN: EYM Publishing, 2010), Kara E Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in your Kids*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), and John Roberto, *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation*, (Naugatuck, CT, 2010).

3. Faith formation in the **first third of life is a critical ministry** of the church. Attending to faith formation in the early years of life has a greater impact on the life of an individual, a greater chance of being integrated into a person's everyday living throughout their lifetime, and is part of the promise faith communities make at baptism.
4. Faith formation is **a lifelong journey**. As *A Social Statement on: Our Calling in Education* states faith formation is for all people at all ages in all stages of life.¹³ Each stage of life has opportunities and challenges for claiming our identity as a child of God and living in response to our trust in God. Therefore attending to faith formation in the second and third chapters of life is important.
5. Faith formation invites **creativity and compassion**. Nurturing faith and trust in a living God provides the opportunity for God's people to embody God's creative and redemptive love in the world as they carry out this calling.

Vision

As a church with a rich history of attending to faith formation and blessed with many faith formation resources, the ELCA is poised to nurture faith in this generation and beyond. Stewarding these gifts for the sake of God's church and God's world rests in our hands.

Imagine people of all ages living their faith, claiming their Christian identity, and sharing God's love in the world in creative and unique ways. Perhaps the church our children lead will be more vibrant than the one they grew up in. What a witness to the gospel this would be.

For people to know their identity as children of God, engage in Christian practices, love and serve their neighbor, and bear witness to God's love in the world requires ministries within the ELCA to connect, align, and collaborate.

¹³ *A Social Statement on: Our Calling in Education*, 13-14.