

Youth and Christian Education

We propose that all Youth and Christian Education ministries be grounded in the five core values proposed by the Mission and Vision Subteam of the Transition Team as submitted on October 6, 2020.

Core Value One

Intentionally inviting a diversity of thoughts and opinions to peacefully gather at the base of the cross.

What would youth ministry look like as shaped by this value?

- It would be rigorously **inclusive**, open to all, appreciating everyone for the unique gifts they hold as children of God.
- It would be **relational**, focused on building friendships rooted in the love of Christ.
- It would be **diverse**, recognizing differences without making those differences into barriers.

What would Christian Education look like as shaped by this value?

- It would be **dialogical**, believing that insight and understanding are achieved through the honest exchange of ideas and viewpoints.
- It would **practice humility**. Christ's truth is eternal, but our grasp of that truth is profoundly fallible and always subject to revision.
- It would be **experiential**, addressing both head and heart.

Core Value Two

To develop a faith that is meaningful 168 hours of the week.

What would youth ministry look like as shaped by this value?

- It would be **practical**. With the wisdom of Christ It would fearlessly take on all issues facing youth.
- It would be **integrative**, helping youth to understand themselves as whole human beings loved by God in all their humanity.
- It would appreciate the role of **family** in the lives of youth, realizing that family – in whatever shape that may take – is the crucible of faith formation.

What would Christian Education look like as shaped by this value?

- It would be **vocational**, helping people to hear the call of God in all dimensions of their lives, be it work, home, or play.
- It would be **searching**. Meaning is not a given, and the pursuit of truth means helping people surrender surface cliché in order to connect with the depths of Christ's message.

Core Value Three

Honoring our heritage, we press forward to follow our divine call in Jesus.

What would youth ministry look like as shaped by this value?

- It would practice deep-seated **gratitude** for the contributions of all the saints of all generations in handing on to us a living faith.
- It would be **Scriptural**, listening to Scripture as a way of recognizing God's voice speaking to us in the present tense.
- It would be **globally aware**, listening to the voices of other people in other parts of the world for how God is speaking to them.

What would Christian Education look like as shaped by this value?

- It would **focus on story**, asking how the stories of faith past inform our stories of faith present.
- It would be **imaginative**. Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, embodying that Kingdom in mighty works, surpassing wisdom, and ultimately in his own death and resurrection. Christian Education would engage the imagination of all learners, inviting them to imagine living now toward the Kingdom that Christ will bring once and for all.
- It would be **Lutheran**. Lutheran theology has been at the heart of the ecumenical movement for the last 100 years, because it brings together the finest parts of both Protestant and Catholic insight. A Lutheran approach to Christian Education would seek to articulate the faith of the universal church, and not just one denominational perspective.

Core Value Four

With thankful heart for the abundant resources God has bestowed on us, we joyfully share those resources with the world around us.

What would youth ministry look like as shaped by this value?

- It would teach **stewardship** as the exercise of all our resources in service to God and the world.
- It would practice extravagant **generosity**, seeking to give as Christ has given and is giving to us.
- It would be **contextual**, rooted in neighborhood and local community,

What would Christian Education look like as shaped by this value?

- It would **partner** with congregational leaders in regular stewardship campaigns to teach Biblical principles of giving and the administration of spiritual gifts inventories.
- It would **raise up and nurture leaders** to serve in congregational and churchwide ministries.

Core Value Five

We foster a sense of community to support, encourage, and affirm each person's place in God's family.

What would youth ministry look like as shaped by this value?

- It would seek **justice** for all whose place in God's family has been diminished or marginalized.
- It would **set more places at the table** for all to share in God's banquet. Every spiritual renewal movement in American history has resulted in bringing more people to God's table (Diana Bass).

What would Christian Education look like as shaped by this value?

- It would practice radical **hospitality**, the kind embodied by Jesus.
- It would encourage **diverse learning opportunities** to accommodate all ages and stages of life, recognizing the diversity of learning styles.

Methodology

Through what programs, plans, and initiatives would these values be realized in the youth and Christian education ministries of our new congregation?

All proposals for Youth and Christian Education are predicated on adherence to the most rigorous safety protocols put forward by the ELCA and NEPA synod.

Sunday School

The origins of the Protestant Sunday School reach back to 18th century England, when the emerging Industrial Revolution led to a flood of poor, rural people moving into cities in search of work and living wages. The social chaos that ensued was extensive, but most sharply felt by children and young people forced into child labor, substandard housing, malnutrition, and urban crime. Churches responded by opening their buildings to educational programs aimed mainly at teaching reading and writing, with the Bible as the principal text and curriculum. Transplanted to America, the Sunday School played a huge role in bringing civil society to America's vast westward expansion. As in earlier centuries, the Sunday School is a church ministry that is adaptable to the challenges of the 21st century.

Our Sunday School will:

- Be led by adults who regularly participate in worship and Bible study.
- Seek to create in age specific classes an environment focused on friendships, cooperation, and openness to all.
- Teach the Bible's stories as patterns for shaping lives to walk in the way of Christ.
- Enact those stories in concrete service projects that put the participants in relationship with communities outside the congregation.
- Engage its students in age-appropriate discussions of issues facing them in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, nation, and world.

Fellowship

For generations congregations have provided safe spaces where young people could gather, experience community, and appreciate the church as the Body of Christ. Many youth-related organizations offer fellowship opportunities, but what makes the church's fellowship are the values embodied in Christ.

Youth and Christian Education fellowship events will:

- Welcome all youth seeking authentic Christian community.
- Be accessible and affordable for all.
- Integrate prayer and worship into all activities.
- Involve youth in planning and coordinating events.
- Seek volunteer support among congregation members open to intergenerational dialogue.

Camping and Retreats

Among the most successful youth and Christian Education ministries of the ELCA are the camping and outdoor retreat ministries based in virtually all the church's synods. NEPA has an outstanding program in Bear Creek Camp that supports faith formation in all age groups. In addition to the Bear Creek programming, other ELCA camping and retreat ministries across the United States offer programs unique to their particular settings, from backpacking adventures to urban immersion experiences to mission trips in sister synods.

Our Youth and Christian Education ministries will

- Actively support our synod's camping ministry by engaging youth in the full spectrum of Bear Creek programming.
- Commit to integrating a week of camp into our confirmation ministry.
- Seek out camp-based programs for high school and college students that emphasize creation care, multi-cultural awareness, and appreciation for the work of the church beyond our local settings.
- Take advantage of spiritual retreat programming that deepens prayer life and aids youth in the spiritual discernment of their respective vocations.

First Communion Instruction

In a landmark study dating from the late '60's the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod agreed to de-couple First Communion from Confirmation. The consensus opinion was that linking First Communion to Confirmation made the Sacrament seem more like a reward for completing Confirmation rather than the gift it truly is. In the decades since that study, the ELCA has issued its own guidelines for the administration of the Sacraments (see *The Use of the Means of Grace*). Although it is acknowledged that the age of communicants may vary, it is agreed that catechesis should attend first communion.

Our First Communion Instruction will:

- Engage parents, pastor, and communicant in discussion of God's gift of Holy Communion.
- Offer First Communion instruction that teaches the biblical basis for the Lord's Supper in the stories of the Exodus and the Last Supper.
- Emphasize the connection between Baptism and Holy Communion.

- Celebrate First Communion in Sunday worship as a family event rather than a congregational celebration.

Confirmation

Confirmation has been a foundational educational ministry of Lutheran congregations for generations. Theologically and liturgically speaking, confirmation is Affirmation of Baptism intended to aid youth in owning their baptisms into Christ and accepting a greater role in the ministry of the church. Historically grounded in Luther's Small Catechism, confirmation aspires to establish a knowledge base for confirmands to continue to grow in their relationship to Christ and to his church.

Our confirmation ministry will:

- Focus on God's grace and our response to that grace as the cornerstone of all Christian identity.
- Emphasize life-long learning as core to Christian discipleship.
- Engage whole families in confirmation through service projects, shared worship, fellowship events, and combined study times.
- Assist students in discerning their spiritual gifts.
- Engage confirmands in all congregational ministries appropriate to their gifts and interests.
- Seek out curriculum that follows Luther's Small Catechism in teaching the Ten Commandments, the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments.
- Support students articulating their faith in their own words.
- Celebrate confirmation as one milestone in the total life of Christian discipleship.

Social Media

While the advent of social media has impacted all levels of American society, youth culture has likely taken the deepest dive into the many different streaming platforms that have abounded in recent years. As a matter of communicating and engaging with young people, youth and Christian education ministries have to make use of all available channels, including social media.

Our Youth and Christian Education ministries will:

- Communicate events and schedules using social media.

- Make curricular materials available online.
- Post prayer resources and inspirational materials for youth through the church's Facebook page and other available platforms.
- Use the church's livestream capabilities to involve youth in producing worship and devotional videos.

Campus Ministry

Given the prominence of so many institutions of higher learning in the Lehigh Valley, an outreach to the student populations of our community is essential to our vision and mission. Although many, if not all, the colleges and universities in our area have their own campus ministries, there are ways our new congregation can reach out and connect with students.

Our Campus Ministry will:

- Coordinate with the various campus ministries for ways in which the church can support or supplement their work.
- Provide fellowship meals for student gatherings.
- Offer retreat opportunities focused on spiritual discernment.