

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

IMITATE MY HEART



**2006-2007 Christian
Education Planning Guide**

**An ongoing expression of
the Call to Discipleship**

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How to use this resource

Adapt this material to fit your setting. Use it as you plan and prepare for the 2006-2007 education year.

Be sure to maximize your use of Web page references found throughout this resource.

For further support, check out the latest offerings for lifelong learning from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. Visit the on-line store at www.augsburgfortress.org or call 800/328-4648.

This program planner is designed to be both a print and an electronic resource. For all material related to this resource, including the full contents of the print resource, clipart, and other support materials, visit www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners/2006CEProgramPlanner/

Copies of this resource may be ordered by calling 800/328-4648. Use order code 6-0002-1724-2. The item is free plus the cost of shipping. (Limit five per congregation).

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***...Be imitators of God,
as beloved children,
and live in love, as
Christ loved us and
gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and
sacrifice to God.***

Ephesians 5:1-2

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Introduction to the Theme

Imitate My Heart



The 2006-2007 *Christian Education Planning Guide* might well be called *Discipleship Anew!* This year marks the seventh year of Christian education materials in support of the *ELCA Call to Discipleship*. (see the following page) Such a milestone deserves a fresh, new look at discipleship. It warrants a radical change in the way we see ourselves as disciples. Followers? Yes! But much more. Our call to discipleship is an attachment to the heart, mind, and soul of Christ that propels us to act as Christ would in our daily encounters with others and in our growing relationship with God.

This year's planner highlights the life and ministry of a radical "contemporary" disciple. In 2006 the world commemorates the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This passionate Christian theologian, activist, and martyr is among last century's most influential citizens. While a rich and profound legacy is left to us in Bonhoeffer's teachings and writings, it is his faith, life, and witness for which we honor this remarkable man. Bonhoeffer knew the heart of Christ and responded to the call to discipleship with strength and unwavering conviction, even unto death.

This program planner should probably come with a big warning label slapped across the front of it:

WARNING: *Using this Christian Education Planning Guide could result in having your entire congregation decide to STOP GOING TO CHURCH.*

That's right. At the heart of this planning guide is the idea that the LAST thing real disciples do is "go to church." Real disciples know the church isn't a place you can "go" to, at all. Because the church isn't a place! Although the church often finds it useful to have a building, in which to gather for worship and learning and the kind of stuff friends like to do together, the church isn't a building. Likewise, although throughout history the church has found it useful to create institutions to organize our efforts, the church isn't an *institution*.

The church is people!

The church is *people* who have received the gift of reconciliation with God through faith in Christ and who are answering the call to share that gift with everyone. The church is *people* who have been created by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. The church is *people* who have been blessed by God, and through whom God is at work today, loving and blessing the whole world. The church is *people* who are ready to follow Jesus, to imitate Jesus, everywhere they go!

As disciples, we know we can't "go" to church. Or "leave" church, for that matter. Because we ARE the church! We are the church whenever we gather (for worship or learning or serving or just to have fun). And we are the church wherever we go. We are the church at home, at school, and at work; on the playground, on the street corner, and at the local diner. Wherever we go and whatever we do, we are the church.

The goal of this resource is to help you equip the children, youth, and adults of your congregation to

- embrace the connection between being a disciple and being a member of Christ's church
- understand that *they* are the church whenever they gather and wherever they go
- explore the ways in which God is (and wants to be) at work through them, loving and blessing the whole world, as they follow Christ!

And, hopefully, the end result will be a whole lot of people in your congregation who STOP GOING TO CHURCH. Because they realize that, to be a disciple, is to be a part of a church *on the loose!* A church through which God is at work "out there" in every neighborhood, in every home, on every street, and in every classroom bringing reconciliation, blessing, salvation, peace, justice, hope, and joy to the whole world.

An Ongoing Expression of the Call to Discipleship

To access many other resources in the *Call to Discipleship* on-line library, please visit www.elca.org/christianeducation/discipleship

The library includes:

Annual Program Planners

- 2000 Living Faith: The ELCA Churchwide Call to Discipleship
A discipleship planning guide for congregations with a focus on the seven faith practices; a six-session discipleship Bible study; and practical discipleship tools for all generations
- 2001-02 Fanning the Flames of Discipleship
Focus is on the Holy Spirit's action and features a parent/teacher training workshop on discipleship, and a presentation of the Bible program module
- 2002-03 Stirring Us to Deeper Discipleship
Focus on Baptism and Lutheran identity
- 2003-04 Nurturing Faith in Community
Focus on Christ's relationships with others; features planning materials for intergenerational learning
- 2004-05 Claiming the Story
Focus on the story of salvation found in Scripture; planning materials for biblical storytelling
- 2005-06 Led to Lead
Focus on the disciple-leader; spiritual gifts, and volunteer ministry
- 2006-2007 Imitate My Heart
Focus on Discipleship in daily life; features the life and ministry of Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Faith Practices

Followers of Jesus are inspired to develop practices and patterns for living that characterize a life that is devoted to daily discipleship. Seven common practices have been identified as key to model and nurture. The ELCA names these seven faith practices:

PRAY, STUDY, WORSHIP, INVITE, ENCOURAGE, SERVE, and GIVE

A four-session Bible study on each of the seven faith practices is available at www.elca.org/christianeducation/discipleship/faithpractices.html

Intergenerational Learning

Each annual Christian Education Planning Guide features at least one or more complete intergeneration program modules suitable for rally day or other congregational events throughout the church year. The events are particularly designed for children ages 3 through grade 6 and their families. Complete instructions and patterns for each 60-90 minute module including planning outlines, skits, worship materials, activity centers, and more are available at www.elca.org/christianeducation/programs

The following lists the available modules with their titles and topics:

- All Ye, All Ye, Come Home Free! (baptism)
- Baptismal Beginnings (baptism)
- Church House Rock (Lutheran identity)
- Faith Trek (children as disciple leaders)
- Good Soil, Garden Center! (faith sharing)
- Happy New Year! (the church year)
- Here Comes Jesus! (Lent)
- Light Shine (faith practices)
- Luther's Info Drive-thru (Martin Luther and the Reformation)
- Proclamation Station (proclaiming God's story)
- Searchlight! (Epiphany)



Imitate My Heart Bible Study

Theme:

This Bible study explores key stories from the Book of Acts that teach what it means to be a church whenever it gathers and wherever it goes!

Purpose:

The goal of this Bible study is to feed the spirits—and the minds—of Christian education leaders and teachers. It invites you to reconnect with the God who is at work in and through you, making a difference in the lives of the children, youth, and adults in your congregation, for the sake of God's mission in the world. It is meant to help teachers and leaders think about and more fully embrace what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ in your own lives, so that you can help others think about and more fully embrace this in their lives, too.

Key ideas:

- The story of the Book of Acts is the story of how the Holy Spirit was at work loving and blessing the whole world in and through the lives of those who answered the call to discipleship.
- To be a disciple in the life of the early church meant to:
 - ◆ Be a recipient of and a participant in God's mission to love and bless the whole world
 - ◆ Be a witness to Jesus in word and deed
 - ◆ Be in relationship with others who have answered the call to follow Jesus
 - ◆ Be ready to meet God in the face of a stranger
 - ◆ Be open to Spirit-led transformation

Diving into the Word:

Are you ready to invite, inspire, and equip the people in your congregation to *akaloo*?! *Akaloo* comes from a Greek word (*akolouthein*) that means “to follow.” When this word is used in the Bible (it appears in all four Gospels) it always means following Jesus. But following Jesus doesn't just mean skipping along behind him, watching as *he* does all the cool stuff (like sharing God's dream for the world, healing people, challenging injustice, inviting people to live in a way that honors God and serves their neighbors, and so on). On the contrary, following Jesus is about *doing* those things, too. People who imitate the heart of Christ in the Bible have received the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. But this gift has come hand in hand with a call to leave everything behind for the sake of God's mission to love and bless and save the whole world (Luke 5:11). The story of the early church (as told in the Book of Acts) tells the story of the first Christians and teaches us (at least!) four things about what it means to *akaloo* today.

GOD IS ON THE LOOSE!

A lot of people think (and/or act like) you have to “go to church” to find God. Do you think that's true? Why or why not?

Read Acts 2:1-22.

When it comes to reading the Bible and listening for what God is saying, everybody has something to offer. Remember that as you invite participants to reflect and respond to these three questions:

1. What is God doing in this story?
2. What do you hear God saying to you in this story?
3. What do you hear God saying to us (as a small group, congregation, etc.) in this story?

The earliest Christians did gather together (a lot!) to share their stories, eat together, and pray for courage (we're going to look at Acts 4:23-31 in a minute). But the Holy Spirit cannot be contained in any building

or constrained by any institution. The Holy Spirit fills the **people** who have answered the call to discipleship—people of every culture, race, and social status; women and men, young and old. These people become *the church*. Through them, the Holy Spirit is at work doing all kinds of startling things...out on the street! The Spirit gives Jesus' followers the ability to dream, to speak, and to act with surprising boldness as a part of God's mission to love and bless the world.

Spend some time thinking and/or talking about these questions:

1. Where is the most surprising (non-churchy) place you've seen God at work?
2. Do you ever miss what God is doing because you can't believe God is doing it through *those* people? Who are *those* people, to you?
3. When was the last time God spoke through you?

GOD WANTS TO LOVE AND BLESS THE WHOLE WORLD!

If you were to take a poll of the people you know, how do you think they would answer this question: What in the world is God up to?

Read Acts 2:37-41.

Reflect-Respond:

1. What is God doing in this story?
2. What do you hear God saying to you in this story?
3. What do you hear God saying to us (as a small group, congregation, etc.) in this story?

It would take those first Christians awhile to finally get their heads completely around this idea (in fact, they argue about it in Acts 15), but God doesn't play favorites. Through Peter, the Holy Spirit announced that God's promise of salvation, reconciliation, wholeness, and life is for *everyone!* God wants to love and bless the whole creation...and every single person in it. And God works through us to get that done. That's what Jesus was trying to tell his disciples when he said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and *to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8)!

Spend some time thinking and/or talking about these questions:

1. Couldn't God have come up with a better plan for blessing the world? Why does God insist on working through *people?!?*
2. What did you do yesterday? How was God working through you to bless the people you met along the way?
3. A "witness" is somebody who has special knowledge about or experience with something. What do you know about Jesus that you can share with others? In what ways have you experienced him at work in your life?

Suggestions for Leaders

There is more material here than can be easily done in one or two sessions. It is important that you choose portions and activities that will fit what you are trying to accomplish and your time frame.

GOD MEETS US WHENEVER WE GATHER AND WHEREVER WE GO!

Do you know anyone who says they don't need or like to go to worship? What reasons do they give? What do you think about that?

Read Acts 4:23-31.

Reflect-Respond:

1. What is God doing in this story?
2. What do you hear God saying to you in this story?
3. What do you hear God saying to us (as a small group, congregation, etc.) in this story?

Those earliest Christians never “went” to church because they *were* the church wherever they went! But they *did* get together. In fact, they didn't get together just once a week. They were together every day (see Acts 2:46)! Why? Well, they couldn't wait to tell each other about all the amazing things God was doing through them “out there.” They couldn't wait to introduce each other to the new friends they were making. They couldn't wait to hear “the gospel” (*good news*) from each other—not only about what Jesus *did* but also about what Jesus was DOING, in them and through them, every single day! When they got together they shared the Lord's Supper, they prayed together, and they blessed each other as they went back out to share good news with the world.

Spend some time thinking and/or talking about these questions:

1. Is this what it looks like when your congregation gathers together? If not, is there anything you'd like to see done differently?
2. What good news do you want to share right now?

GOD ISN'T FINISHED WITH US YET!

How do you *really* feel about CHANGE? No, seriously. When was the last time you changed your hairstyle? Your address? Your mind?

Read Acts 8:26-40.

Reflect-Respond:

1. What is God doing in this story?
2. What do you hear God saying to you in this story?
3. What do you hear God saying to us (as a small group, congregation, etc.) in this story?

The Holy Spirit was always messing with those early Christians. Whenever they were tempted to get comfortable and hunker down, the Spirit chased them back out onto the highways and byways. Wherever it looked like they were going to close the doors to anybody who looked or acted different, the Spirit plopped them right down into the company of strangers. You see, God's plan was to work through those early Christians to change the world. But that's not all. God used those new experiences and those new people *to change the church!* It took, for example, being in the chariot of a guy who was as different as different could be, to help Philip understand God's mission to bless *everybody*. The same sort of thing happened to Peter, in the home of a Gentile soldier named Cornelius (see Acts 10-11). The fact is, God's not done with us yet. Being ready to follow Jesus always means being ready to change!

Spend some time thinking and/or talking about these questions:

1. Through whom and/or through what kinds of experiences has the Holy Spirit helped you—and your congregation—change in good and holy ways?
2. God works through our encounters with strangers to transform us. Do you think maybe that's why we're so afraid of strangers or so reluctant to really welcome them into our congregations?
3. What kinds of good changes do you think the Holy Spirit still has in store for you? How about for your congregation?

IMITATE MY HEART



...Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2

This year marks the seventh year of Christian education materials in support of the *ELCA Call to Discipleship*. Such a milestone deserves a fresh, new look at discipleship. It warrants a radical change in the way we see ourselves as disciples. Followers? Yes! But much more. Our call to discipleship is an attachment to the heart, mind, and soul of Christ that propels us to act as Christ would in our daily encounters with others and in our growing relationship with God.

Being a disciple is not often easy. In 2006 the world commemorates the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran pastor, activist and martyr. While a rich and profound legacy is left to us in Bonhoeffer's teachings and writings, it is his faith, life, and witness for which we honor this remarkable man. Bonhoeffer knew the heart of Christ and responded to the call to discipleship with strength and unwavering conviction, even unto death.

As Christians we are people who have received the gift of reconciliation with God through faith in Christ and who are answering the call to share that gift with everyone. We have been created by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. We are people who have been blessed by God, and through whom God is at work today, loving and blessing the whole world. The church is *people* who are ready to follow Jesus, to imitate Jesus, everywhere they go!

Commitment and Affirmation of Disciple-Leaders

The pastor may welcome children, youth, and adults to come forward to bless their teachers, guides, and facilitators for the coming year. At the appropriate time, teachers and leaders of all the congregation's educational ministries are invited to come forward.

A lay assisting minister begins:

The following leaders have been called to teach and disciple in our midst this year: *Names are read as individuals come forward.*

The pastor continues:

Today we recognize and bless those who have been called, set apart, equipped, and sent as leaders in our teaching ministry.

The pastor addresses the teachers and leaders:

As those who have heard Christ's compelling invitation to be a disciple among those you teach, do you accept this responsibility to nurture Christian growth in others?

The teachers and leaders respond:

I accept this responsibility and ask God to help and guide me.

The pastor continues:

Will you follow the example of Christ as you encourage others to live in faith each day? Will you use your gifts, talents, interests, and abilities to lead others to fullness in a life in Christ?

The teachers and leaders respond:

I will and ask God to help and guide me.

The pastor addresses the congregation:

It is our privilege to affirm and send forth those who are called to the teaching ministry of our congregation and God's kingdom in this place. Will you commit to support them in their spiritual well-being through prayer, encouragement, and service?

The congregation responds:

We will, and we ask God to help and guide us.

The pastor continues:

Let us pray.

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon all those who teach and learn. Bless the gifts you have bestowed on us and help us to acknowledge your intent for these gifts. Fill us with desire to imitate the heart of Christ with faith and commitment in showing others your abundant grace and love. In Jesus name, we pray.

Amen

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Disciple



gettyimages

Introduction:

This year we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the person who wrote the book on discipleship. Literally.

Christian Education leaders and teachers may choose to celebrate the life of this hero of the faith throughout the church school year and/or as a way of kicking off another year of discipleship. It may be helpful to have this re-introduction to Bonhoeffer's life and some of his key ideas.

A Review of Bonhoeffer's Life & Key Ideas:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor in 1937, a time when Adolph Hitler was taking his nation down a terrible path. What was even worse is that many Christians and church leaders in Germany were supporting the Nazi's agenda. Bonhoeffer knew this was wrong. And he wasn't the only one.

The Confessing Church emerged in Germany, to oppose the Nazi regime and to counteract the preaching of the German Reich Church. Bonhoeffer and others were accused of being disloyal to their government, and suffered at the hands of

the Nazis who used arrest, torture, and terror to keep German citizens under control. Like countless others who resisted the Nazis, Bonhoeffer was arrested and placed in a concentration camp. On April 9, 1945, even as the Allied forces were winning victory over Hitler's armies, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged in the Nazi concentration camp at Flossenburg, Germany.

Published in 1937, Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship* (reprinted more recently under the title *Discipleship*) grew out of his seminars, sermons, and study groups he was a part of as the world around him got crazier and crazier.

Bonhoeffer knew that following Jesus means more than skipping along behind, watching Jesus do stuff. Following Jesus means *participating* in Jesus' life and ministry, as well as in his death and resurrection. He modeled that in the way he lived—and died. But his ideas were just as powerful as his witness:

THE GIFT IS A CALL.

As a good Lutheran, Bonhoeffer grew up hearing the famous Reformation rallying cry. *We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ!* And he wouldn't have argued with it. But he DID have a problem with Christians who taught and/or thought that, since we don't have to do anything to be "saved," therefore we don't have to do anything at all. That, he said, is cheap grace.

"Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ" (Discipleship, Fortress Press paperback edition 2003, p. 44).

Bonhoeffer contrasts cheap grace with what he calls "costly grace," grace that is always connected to discipleship.

"It is costly because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live. It is costly, because it condemns sin; it is grace, because it justifies the sinner. Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, because it costs God the life of God's Son – 'you were bought with a price' – and because nothing can be cheap to us which is costly to God" (ibid, p. 45).

The gift of salvation can never be separated from the call to follow Jesus. We don't have to do anything to be saved; that is a gift! But this gift sets us free to answer Christ's call to love God and serve our neighbor. We are called and set free to give ourselves away for the sake of others. We are called and set free to follow Christ.

JESUS IS THE REAL DEAL.

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jesus was not just an idea. Nor was he just somebody who lived a long time ago. Jesus was REAL. Jesus IS real. In fact, the only reason we can answer the call to follow is because it is JESUS who calls us.

“Because Jesus is the Christ, he has authority to call and to demand obedience to his word. Jesus calls to discipleship, not as a teacher and a role model, but as the Christ, the Son of God” (ibid, p. 57).

Bonhoeffer reminds us that answering the call to discipleship looks a lot like Peter stepping out of the boat, onto the water (Matthew 14). Jesus called him. And so he went. He *decided* to answer Jesus. But Peter couldn't have done this on his own. The only reason he could do it is because Christ gave him the gift of a call.

The word Jesus speaks isn't simply to be “believed.” It doesn't create a new “doctrine” to memorize or repeat. Jesus' word creates a whole new reality. He makes it possible for us to ACT differently, to get out of the boat, to answer his call. He made it possible for Dietrich—and makes it possible for us—to speak the truth, stand against evil, work for justice, and give everything there is to give for the sake of what is right and holy in this world. No doctrine could do that. No idea could do that. Not even the best, most compelling idea. The only thing that could make all this possible is Jesus himself.

DISCIPLESHIP IS JOY.

As Bonhoeffer was finishing up his work on the book that would be titled Discipleship, he was already in up to his eyeballs in the movement opposing Hitler. He couldn't have known exactly what his fate would be, but he was no fool. He knew the risk. And, yet, writing in the preface of his book, he said:

“Where will the call to discipleship lead those who follow it? What decisions and painful separations will it entail? We must take this question to him who alone knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ, who bides us follow him, knows where the path will lead. But we know that it will be a part full of mercy beyond measure. Discipleship is joy” (ibid, p. 40).

When we answer Christ's call to follow, Bonhoeffer reminded us, it is like finding a treasure hidden in a field or a pearl of great price. It is worth leaving your nets behind. It is an easy burden to bear.

“[Blessed are those who follow Christ because...] their heavenly home has become so certain that they are truly free for life in this world” (ibid, pp. 55-56).

Answering the call to discipleship is not easy. It is a path paved with sacrifice and suffering. But Bonhoeffer wouldn't have had it any other way. It is the only path to freedom. It is the way to joy.

Imitate My Heart:

Intergenerational Rally Day Program Overview

NOTE:

- The complete rally day format and instructions begin on page 14
- All supplemental materials listed for the Rally Day Activities are found at www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners/2006CEProgramPlanner/

Imitate My Heart calls us to be imitators of God, as God's beloved children. Adults, youth, and children will use interactive events to explore what it means to imitate God, celebrate the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, and learn ways to practice discipleship in daily life. The module focuses on generations learning from one another.

Key verses: Ephesians 4:25—5:2

Opening activity

Participants will learn about imitation by playing the mirror game. They will form larger groups to play Follow the Leader to transition into the large gathering.

Large Gathering

A skit, *Choose the True Christian* uses the model of a game show to help illustrate what it means to be a disciple and imitate Christ.

Scripture reading: Ephesians 4:25—5:2

Song

Rotations

Three rotations will focus on the cost of discipleship, celebrating salvation, and imitating God.

At each rotation, participants will receive a parchment fragment with part of the Scripture reading on it. At the end of the session, the fragments will be assembled like a puzzle and decorated as illuminated manuscripts.

BONHOEFFER: THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP EPHESIANS 4:25—28

Participants will learn about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Just as Bonhoeffer spoke the truth in difficult times, Ephesians calls us to speak the truth.

Participants will decorate a wooden coin to remind them of the cost of discipleship.

They will also receive the appropriate manuscript fragment, which will be read together.

GIFT OF SALVATION—CHRIST DIED FOR US EPHESIANS 5:2

Participants will learn that discipleship does not earn salvation, but salvation is a gift from God. Living as disciples is our way to say thanks.

Participants will open gift bags, imagining that they have received the best gift ever. They'll learn about God's gift of salvation. The appropriate manuscript fragment will be handed out and read together.

IMITATING GOD EPHESIANS 4:29—5:1

Adults and children will use a small deck of discussion-starters to share with one another ways that they practice discipleship.

The discipleship discussion will lead into a group project: a heart quilt.

Participants will draw words or pictures on fabric hearts, illustrating ways in which they will imitate God, or be disciples. The hearts will be assembled onto a quilt or banner.

Imitate My Heart Generational Groups

Adults and children will separate for this activity. Adults will discuss mentoring—their privilege and responsibility to be examples for the young people in the faith. Their activity will be to make a bookmark with the Bible verse:

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. 1 Cor.11:1

Children will talk about the roles they play in congregational life. Singing in church, going to Sunday school, welcoming others, serving as acolytes, and caring about other members are ways they can show discipleship. Their activity will be to make a bookmark with the Bible verse:

Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. Mark 10:15

Closing

The two groups will come together for the final prayer. Adults and children exchange bookmarks, so that each has the message from the other. The closing prayer will be an imitation prayer, with the group echoing the leader.

Suggestions for Leaders

1. Invite everyone in your congregation, not just parents of school-age children, to attend your rally day event. Cross-generational interaction can be a fun and mutually enriching experience for participants of all ages including youth, young adults, and older adults.
2. Ask someone in the congregation who quilts to help with the heart quilt craft project. It can be done very simply, by ironing the hearts in a pattern onto a colored sheet or onto squares, which can be sewn into a quilt. Here's a great opportunity to involve others who do not usually help with education.
3. Take advantage of the mix of generations. Do older members remember other popular comedians from the Marx Brothers era? Who in the congregation has memories of World War II, or is about the age that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was when he died? Ask the children what other game shows they watch on television.

Imitate My Heart:

Intergenerational Rally Day Module

Opening activity

...Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Advance Preparations:

Look into getting a copy of *Duck Soup*. (Check your local library or video rental store. *Duck Soup* was recently released as part of a Marx Brothers DVD collection.) Don't forget to arrange for TV/DVD or other projection equipment!*

*Public performance of a movie or movie clips, including at a church, requires a license. Many movie studios are represented by licensors such as Christian Video Licensing International, which offers annual licenses for churches. www.cvli.org 1-888-771-CVLA (2854)

As participants arrive, divide them into pairs. Try to pair an adult with a child, or a younger child with an older child. Divide families to encourage interaction with different people.

If possible, begin by showing the mirror scene from the Marx Brothers movie *Duck Soup*. The mirror scene shows two brothers, dressed alike in nightgowns, imitating one another, as one pretends that a broken mirror still exists.

After the viewing the clip, invite pairs to do mirror scenes with one another. The youngest person starts by motioning a favorite activity such as swinging a baseball bat, playing a saxophone, reading a book. The older person mirrors their actions. Then reverse the roles. See whether they can learn about one another's life without using words, but just by imitating.

Gather the pairs into groups of 10 to play Follow the Leader. The leaders can lead the participants out of the room to another space for the group gathering, or back into the same space. Encourage leaders to choose simple actions that can be imitated by both the oldest and youngest participants.

Gathering

Advance Preparations:

Download the *Choose the True Christian* skit. (See link reference on page 12)

Recruit three adults and three young people to do the skit. Five chairs and a cross necklace are the only props needed. Use microphones if performing for a large group. Rehearse the skit several times so that actors are comfortable with their lines.

Provide songbooks for the song you choose.

Prayer: O God, we come together today with great joy. We gather as young and old, parent and child, student and teacher, to learn from one another. Open our hearts to live as your disciples, by imitating you. Amen

Skit: *Choose the True Christian*

Scripture reading: Ephesians 4:25—5:2

Song: choose a song of your choice such as "Be Ye Kind, One to Another" or "Love One Another"

Rotations

Advance Preparations:

Each rotation leader will hand out the “fragment” of the Scripture reading that corresponds with their lesson. To make the fragments, download a copy of Scripture Manuscript Fragments from the Web site listed on page 12. Make copies onto parchment-like paper. Cut the three sections apart. Give the sections to the appropriate rotation leaders. Have additional parchment paper ready for participants to glue the pieces onto to form the entire lesson, and decorate as an illuminated manuscript. They will need to add an “S” to the beginning of the lesson!

ROTATION 1: BONHOEFFER

Materials Needed:

- Newsprint or dry erase board and markers
- Small wooden disks (purchased at craft store)
- Fine tip permanent markers, black and colors
- Copies of manuscript fragment: Ephesians 4:25-28
- (Optional) Locate a copy of Bonhoeffer’s poem, “Who Am I?” (see Web link on page 12)

Background for leaders:

The focus of this rotation is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor who spoke out against the Nazi party before and during World War II. This year (2006) marks the 100th anniversary of his birth.

His death day, April 9, is commemorated in *Lutheran Book of Worship. The Manual on the Liturgy* (Messerli & Pfatteicher, Augsburg, ©1979) offers this description.

“Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 in Breslau, the son of a psychiatrist at Berling University, where the son began his university studies in 1924. He was a pastor briefly in Barcelona (1928-29) and then studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York. In 1930 he returned to Berlin and taught until his work was forbidden by the National Socialists. He directed a seminary in Pomerania and had great influence on the students there. He was arrested in 1943 for anti-war activities and imprisoned. On Sunday, April 8, 1945, in Flossenbug prison, after conducting a service, he was taken away to be hanged. As he was taken away, he said to Payne Best, an English prisoner, “This is the end, but for me the beginning of life.”(pp. 46-47)

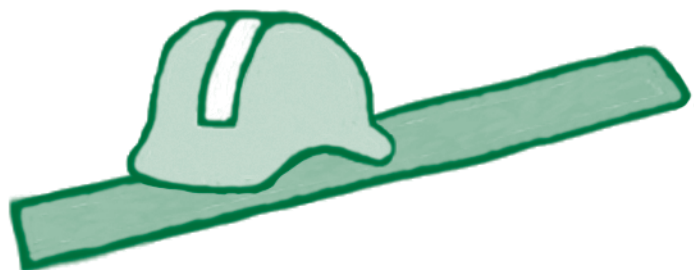
(See more about Bonhoeffer’s teaching on page 10.)

Rotation details:

Begin the rotation by asking the group for some words that describe who they are: student, mother, teacher, child, soccer player, writer, pastor, dancer, engineer, doctor, uncle, etc.

Record the responses on the dry erase board.

Now say that you will be telling a story about a man who lived about 60 years ago. Think about who he was as you hear the story.





Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young Lutheran pastor when the National Socialist (Nazi) party came to power in Germany in 1933. The Nazis had some evil ideas about how to treat different people. They were especially mean to Jewish people.

Most people were afraid to say anything against the Nazis, even if they thought the ideas were wrong. But Bonhoeffer spoke out. As a Christian disciple, he knew he should speak out against evil. He became part of the Confessing Church, which protested the evil things that the Nazis said and did.

Though Bonhoeffer was a man of peace, he became involved in a group that wanted to overthrow Hitler. The group could see that Hitler was a danger not only to the Jewish people, but to all of Europe.

Bonhoeffer left Germany in 1939, and went to New York where he could find safety. He was not safe in Germany since it was dangerous to speak out against Hitler and the Nazi party. After two weeks, Bonhoeffer returned to Germany. He said "I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people."

He continued to work with the people who were resisting the evil ways of Hitler. Most of the world was now at war. Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Nazis in 1943, and put in prison in Berlin. He wrote letters, poems, and papers to his family and friends. He continued to follow Christ and encourage others to live as Christian disciples.

On July 20, 1944, some German people tried to kill Hitler, hoping it would stop the evil and bring an end to the war in Europe. But Hitler was not killed. Instead, many people who opposed Hitler were arrested and killed. Bonhoeffer, already in prison, was one of those who were put to death. He said to one of the prisoners as he was taken away "This is the end, but for me the beginning of life."

Bonhoeffer knew Christ had died for his sins, and that he would be saved. All through his short life, he lived as a disciple, even when discipleship cost him his life.

Now ask for some words that describe who Bonhoeffer was and write them on the newsprint or dry erase board. He was: German Lutheran pastor, writer, man of peace, theologian, anti-war activist, poet, prisoner, seminary teacher, and martyr.

(Some of these can be found in the brief story of him, others may be known by adults in the group.)

Explain that, despite all the things he was, one of the most important things that he was can be found in the last two lines of a poem he wrote while in prison.

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine. (*Letters & Papers from Prison*, p. 348)

Sometimes it is not as important to know who we are as whose we are. We are God's.

For the activity, distribute wooden disks to each participant. With pens or fine-line markers write "Who am I?" on one side of the coin, and "I am Yours" on the other. Decorate the coin. Encourage participants to carry this coin in their pocket, purse, or pencil case to remind them that they are to imitate God in their daily life, no matter what the cost. Another translation of the poem reads

Who am I? They mock me these lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, you know me, O God. You know I am yours.

(Optional) Locate a copy of Bonhoeffer's poem, "Who Am I?" (see Web link on page 12)

Distribute the Scripture manuscript fragment and read it together. How do these verses remind us of Bonhoeffer?

ROTATION 2: GIFT OF SALVATION

Materials Needed:

5-10 Gift bags with tissue paper, as though a gift were inside
Copies of manuscript fragment: Ephesians 5:2

Rotation details:

Gather into circles of 8-10 people. Give a gift bag to several people in each circle. Explain that each person is to think about the gift they would most like to receive for their birthday. (Because it's an imagination game, it could be something that wouldn't fit in the bag.) Take turns letting each person pretend to pull their present out of the bag, and react to finding out it is just what they wanted. Encourage them to be enthusiastic recipients.

Part of the fun of the exercise will be for adults to hear the latest toy fads of children and young people, and children can hear what adults are interested in. If desired, adults can imagine a toy that they really, really wanted when they were young. (Oh, the dream of a Suzy Homemaker oven...) Let each person "open" their gift, then pass the bags along for the next person to use.

Ask, "How do we respond when we receive a really special gift?" (Besides being excited, hopefully we thank the giver). Is it still a gift for you, even if you don't say thank you? (Yes)

Now ask what gifts God gives to us. (Answers may vary: health, food, parents, love, sending God's Son, eternal life.) Distribute the manuscript fragment. Which gift does this verse refer to? (Christ dying for our sins) Do we react to God's gift with the same enthusiasm we show for material gifts? (Not very often.) Read another verse from the book of Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of **God**—not the result of works, so that no one may boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

Younger children may not be able to relate to the idea of eternal salvation, but may better be able to understand God's love. God's gift is that God is always with us, always loves us, and always cares about us.

How do we thank God for such a gift? (We can thank God in prayer, but more importantly, how we live as disciples becomes our expression of thanks. The gift is given to us, we don't earn it by our behavior, but our behavior becomes a thank-you note to God.)

ROTATION 3: IMITATING GOD

Materials needed:

Fabric, light colored solids or simple prints
Iron-on bonding for fabric
Sheet or quilt squares
Iron, ironing board
Permanent markers or fabric markers
Sets of cards for every 5-6 people per rotation. Pattern available on Web site.
Copies of manuscript fragment: Ephesians 4:29—5:1
Fine line markers, gel pens, or colored pencils
Heart design. Pattern available on Web site.

Advance Preparations:

Iron bonding according to package directions onto back of fabrics.

Download heart design from Web page. Using this template or your own design, draw hearts on bonding and cut out fabric hearts.

Copy Imitating God cards onto card stock and cut apart. A template for the cards is found on the Web site. You will also find a straight text file of the cards so you can tailor-make your own version of the cards. You may want to print them on to business card paper and punch apart.

Rotation details:

Divide the group at this rotation into groups of five or six. Give each group a stack of cards. The group should sit in a circle and take turns choosing a card and answering the question. Adults or older children should read the questions for younger children.

When all have had a chance to answer a question or two, distribute their manuscript fragments. Read the manuscript together. Discuss how these verses fit with some of the things they talked about in the card game.

Let each participant choose a fabric heart. Using permanent markers or fabric markers, write or draw on the heart ways they imitate God in daily life. (Be kind, speak the truth, show love, help others, work for peace, etc.) The hearts can be arranged in groups of four to form a flower pattern. Iron them in place onto a sheet or other backing. Use it as a banner or a tablecloth at coffee hour.

For further quilt-making tips visit www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners/2003ceprogramplanner/mod1/makingclothquilt.pdf

Generational Groups

Materials needed:

- Gather two sets of the following materials, for each of the small groups:
 - ◆ Glue
 - ◆ Fine line markers, gel pens, or colored pencils
 - ◆ Sheets of white or parchment-like paper
 - ◆ Books or printouts showing pages from illuminated manuscripts
 - ◆ Cardstock
 - ◆ Hole punch
 - ◆ Scissors
 - ◆ Ribbon
- Copies of bookmark pattern for each appropriate group (see Advance Preparations, below)

Advance Preparations:

Download bookmark templates from Web page.

Print copies of adult bookmark onto cardstock and cut apart.

Print copies of child bookmark onto cardstock and cut apart.

Adult Group Details:

Invite participants to glue their manuscript fragments onto a paper backing. They can use markers, gel pens, or colored pencils to illuminate their page. Show examples of illuminated manuscripts for ideas.

As they work on their manuscript, thank the adults for coming today. Children learn by imitation. The baby learns to talk by imitating his mother's words. A child picks up a hammer and imitates her grandfather's pounding motion. Each generation learns from the previous generation.

In the life of the church, our faith is passed on from one generation to the next. Long before they fully understand their words or actions, the child has learned to imitate the practice of worship, and the practice of our faith. The adults here mentor not only their own children, but also every child in the congregation.

Distribute bookmark pattern for adults to color. The verse, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

1 Corinthians 11:1, reminds them that they are mentors for the next generation. Punch a hole near the top and add ribbon.

Children's Small Group Details:

Invite participants to glue their manuscript fragments onto a paper backing. They can use markers, gel pens, or colored pencils to illuminate their page. Show examples of illuminated manuscripts for ideas. As they color, remind the children that they play an important role in the life of the church. How are they leaders? (*They attend Sunday school, sing in worship, acolyte, usher, read lessons, play instruments, help with coffee hour, etc.*) Everyone can be a disciple and imitate God.

Distribute bookmarks for students to color. The verse, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child [does] will never enter it," Mark 10:15 will remind them of how important Jesus considers children in the life of the church. For younger participants, tell them that they will be giving the bookmark away as a gift.

Closing

Invite the adults to read together the verse on their bookmark to the children. Then invite the children to recite together the verse on their bookmark. Have each child exchange their bookmark with one from an adult. (Have extra adult or children's bookmarks ready, as necessary, so that everyone can make the exchange.)

Join hands in a circle, and have participants echo the leader in this prayer.

Leader: O Lord, Heavenly Father (echo)

Thank you for the gift of salvation, (echo)

Thank you for the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. (echo)

Help us to speak the truth, (echo)

Help us to control our anger. (echo)

Let our words bring joy and comfort, (echo)

Let our actions show kindness and love. (echo)

In all that we do, (echo)

Let us imitate you (echo)

As your beloved children. Amen (echo)



Bonus Material:

For a reproducible coloring page of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, visit www.elca.org/christioneducation/programplanners/2006CEprogramplanner

Discipleship and Lifelong Learning Through the Lens of Akaloo

It's here! Augsburg Fortress Publishers has launched Akaloo, a program of intentional discipleship that covers the entire lifespan, children through adults! Visit www.akaloo.org

“It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression “follower.” He never asks for admirers, worshippers, or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for.” Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's claim has a deep-rooted biblical basis: Jesus came across two fishers casting their nets from the seashore, two ordinary people doing their ordinary jobs, and he said, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” That simple invitation—or, rather, the person who issued it—would change those fishers' lives forever. With a few words they became disciples of Jesus Christ. Not admirers (though they surely admired him) and not adherents (though they surely agreed with his teachings), but *followers*.

Jesus strolled into their everyday surroundings as they went about their everyday work and called them to follow him. It's noteworthy that Jesus' disciples struggled mightily with the task of following him. They peppered Jesus constantly with questions, they bickered with one another about which of them was the best, they panicked when the seas rose around them, and in the end they abandoned him and hid like cowards. It seems that whatever of Jesus' attributes the disciples acquired, they did so because of close proximity to him. They didn't become his disciples through their own effort or will, but simply by experiencing Jesus firsthand. They were present when he healed the lame, fed the hungry, and raised the dead.

Jesus' invitation—“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people”—is an invitation to become an inviter. In fact, the call to discipleship is the act of sinful, imperfect beings inviting other sinful, imperfect beings, not to become perfect or sinless, but to follow the one who is. Discipleship means to gather up in as close proximity to Jesus as we can as often as we can and experience him, the Word of God made flesh in all his healing, feeding, resurrecting glory, until he comes again.

Akaloo is a theologically consistent approach to congregationwide faith formation with the single, clear goal of making disciples—of all ages and especially those who haven't yet heard the invitation to follow Jesus. Two critical balances characterize Akaloo as a disciple-making program. First is the balance between the “individual believer,” who must acquire ownership of his or her faith life over time to grow and be effective, and the Christian “community,” whose guidance, support, and correction act to shape the individual, who in turn shapes the community. Second, Akaloo engenders a balance between “planned activity” whose aim is stretching and challenging faith growth to ensure structured support and care, and “spontaneous revelation,” the “Aha!” that occurs naturally when openness is cultivated as both an individual and communal value.

Akaloo,
from Greek
(akolouthēin)
means
“to follow.”

Questions drive a conversation forward; answers tend to stop it. Learning environments that are strictly answer-based tend to favor the instructor at the expense of the learner, while environments that are question-based favor both equally. The learner becomes fully engaged, a full partner in her or his own growth, resulting in greater retention and greater ownership. Do this long enough, through enough of life's ups and downs and across enough spiritual growth spurts, and you can prepare someone well for a lifetime of meaningful Christian service.

In *Akaloo*, questions activate the whole process. From age 3 to 103, the questions individual disciples naturally ask form the basis for their own faith formation. From the simple curiosities of children to the challenging provocations of high school students to the quiet but profound questions of adults, Akaloo tracks along with learners step for step, providing the appropriate challenge and support they need to keep on growing.

Akaloo represents an acknowledgment that the patterns of life for growing Christian disciples—communication, interaction, growth—the ways people move and talk and engage the world around them, have evolved. *Akaloo* maximizes the local congregation's unique power to gather and shape disciples as the united body of Christ, an environment that cannot and will not ever be replaced, but it also maximizes the uniqueness of the home environment and family life as an essential partner in the process. Through use of the Internet, breakthroughs in curriculum delivery, and powerful, memorable learner resources, *Akaloo* commandeers both church and home environments to create a single, effective environment for faith growth.

Shifting the way you do things, especially in church, can become difficult in many congregations, but *Akaloo* carries with it the potential to transform every part of a congregation's life for the better. Worship, fellowship, service, evangelism, learning, and even governance can all become reinvigorated and unified when gathered together under the single purpose of making disciples.

Taken in part from the *Akaloo Guidebook* Introduction

Augburg Fortress, 2006



AKALOO

Here's a sneak peak at an Akaloo Intergenerational Life Group Session

Intergenerational Life Groups

Celebrating Church

People Connection

Note for Life Group Leader

Welcome to *Akaloo* Life Groups! Discovering the Bible Intergenerational Life Group material is relational, engaging, and will help you and those in your group talk about faith and share faith with each other and the world.

Easy-to-do activities, prayers, rituals, service projects, and faith-filled conversation starters organized around a specific theme related to *Akaloo* are all part of these Leader Pages. Any or all of them can be part of weekly Life Group gatherings.

Celebrate faith, life, relationships, and community with *Akaloo* Life Groups. Have fun!

All of Us Together

Gathering Ritual: Welcome!

The church is all about the people of faith around the world who are connected in Christ's work of love. Most of the people in the church we will never meet, but we are still connected to each other because of God.

Introduce yourself to the group with your name, adding a made-up place and favorite food that starts with the first letter of your name. For example: "Hi, I'm Jennifer. I'm from Jericho and I like jelly."

Celebrating Church Together: Worldwide Connections

Being part of the church means *understanding how many different people are in it!* On a big piece of paper, use markers and crayons to make a map of the world, remembering as best you can how it looks.

Have each person make a star on the map where they live. Make stars where extended families live. Make stars on all the places where you have a connection. Include home countries of friends, church missionary posts, places you've heard of on the news, locations where your favorite movies are set, countries your fresh fruit comes from, places where languages you know are spoken everyday, where some favorite wild animals live, and so forth. With your whole Life Group working together, how many stars can you make?

Talk About It: If you wanted to visit the starred locations on your map, how would you get there? How would you get in touch with people who live in those locations? Pick one place you want to learn more about and investigate on-line.

Faith-Filled Conversation

Sprinkle these questions throughout your time together. Continue the conversation about today's theme and related activities, and learn more about faith and life.



- What do God's people look like?
- Why do you think God needs so many different people to be the church?
- Who are the youngest and oldest persons you know at your church? Who speaks more than one language? Who was born (or has lived) in another country? God loves us all just the way we are, as different as we are.

Celebrate: A World Feast!

Shop for some foods from other parts of the world. Get a variety to experiment with, so there will be lots of choices for everyone to try. In particular, investigate the produce section of your grocery store, or, if you are extra enthusiastic, an ethnic food store. Consider asking friends from other cultures to recommend their favorite dishes. The challenge is to come up with at least a couple of foods that are brand new to each person in your Life Group.

Make labels for each food, writing its name and the place it comes from. Take some risks and try each new food. Feast and remember you are part of the big, wide, beautiful world.

Serving Others Together: Prayers and Pen Pals

Think about all the stars on your Life Group map of the world. Offer your love and God's blessings to all the people and animals that live in those starred places. Pray for their happiness and for whatever you think they might need. Let each person mention a place on the map to pray for. Maybe people *there* are praying for *you* today! God loves them just as much as God loves you.

Is anyone interested in being pen pals with someone from another country? Investigate on-line to connect with a new friend.

Prayer

Say this prayer or blessing at the close of your *Akaloo* Life Group time.

Gather in a circle with your left hands stacked in the center. Repeat the last "Love and Amen" together.

Loving God, we are part of your church with people all over the world. Thank you for connecting us all!
Love and Amen.

Love and Amen!

2006-2007 Planning calendar

Utilize these pages to plan and schedule your congregation's activities and offerings in Christian education and discipleship. The right side of the calendar is a place for thematic notes, reminders, and connections to other areas of congregational life. Complete the calendar before distributing it to teachers, staff, and other congregational leaders.

DATE	NOTES, REMINDERS, and CONNECTIONS
3	
10	September 14- Holy Cross Day
17	
24	
September 2006	
1	
8	
15	
22	
29	Reformation Sunday
October 2006	
5	All Saints Sunday; November 10-Martin Luther's Birthday
12	
19	
26	Christ the King Sunday
November 2006	
3	1st Sunday in Advent
10	
17	
24	December 25- Nativity of Our Lord
31	January 6, 2007-Epiphany of Our Lord
December 2006	
7	Baptism of Our Lord
14	
21	
28	February 2- Presentation of Our Lord
January 2007	

4 _____
11 _____
18 Transfiguration of Our Lord; February 21-Ash Wednesday
25 _____

February 2007

4 _____
11 _____
18 _____
25 _____

March 2007

1 Palm Sunday
8 Easter Sunday; Resurrection of Our Lord
15 _____
22 _____
29 _____

April 2007

6 _____
13 May 17- Ascension of Our Lord
20 _____
27 Day of Pentecost

May 2007

3 Holy Trinity
10 _____
17 _____
24 _____

June 2007

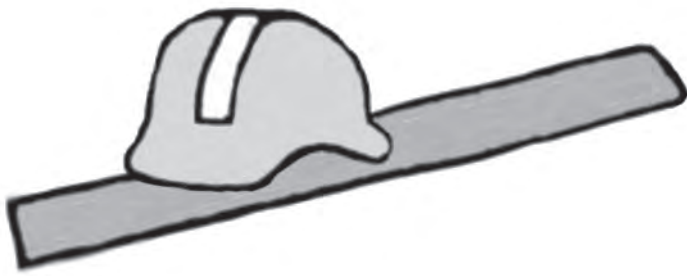
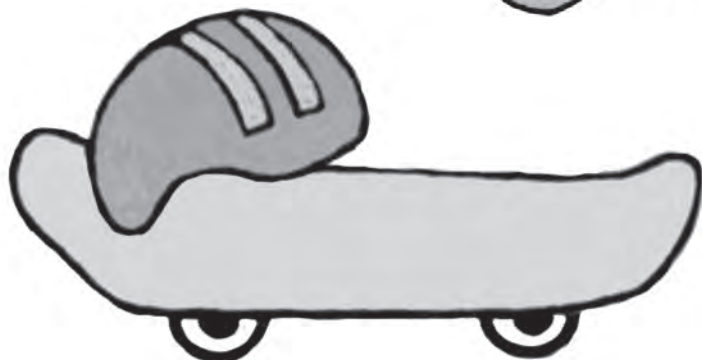
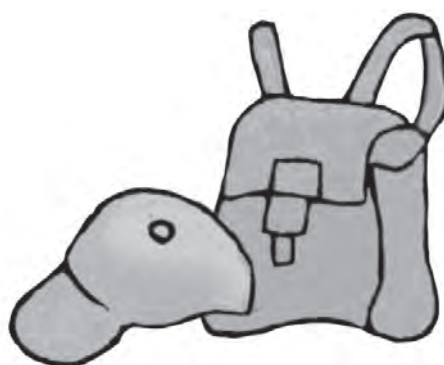
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July 2007

5 _____
12 _____
19 _____
26 _____

August 2007

LIVING FAITH • ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship



IMITATE MY HEART



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Living in God's amazing grace

LIVING FAITH • ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship



Imitate My Heart: An ongoing expression of the ELCA Call to Discipleship

2006-2007 Christian Education Planning Guide



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Living in God's amazing grace

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