

seeds for the parish

Spring 2015

Resource Paper for Leaders of ELCA Congregations

www.ELCA.org



"God's work. Our hands." Sunday scheduled for Sept. 13.

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Resources for digging into today's immigration issues.

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Building bridges faith to faith

By Megan Nuehring

"God has used us in ways beyond our ability ... we have reached milestones [in a relationship of love and understanding] with our neighboring Muslim community," says Rani Abdulmasih, pastor of Mother of the Savior Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in Dearborn, Mich.

A mission congregation, Mother of the Savior is unique. The congregation is one of two Arabic speaking congregations in the ELCA and is the only Middle Eastern Christian congregation in Dearborn. The church property is next to the largest mosque in North America. Members of Mother of the Savior worship in a community where 90 percent of the residents are Muslim.

"In the past year, I have brought 900 people to the mosque to meet and learn about our Muslim neighbors," he says. In

a society that can often be fearful of those with varying beliefs, Rani immerses his congregation in activities that help them walk with their neighbors. Every other weekend an interfaith event is held, and 80 to 150 people attend. These events allow the participants to experience one another's faith and fellowship.

One year ago, Mother of the Savior hosted an ELCA Glocal Event. The overall event called for a celebration of what the congregation has accomplished and the bridges that have been built. Rani emphasizes that it does not matter if someone is Muslim, Jewish or Christian. The main concern is building relationships.

"My belief tells me to walk with my neighbor, no matter their background," he says. "It is amazing the need to just simply

be there and open the relationship with those who are different, [and] although we may have different beliefs, we are both in the journey together."

The interfaith activities benefit the youth in many ways, Rani adds, including encouraging young people to ask questions and learn about and from their peers.

"Some [of the youth] were born in the United States, and some were raised in the Middle East," Rani says. The youth are asking their peers, "Why are you Christian? Why are you not Muslim?" and vice versa. This allows youth to build bridges among their neighbors.

"Interfaith work is not a complicated business," says Rani. "It is simply walking with my neighbor."



Youth attending MYLE reflect a diverse world – and church.

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Confirmation curriculum fosters questions and discovery.

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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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Youth serving God — disabilities and all

By Sarah Flatt

In the summer of 2000, I had just finished my freshman year of high school. I was a spitfire of a youth group member in my congregation, Bethel Lutheran Church in St. Clair Shores, Mich. I was also the pastor's kid. "Church" was synonymous to "family gathering" in my mind – and the concept of attending the ELCA Youth Gathering in St. Louis practically had me jumping out of my skin in excitement – that many Lutherans in one place sounded like heaven on earth!

I was not, however, excited to attend the **Definitely-Abled Youth Leadership Event (DAYLE)** before the Gathering. As a youth living with a disability for most of my life, I did not see any sort of value in gathering with other youth like me. I had found a place of my own within my community, being active in drama, youth activities and attending multiple summer camps. Why would I want to miss Six Flags with the youth group to sit around with other kids in wheelchairs for a few days?

But I went, practically kicking and screaming. You see, I had a plan – I wouldn't enjoy myself. I would suffer through the four-day event to prove my dad and everyone else wrong: There's no point in gathering with a community larger than the one you're already a part of. And then, even if I had forced myself to have a miserable time, I could at least have the pleasure of being right.



40 youth, parents and/or care providers are registered to attend DAYLE 2015 in Detroit — with room for more!

You know where this is going, because wherever two or three are gathered, the Spirit is at work. Whenever intentional community is being formed, we learn things about ourselves that otherwise go missed in our own self-reflection. Whatever our personal disabilities or limitations might be, God has gifted us with skills and abilities to do work in the kingdom, here and now.

I didn't make it through opening worship without making a friend. By breakfast the next morning, I was curious about ways that youth with disabilities were serving in the ELCA. The following afternoon, I was elected by my peers as a leader to the Definitely-Abled Advisory Committee – a group of definitely-abled young people called to represent and encourage participation of definitely-abled youth in all aspects and expressions of our church.

DAYLE was, and continues to be, a crucial part of my call to public ministry. It was at that event that the seed was planted: I had gifts to offer the church, and the ELCA needed those gifts. Fifteen years later, I'm still realizing that not only do all people have Spirit-given gifts, but we are all definitely able to serve God through the parts of us that the world labels as limiting, disabling or worthless.

The church is the place where death and new life are inseparable. Whatever it is that separates us from the abilities of others,

wherever we are weakest and most vulnerable, whatever we have that the world considers dead – Christ brings creative opportunity, strength in community and always new ability and new life.

If you are a definitely-abled young person, or know someone who is, please don't miss the opportunity to participate or encourage someone's participation in this summer's Definitely-Abled Youth Leadership Event. DAYLE 2015 will take place July 12-15 in Detroit, and all definitely-abled youth in the ELCA are invited to attend. More information and registration can be found at www.ELCA.org/YouthGathering/GatheringDetails/MYLEandDAYLE.

Grace Institute for Spiritual Formation

Grace Institute for Spiritual Formation will begin its eighth program, beginning Aug. 7-9 at Shalom Spirituality Center in Dubuque, Iowa. This in-depth program has a Lutheran center with ecumenical breadth. Lay and ordained church leaders meet quarterly for two years, August 2015 - May 2017. Each session has presentations, worship, small groups and one or two new forms of meditation and prayer. The program fosters spiritual growth and leadership in spiritual practices for individual and congregational renewal.

The Congregational Transformation Program, an additional track this year, aims to enrich and deepen the spiritual life of a congregation through shared contemplative practices in a congregational

small group. The program offers a model of contemplative leadership to deepen the congregational practices of prayer, listening to Scripture and renewal in worship for service in God's world. The core practice is the covenant group, a small group that meets regularly for prayer, faith sharing and leadership development.

The eight session themes are: grace-centered spirituality, attending to the Word, symbols and sacraments, worship, contemplative prayer, discernment, spirituality and service in the world, and spirituality and evangelism. Presenters include Marty Haugen, Susan Briehl, Fr. Richard Flom (Orthodox priest), Mary Preus, Tom Witt, Laura Gentry, Ginger Anderson-Larson, Craig Nesson, Amy Larson, Myron Her-



zberg and Bradley Hanson. Cost: \$2,400 payable over three years.

Grace Institute for Spiritual Formation, an ELCA Lifelong Learning Partner, is hosted through the Office for College Ministries at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa.

For information visit: www.luther.edu/graceinstitute or contact graceinstitute@luther.edu, 563-387-1040.

seeds for the parish

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Freed in Christ to serve

“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor.

Since 2013, thousands of ELCA congregations have participated in this opportunity and have dedicated one day to serve communities in ways that share the love of God with all people. The date for 2015 is **Sunday, Sept. 13**. Mark your congregation’s calendar today! If your congregation cannot participate on this date, please consider another day.

Whether it’s volunteering at a shelter for people and families who are homeless, gathering food items to fill shelves at a local food pantry or advocating for peace and justice in communities, your service activities offer an opportunity for us to explore one of our most basic convictions as Lutherans: that all of life in Jesus Christ – every act of service, in every daily calling, in every corner of life – flows freely from a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.

In speaking about his congregation’s 2014 experience, a 10-year-old member from St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Whittier, Calif., puts it best: “It feels good to give.”



According to Terri Roberston, youth and family minister at St. Andrew, “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday offers his congregation a unique way to “see the face of God.”

“From the formation of a planning team to (St. Andrew’s) donations of school

supplies and monetary gifts – and finally the weekend of assembling, packing, cutting, tying and delivering – I witnessed our congregation serve together in ways I have not seen before. Through it all, we grew closer to one another,” says Terri.

“All ages – from our Brownie Girl Scouts to our older members, one just recovering from a stroke – we worked side by side sharing in a common goal: to be the hands of God here in Whittier. On Sunday, when we delivered food to those in need throughout our community, we had the chance to see the face of God over and over again. Many were inspired to work in the days and weeks ahead to serve in this way on a consistent and more frequent basis.”

To help your congregation plan for 2015, visit www.ELCA.org/dayofservice. Here you’ll find a toolkit, information to order your personalized “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday T-shirt (now available in Spanish and Arabic in addition to English) and more.

A gathering for leaders of faith formation

Congregational leaders who envision their ministry to be “making disciples for the sake of the world” will want to attend the North American Association for the Catechumenate’s (NAAC) 2015 Annual Gathering in Baltimore, July 30-Aug. 1. Popular authors and ELCA pastors Jessica Krey Duckworth and Paul Hoffman will speak on the theme, “Transforming Congregations through Spiritual Practice: Creating a Discipleship Community.”

This event is for pastors, seminarians, educators, musicians and other congregational leaders, and is sponsored by NAAC, an ecumenical organization dedicated to providing faith formation resources for congregations of all denominations in the United States, the Caribbean region and Canada.



For more information and to register, go to www.catechumenate.org. Partial scholarships are available for seminarians and first-call pastors. Contact Devra Betts, registrar, at devrabetts@gmail.com no later than June 15 for scholarship information.



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Register Now!

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How: Tune in to the meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

Register at: Thrivent.com/membermeeting

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Three ways to dig deeper on immigration issues

Handbook for new Americans helps navigate complex systems

As many of you know, arriving in the United States does not mean life suddenly gets easy for immigrants. It takes courage to leave everything you know, and it takes courage to navigate our complicated system. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) has created a guide to help migrants, and those who walk alongside them, navigate these complex systems. Titled, “First Steps: An LIRS Guide for Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants Released from Detention,” the guide provides critical information for migrants to successfully rebuild their lives. Pastors who have new Americans in their congregations or a visitation ministry will find this resource especially helpful.

Supplements for specific immigration statuses offer details for asylum seekers and lawful permanent residents. More supplements will be available later in 2015. Visit lirs.org/FirstSteps to download “First Steps” in English or Spanish. Email firststeps@lirs.org to order hard copies.

Video for discussing unaccompanied immigrant children

The news cameras may have turned away from Central American children trekking across multiple countries and the desert in search of safety, but that doesn't mean children aren't still fleeing. Our new video, “The Journey,” delves into why these children have fled their homes, their hopes for the future, and how people of faith can protect and empower them as children of God.

View “The Journey” with your congregation to educate them on this issue, and show how Lutherans across the country are welcoming these children. The video includes suggestions of how congregations can take action to create lasting change in the lives of new Americans. These include: advocacy through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's Action Center, starting an immigration detention visitation ministry and praying during Refugee Sunday. Visit lirs.org/TheJourney to view “The Journey” and download our discussion guide. All materials are available in English and Spanish.

Refugee Sunday 2015

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is proud to celebrate the gifts new Americans bring to the United States through Refugee Sunday. After Refugee Sunday last year, one pastor told us, “The resources were perfect, but I wish we could have celebrated Refugee Sunday on any Sunday.” So this year, any Sunday is Refugee Sunday! Pick the Sunday that works best for your congregation to celebrate.

Resource kits including bulletin insert and poster are available to make the service interactive and educational. The kits also include a petition asking President Obama to allow more Syrian refugees to rebuild their lives in the United States. Now, more than ever, Lutherans need



Pastor Phil Anderson
San Salvador, El Salvador

to help uprooted people. Go to lirs.org/RefugeeSunday to receive a kit and start planning your Refugee Sunday. If you have questions, contact Matt Herzberg, LIRS manager for Congregational Outreach, at mherzberg@lirs.org.

High praise received for Whirl Lectionary Sunday School

Switching to a new Sunday school curriculum can be an overwhelming experience, but Lutheran congregations are giving the new Whirl Lectionary Sunday School from sparkhouse a try – and they haven't been disappointed. Whirl Lectionary makes it possible for young people to make connections between worship and what happens in Sunday school, as well as apply what they are learning to their own lives in a fresh, innovative way. They also can see how each Sunday fits into the seasons of the church year.

“Kids now know what the church seasons are – and that they can hear the same Scripture in church and already have a basic understanding. I think that's huge!” said Laura Twedall, director of youth ministry at United Lutheran Church in Grand Forks, N.D. “More than once, my son has said in church, ‘Hey, we read this in Sunday school, too!’”

“I use the children's messages in the director guide every Sunday. That's been great! It really means that worship is the beginning of the [Sunday school] experience for the kids,” says Virginia Child,

interim pastor of First Church of Christ, Congregational, a United Church of Christ congregation in Bethany, Conn.

Whirl offers congregations an array of tools to immerse young people in the church year seasons and texts of the Revised Common Lectionary, including a colorful wall chart and floor mat showing the church year, an engaging Story Bible, a colorful NRSV Bible, beautifully designed leaflets and leader guides, and lively videos.



“The activities in each lesson are short enough to keep students' attention, but powerful in their content and always age-appropriate. I love that there are multiple activities for each lesson, and you can customize your lesson to fit your time and student needs,” said Twedall.

In many ways, Whirl is the answer to Christian education directors

who are looking for curriculum that invites children and youth to wrestle with Bible stories and explore what Christian faith

means for real life in a way that goes beyond the expected pat Sunday school answers.

“I was looking for a curriculum that encouraged questioning and presented the Bible with nuance, exposing the kids to the underneath of the stories. For instance, I wanted the lesson on Jonah to focus on how far away from God he got, rather than expecting them to believe that he was swallowed by a whale. This paid off ... when we did the [Whirl] lesson on Jonah!” said Child.

“When I ask the kids questions, I no longer get the same answer over and over, but kids are starting to connect to the videos and come up with their own ideas on what it means to follow God,” said Twedall.

Sparkhouse publishes ecumenical faith formation curriculum for children, youth and adults. Learn more about sparkhouse at www.wearsparkhouse.org.

Crafting language for worship

in these or similar words
CRAFTING LANGUAGE for WORSHIP



There is an important distinction between most worship books and Evangelical Lutheran Worship that many have not yet discovered. Throughout the liturgical material in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, the rubrics – the informational words in red – often say things like, “in these or similar words,” indicating that the particular text may best be adapted to the unique circumstances, such as:

“The presiding minister announces God’s for giveness with these or similar words.”

Actual texts are then provided, but the rubric opens up the opportunity for the minister to carefully craft an appropriate text unique to a particular context.

This is good news, especially for those who struggle to craft worship that is faithful to our Lutheran liturgical tradition. It enables worship leaders to be attuned to contemporary, often younger, congregations, or perhaps an aging demographic who may be better served by simpler texts, unique settings such as an outdoor service at a retreat, or worshipers who are new to a Lutheran setting.

With this freedom comes responsibility. The intent is not to encourage “anything goes.” “Similar” and “appropriate” are the guiding words and principles. The goal is for worship planners and leaders to make an intentional effort to carefully create texts that speak clearly to the gathered community while still communicating the theological content for the specific liturgical moment.

For example, consider this prayer after communion found in Evangelical Lutheran Worship:

*We give you thanks, almighty God
that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of life.
In your mercy, strengthen us through this gift,
in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This beautiful prayer has been a part of our liturgical language for years and for many worshipping communities is still an excellent prayer to retain and use. If there is desire to craft a new prayer for this moment in the liturgy, consider the following:

- There is a clear address and word of thanks to God.
- It is clear that this prayer follows the receiving of communion and that it precedes worshipers being sent into the world.
- We humbly ask God to do something; in this case, to strengthen us to go into the world.
- We wrap it up with a clear statement of why we do this – for the sake of Jesus.

How might a prayer function in the same way within the service and contain the same core elements, but be said in language that sounds very different? Consider this possibility (from the forthcoming resource, “In These or Similar Words: Crafting Language for Worship”):


*Great God of gifts: Thank you!
You feed us in many, many ways, and we are grateful to receive.
We look to you, we look to each other, and we praise your name.
As you’ve fed us, now make us food for the world.
Thank you, great God of gifts! Amen.*

This example, with more colloquial language, may not be useful with every worshipping assembly. That’s okay. It’s not supposed to be. It does though fit the “in these or similar words” criteria and may work very well in some settings. Unity is found in the theological content and the patterns of worship, not always in praying the exact same words.

If you are a worship planner or leader, and crafting worship texts that are unique to your community is not part of your practice, try it sometime. It isn’t always easy. In fact, you may discover that the texts in Evangelical Lutheran Worship fit your context just fine. If, however, this is a practice that you are interested in exploring, do so with careful reflection and intention.

- Study the service material in Evangelical Lutheran Worship and imagine a possible beginning place.
- Name the function within the service and identify the key theological points being made in whatever text you choose.
- Identify the context for which you are writing and name the style of language you are attempting.
- Then try it and try again. Read texts aloud. Imagine a whole group of people saying something together. It is hard work to do well.

Coming this July is a resource to help you explore this concept more fully. “In These or Similar Words: Crafting Language for Worship” (Augsburg Fortress) will guide individuals and groups who wish to prepare new worship texts for their communities. To learn more and pre-order, visit augsburgfortress.org or call Augsburg Fortress Sales & Service at 800-328-4648.



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Worship Jubilee

Worshippers, worship leaders, lay and ordained, musicians and artists, and everyone interested in the worship life of the ELCA are invited to attend this Worship Jubilee.

For complete information and registration, see:
www.LivingVoice2015.org

**Worship Jubilee of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

**Biennial Conference of the
Association of Lutheran Church Musicians**



Participate in worship, singing, presentations and workshops.

Interact with those whose worship may be similar to yours and be a church together with those whose worship may differ.

Envision your congregation’s observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Let your voice be heard as plans are shaped for the ongoing renewal of worship in the ELCA.

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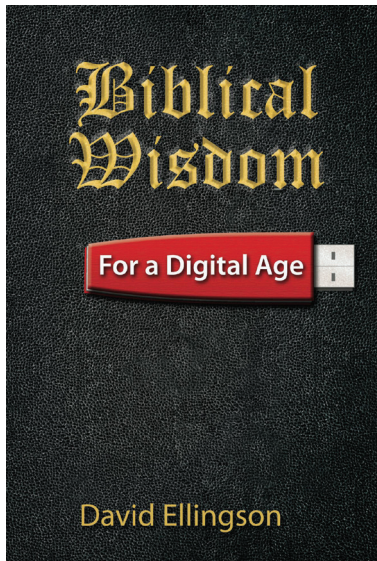
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'Biblical Wisdom For a Digital Age'

This new book by David Ellingson, "Biblical Wisdom For a Digital Age," offers 50 carefully chosen biblical phrases or proverbs that capture familiar sayings and essential teachings of the Christian faith. Each phrase is accompanied by a short reflection, questions to ponder and suggestions for personal devotion or interaction and conversation between household members,



groups of youth or in multi-generational small groups.

In a digital age of "sound bytes," short attention spans and busy, overflowing lives, this offering of 50 meditations is an effective tool for teaching and sharing God's word and providing practical insights for daily life. One may just turn to a page – any page – and experience a meaningful sound byte (biblical phrase) to reflect upon for the day. Ellingson says

of himself in one of the daily meditations, "That's part of my personality. I am not cautious; I go 'all in.'" This trait is evident throughout "Biblical Wisdom For a Digital Age." He has poured his heart, soul, mind and life experiences into the words and personal stories that grace each page.

For use in congregation or home, on the road or at a retreat, these meditations will elicit

the reader's own life stories and nurture personal faith in a fast-paced world.

"Biblical Wisdom For a Digital Age" is available from Amazon.com or can be ordered in quantity for groups, congregations and gatherings by contacting Ellingson at david.ellingson@tlc.edu or by phone at 206-459-0911.

David Ellingson is an ELCA pastor, professor of children, youth and family studies, and director of the Children,

Youth & Family Center at Trinity Lutheran College in Everett, Wash. He is also the author of "Paddle Pilgrim: An adventure of learning and spirit, kayaking the Mississippi River" (2013).

'Biblical Wisdom For a Digital Age' is a one-of-a-kind multi-generational resource that can engage families, teens and adults in praying, reflecting and applying one Bible verse each week for a year. The activities are short, easy-to-use and engaging – they can become part of people's everyday lives. Dave Ellingson brings the wisdom of the Bible to life in a format that fits our digital world.

– John Roberto, author, "Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century"

The ELCA Malaria Campaign

Every year millions of people around the world observe **World Malaria Day on April 25**. The ELCA Malaria Campaign is turning this day into a special week, inviting you and your congregation to observe World Malaria Day on Sunday, April 26.

Five years ago we set a goal, dreamed big with our Lutheran companion churches and partners, and set out to raise \$15 million by the end of 2015. Our hope for this week is to make that dream a reality. As of the end of December, faithful ELCA members have already raised over \$13.5 million for this campaign. By joining together, we can reach \$15 million. Be a part of this historic time in the life of our church and get involved:

1. Announce that you will be joining millions of people around the world and ELCA congregations across the country in promoting and observing World Malaria Day.
2. Activate your congregation, learning about malaria and the ELCA Malaria Campaign with free resources.
3. Invite members to give generously and be a part of this historic time in the life of our church.
4. Pray for those affected by malaria with special World Malaria Day prayers, litanies and suggested readings.
5. Share the story of the ELCA Malaria Campaign with videos and a special World Malaria Day toolkit.

Find more information and resources at www.ELCA.org/malaria.

A beautiful reflection of the body of Christ

By Maya Mineoi

This summer the ELCA's most ethnically diverse large gathering, the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE), will be held in Detroit preceding the ELCA Youth Gathering. MYLE connects youth of color and youth whose primary language is other than English with ELCA resources and the ELCA churchwide community.

When I was 16, I attended MYLE 2009 and met many youth of color who, ironically, thought all Lutherans were the same ethnicity as they were. The presiding bishop at the time, Mark Hanson, preached that this gathering of Lutherans from Hawaii to North Dakota to Puerto Rico was a beautiful reflection of the body of Christ. Shortly after, I learned that the membership of the ELCA was only 3 percent people of color. This shook me because neither my home congregation nor the ELCA publications that I saw reflected this statistic. I began to learn that my church had a lot of work

to do in order to be the church we wanted to be – reflecting the diverse world in which we live.

At 19, I volunteered at MYLE 2012. I was honored to listen to MYLE youth and adult leaders struggle with how their faith impacted their sense of meaning and truth. They wrestled with varied topics such as interfaith dialogue, sex education in the school system, relevance of the 1960s civil rights movement, the place of pop culture in faith life, and their role in all of it. I began to celebrate as a young adult that I was a part of the ELCA, a denomination that is making space for members to live with difficult questions of faith and social justice.

Now I'm 21 and serving as a co-team leader for the MYLE 2015



planning team. The team is preparing for participants to worship, explore their call to accompaniment in service, meet Detroit organizational leaders for experiential learning time, and celebrate together around the theme "Love Does." Each day of MYLE 2015 will engage us in a different aspect

of God's presence in our lives. Acknowledging the spiritual gifts of community, celebration, vocation and grace, we hope to empower youth in learning to creatively do God's work in the world.

For more information about the 2015 Multicultural Youth Leadership Event, visit www.ELCA.org/YouthGathering/GatheringDetails/MYLEandDAYLE.

A new approach for confirmation and youth faith formation

Anyone who's spent time with teenagers knows that young people have far more questions than answers, especially when it comes to their faith. And that's fantastic!

The Sparkhouse Youth team knows teenagers, and we know there is no end to their need to dig in, poke around and mess with their own ideas. They take nothing for granted and are eager to test out their big ideas and big questions on anyone who will listen.

That's why problem-based learning is such a powerful tool for congregations and youth leaders hoping to nurture a lasting, resilient faith in their young people. It taps into teenagers' inherent skepticism and need to know. It's the heart of our new confirmation curriculum, Colaborate. The theory behind problem-based learning is that students learn best when they have a vested interest in the information being presented. It's a way of helping them answer the question, "So what?"

This is particularly important in the area of faith formation. Problem-based learning helps students discover for themselves that the doctrines, traditions

colaborate

and beliefs of their faith are relevant to their lives. Students are presented with a problem – "Why are we called Lutherans?" or "What's the point of being baptized?" – they can't solve on their own. Their inability to solve the problem leads them to discover what they need to learn. That tension is the core of problem-based learning.

This way of learning changes the way teenagers think about faith itself. Rather than faith being handed over as an established set of facts to be learned and mastered, faith formation is understood as a continual process of growth and discovery.

This way of learning has implications for leaders as well. They don't have to be experts on biblical history or theology, they don't have to have their own faith all ironed out. They are encouraged to share their own questions and discoveries as they guide the group through the learning process.

Problem-based learning includes lots of collaboration, peers working in small groups. They gain a richer understanding of the content. They test out their thoughts by saying them out loud. They hear how others are processing the information. They see that it's okay to not have everything figured out.

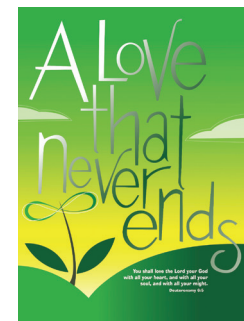
Finally, problem-based learning uses projects to help teenagers expand and deepen their understanding of concepts through hands-on learning. Group discussion, art projects, off-site adventures, games, poems and service projects give teenagers real-life experiences that help make often-abstract ideas more concrete.

Problem-based learning certainly won't answer every teenager's questions about God, faith, church or life, and that's okay.

Visit www.wearesparkhouse.org/teens/colaborate to learn more about the all-new Lutheran confirmation curriculum, Colaborate.

2015 outdoor ministry curriculum: "A Love That Never Ends"

Lutheran Outdoor Ministries is excited to announce its 2015 curriculum, "A Love That Never Ends." The outdoor ministry curriculum is produced every year for use by camps, congregations and other organizations. Loving God and loving others sounds simple, but living that love in our lives gets complicated. People of faith have often been called to do difficult things – to pack up and go when called, to speak difficult truths in challenging situations, to believe in God's promises and to love even our enemies. With "A Love That Never Ends," participants will learn about their calling to love God and others from people of the Old Testament who struggled to do the same.



"A Love That Never Ends" is available for purchase in different curriculum "bundles." This enables organizations to purchase the sections that best serve their needs, whether they plan to use the entire curriculum or just a few of the Bible studies. A new preschool Bible study is available this year to use with vacation Bible school and family programs. This section includes additional suggestions and activities for using the curriculum with participants that have special needs.

Purchasing the curriculum gives access to its supporting website. The website contains a discussion forum where users can ask questions, share ideas and post other related resources they've discovered. There are also decorating ideas that can be used for vacation Bible school, as well as photos of the crafts contained in the craft section. The website will host webinars in the spring on topics such as the biblical background, games and ropes course, staff faith formation and vacation Bible school.

For more information or to purchase "A Love That Never Ends," visit www.lomnetwork.org.

Gather Bible study to change schedule and format

Women across the ELCA have a long and rich heritage of studying the Bible. And for most groups, that study is delivered through the magazine of the women's organization, Gather (formerly Lutheran Woman Today). This year Gather is changing the format of the study. Rather than a nine-month study and a three-month summer study, the magazine will run several studies throughout the year. Gather will no longer publish a separate leader guide, bookmark and companion Bible. The leader information will be included in the magazine.

Many Bible study writers are scholars, often retired, who had the time, experience and academic background to write a nine-session study and a leader book. It is difficult to identify folks who are able to commit to such a large project. By shortening the studies, the magazine can get new authors who couldn't make a commitment to write a longer study. Readers will enjoy hearing the perspectives of a larger, more diverse group of writers.

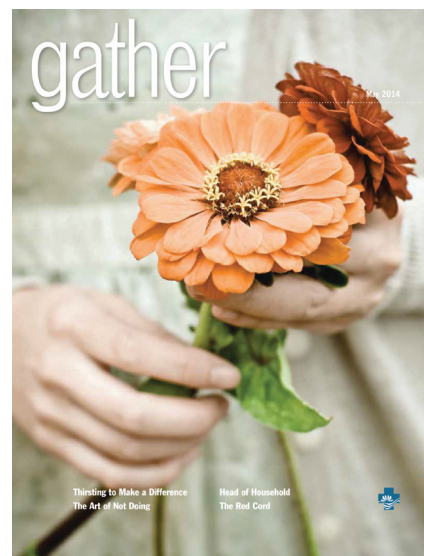
The magazine staff hopes that shorter Bible studies will make it easier to invite

new people to join in congregational study. A three-session study may be a good way to create an entry point. So in 2015-16, Gather is offering Bible study in a different way.

The shape of the year will be:

- Summer: Three sessions (June, July, August)
- Fall: Three sessions (September through November)
- Advent/Christmas: Shorter seasonal devotional (December)
- Winter: Four sessions, probably on a book of the Bible (January, February through April)
- Spring: One session, an intergenerational lesson (May)

For the summer of 2015, Emma Crossen, Women of the ELCA's former stewardship director, is writing a three-session study on giving called "No Catchy Slogans." For the fall of 2015, Liv Larson Andrews, pastor at Salem Lutheran Church in Spokane, Wash., will write a three-session study called "Slow Faith" on



how the kingdom of God moves slowly, yet in our culture we are asked to move with ever greater speed. Spring 2016 will bring an exploration of Philippians. Go to www.gathermagazine.org for updates and titles.



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Photo: Members of Emmaus Evangelical Lutheran Church, Racine, Wisc., a congregation of diverse ages and cultures.



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