

A Framework for Faith Formation in the ELCA Fall 2015

Introduction

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

Will our children be nurtured and transformed

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

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

Social Statement on: Our Calling in Education, 2007

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² ELW baptismal service.

³ See the ELCA website for more:

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

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

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

Section 1: Theological Framework through a Lutheran Lens

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

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

Section 2: Faith Formation Framework

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Effective Faith Formation:¹²

Perspective

Effective faith formation perspectives include:

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

Practices

Effective faith formation practices include:

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

Orientation

Effective faith formation orientation include:

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

Section 3: Mission, Values, and Vision

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

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

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

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

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

Vision

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

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

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

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