



Christian Education Network Devotions on the Five Gifts of Discipleship

For those serving as leaders in faith formation ministries

BAPTISM

During baptism, the presiding minister addresses parents and others who bring for baptism children who are not able to answer for themselves and asks them to accept the following responsibilities:

**To live with them among God's faithful people,
Bring them to the word of God and the holy supper,**
teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
place in their hands the holy scriptures,
and nurture them in faith and prayer,
so that your children may learn to trust God,
**Proclaim Christ through word and deed,
Care for others** and the world God made,
And work for justice and peace. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 228)

Session One

Theme: Overview

Purpose: **To reflect on how we are all baptized into one body.**

Scripture: Read I Corinthians 12: 12-13

Devotional:

These devotional thoughts and reflection questions are to help you grow spiritually. Many of us work with families and children and/or youth. We are concerned about nurturing their faith development. The best way is to surround those children/ youth with adults who are growing spiritually. We can teach content but we cannot grow faith. That is the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. So the purpose of this series is to nurture your spiritual growth, which will spiral out into the lives of others, to help you reflect on who you are and to help you practice your faith.

We who work in children's ministry or faith formation or children, youth and family ministry carry different titles and different job descriptions. We work in different regions of the ELCA in very different contexts. Yet we are all one. We all serve God and are interested in how faith develops and is nurtured. This passage in Corinthians talks of the many parts of the body and yet how the body is one and all the parts work together.

As we are baptized, we become a child of God, part of the Body, part of the Church. We are all baptized into this body through the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the primary rite by which people enter the community of the Church, no matter what the age. Five promises are made

during that baptism – either on behalf of the child or for one’s self when older. These promises are actually lived out through practices of faithful living. We become part of a community of faith and connect with other faithful Christians through showing up for worship and other community events. We give those baptized Bibles and encourage them to read them. We teach about basic documents of our faith such as the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments. We tell about the good news of Jesus Christ and we act like we believe it. People who “practice” will grow in faith, will learn more about God, and will deepen their spiritual life.

Reflection is an important part of spiritual growth. Please ponder the following questions, journal about them, share with a partner or participate with us in a video discussion (see separate invitation).

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the date of your baptism? Reflect on any stories you heard about your baptism. Who was there? Where was it held? How old were you?
2. Which of the five promises or gifts of discipleship do you find the easiest to live out? Which is the most difficult?
3. Choose one of the five that you can focus on for the next 11 weeks. What is one thing you can do to help you with this focus?
4. In what ways do you help parents reflect on the five promises that will be used in the baptismal rite?

Session Two

Theme: Living together as God’s people in one body

Gift: **To live among God’s faithful people.**

Purpose: To reflect on how we could actually live together as one faithful body.

Scripture: Read Ephesians 4: 1-6, 15-16

Devotional:

Paul gives us some hints on how to live together in harmony. He says to be humble, gentle and patient, bearing with each other in love. People in a congregation can be hard to live with sometimes. There are people with strong opinions, people who judge others, people who gossip, people who say the wrong things, etc. People are not perfect and can be a challenge to get along with. In frustration, people just leave or get angry and lash out at others. It can be hard to live with others when we are so different. When we work with families who have children, do we talk about this and how hard it is? We say in baptism we will make an effort to live among God’s faithful people. Why is this important enough that it is one of the five gifts of discipleship? God puts us in families and God instituted another family – the church. It takes effort to be part of a church family.

Dorothy C. Bass says this in the introduction to the book, *Practicing Our Faith*,

How important it is to have companions as we seek life-giving ways of life! This, after all, is a basic tenet of Christian faith and life; though Christ, we belong to God and become brothers and sisters to one another, sharing Christ’s love for all people. Christians know that we are not made to be alone. Yet today we too are uncertain

about the shape of our way of life. With the ordinary things we do each day changing all around us, even we who have belonged to the church all our lives wonder how to do these things well – how to do them, in Christian terms, faithfully.” [pp. 4-5]

Exploring with the baptized why they should be part of a church community is an important discussion. It is not an easy discussion and has no clear set of answers but listening carefully is life-giving. The answer might be that they just cannot get to worship regularly. Help them make a plan on how to connect with others in the church even if they cannot get to worship each week.

Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean for you to live among God’s faithful people?*
2. Name someone who influenced your faith journey. Describe that person’s faith.*
3. How might “living among God’s faithful people” be considered a gift? What are the consequences, if any, if we do not allow this gift to be part of our life?*
4. List seven reasons you need to be part of a church family. Ask the adults who will be participating in the baptismal service to do the same thing.*

Session Three

Theme: Learning to Trust in God

Gift: **Hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper**

Purpose: To reflect on how people come to trust in God

Scripture: Read I Corinthians 11: 23-26, 2 Timothy 1:5, 3: 14-16

Devotional:

Paul emphasizes passing along to others what we have received. In I Corinthians, he says that he is passing along information about the Lord’s Supper that he received from the Lord Jesus. Then he reminds Timothy about the faith that he has received from his mother and grandmother. Later in the letter to Timothy, Paul talks about the importance of the Scriptures for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training. He is of course talking of the Hebrew Scriptures because the New Testament had not yet been put together. Corinthians and Timothy were written around 50 – 70 CE and the New Testament was not official authorized by the Catholic Church until 382 CE.

Often we have taken this list in the sacrament of baptism as the content for the curriculum that we must teach or help parents teach. Note that this part of the covenant is the only one that lists a purpose: “so that your children may learn to trust God.” So how do we learn to trust God? Trust and knowledge are passed along from person to person just as faith is passed along. It cannot be taught through a curriculum. John Westerhoff III in his book, *Will Our Children Have Faith*, says, “religion is caught more than taught and we cannot teach what we do not know and believe.” (p 83) He goes on to state that religion is an experience. He continues, “The purpose of a Sunday School is to give people an opportunity share life with other faithful selves, to experience the faith in

community, to learn the Christian story and to engage in Christian actions.” The key is experience with the people in community, not any curriculum.

Nurturing prayer, the last item on the list might be the most important for helping children develop trust. It does not require teaching them to pray but having them see others praying and have adult pray with them. The first item about bringing children to worship is again an experience with adults – watching, following, and mimicking. From those first experiences, comes understanding. Later, the process of using the Bible and learning the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandants can inform the faith and trust that is already developing.

Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean for you to hear the Word of God?*
2. Describe what it feels like to receive the Lord’s Supper.*
3. What are your first memories of going to worship? Who took you to worship?
4. Who taught you the Lord’s Prayer?
5. What does it mean to “trust in God?”
6. Encourage the adults in your congregation to reflect on what helps them to trust in another person. Then lead them to reflect on the ways in which they trust God.
7. Take a few minutes for silent prayer. While you pray, think of a phrase, verse, or image from the scriptural passages for this devotional. Share in a journal, during the conference call or with a partner.

Session Four

Theme: Loving in Words and Deeds

Gift: **To proclaim the good news of God in Christ in word and deed.**

Purpose: Reflect on how we can proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ through our words and actions.

Scripture: Read I John 3: 18-24; 4: 19-21.

Devotional:

In this biblical passage, it says to love not just with words but with actions. Christ loved us with words and with actions. Jesus tells us to be at peace, to trust in him, to love one another as God has loved us. By loving words and loving deeds, we proclaim the good news of God in Christ. Often we think of proclaiming the good news as something only the pastor does and the pastor does this from the pulpit. We need to help households in our congregation see that all of us proclaim the Good News every day. We know that the Word of God has power and can transform lives but this is also true of how we live, how we treat others, how we react in the face of racism, sexism, hatred, and bullying, etc. Early Christians were described as people who loved each other. Would those outside of your congregation, describe it as a place where people love each other and love those outside of the congregation. How is love shown? To whom? The passage in chapter 4 makes a

good point: how can we love God whom we have not seen, if we cannot love others whom we have seen? Loving becomes the prominent command in I John. Conversation about ways to love others become the usually comment of “Be nice to each other.” Yet. how do we love when others are not nice to us? How do we support each other in our Christian communities when loving others is hard, uncomfortable and even dangerous? These questions take the baptismal gift beyond just words into a whole another dimension – a harder place.

Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean for you to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word AND deed?*
2. What prevents you from freely sharing the good news of God in Christ?*
3. How can you help those being baptized or involved in the rite of baptism, understand the significance and challenge of this gift?
4. How do you live in love when people do not love you in return?

Challenge # 1: Share with someone part of your faith story in less than five minutes.*

Challenge #2: Write a strategy of how you will respond when someone insults or demeans you.

Session Five

Theme: Being a servant

Gift: **To serve all people, following the example of Jesus.**

Purpose: Reflect on what it means to be a servant and to be humble.

Scripture: Read Mark 9:33-37, John 13:12-17

Devotional:

As human beings, we all want to be recognized, to have others pay attention to us and to have the best seat in the house. Jesus turns that desire upside down. He says in each of these biblical passages that rather than wanting to be first, we should be last and be servant of others. Ugh. Really??? There has been a big movement to self-actualization and claiming one’s gifts. When does that cross the line into bragging or putting oneself first? This is not an easy gift to live out. It specifically says follow the example of Jesus who washed feet, hung out with undesirables, emphasized welcoming children who are powerless, and was killed. This is not a leader who is easy to follow. Living in a supportive faithful community is needed or we will never be able to follow the example of Jesus.

Servanthood that is demanded by another person is not what is meant. Being a willing servant is very different than being a slave. A slave has no choice. When we are called to be servants, we have a choice. Again it is an opportunity to act in a way that proclaims the gospel, the loving way, the caring way, walking in compassion with respect for those we are serving. Remembering those who are powerless like children, elderly, immigrants, and the poor, is a huge task. It is easy to

swoop in and paint a house or distribute food but not actually interact with the powerless.

Gratitude is not always given to the servant. Expecting or demanding gratitude or expression of thanks is not the servant's way. Servants quietly care for others, whether or not there is reciprocal service or thanks. Following The Way is not easy.

Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean for you to serve all people following the example of Jesus?
2. Describe the example of Jesus as he served others. Describe what it feels like to serve others.*
3. How might the act of serving others (like Jesus) become a gift to both those served and the server?*
4. How do we welcome children and yet teach them to be willing servants?
5. List some potential partners that could work with you to deepen and widen your service to others.*
6. Work with adults who will be part of the baptismal rite (this includes sponsors) to reflect on times when they have been a servant. When was that? How did that feel? In what ways can they be a servant to the child being baptized?

Session Six

Theme: Struggling for justice and peace.

Gift: **To strive for justice and peace in all the earth.**

Purpose: To reflect on the connection between justice and peace and how these two concepts can be lived out in the world.

Scripture: Read John 14: 25- 27, Matthew 25: 31-40

Devotional:

This is the hardest of the baptismal gifts. Justice and peace are words with many layers of meaning. My computer program gives these synonyms for justice: fairness, impartiality, righteousness, reasonableness, evenhandedness, honesty, integrity, and uprightness. That is quite a list. Thinking about each of them gives a bigger picture of what is meant by justice. There is also economic justice or environmental justice. One can advocate for justice in the political sphere which make the concept even larger.

How is peace connected to justice? Why are the two words put together in this gift? The synonyms for peace listed are: concord, amity, harmony, armistice, reconciliation, and ceasefire. When we have justice, it is easier to live in harmony. When we are reconciled, it is easier to make decisions that demonstrate justice. When we talk with reasonableness, it is easier to live in amity – no shooting at each other with negative words or bullets. The synonyms for the word, “strive,” are: struggle, endeavor, try, and attempt. Striving means “working towards” with the understanding that it will be a struggle. It will not be easy. There are many paths toward peace and justice. Helping those

involved in our congregations think about ways to strive for justice and/or peace is a worthwhile discussion.

Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean for you to strive for justice?*
2. What can we do as individuals to promote peace in the earth?*
3. What advice would you give to someone exhausted from striving for justice and peace—one who can no longer embrace working for justice and peace as a God-given gift and opportunity?*
4. Reflect with the baptized adults in your congregation on how they strive for justice and peace.

Challenge: Select an injustice or area of strife which concerns you. Identify one thing you will commit to do to make a difference.*

Works Cited:

Bass, Dorothy. **Practicing our Faith**. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1997.

“**Living Our Baptism Overview with Discussion Guide**” by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016. Starred (*) reflection questions were utilized from this resource. To find this resource, go to <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Faith-Practices/5-Gifts>, and scroll to the bottom of the list.

Westerhoff, John H. III. **Will Our Children Have Faith**. Revised and expanded edition. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000.

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