

Theology Guidelines within Children, Youth & Family Ministry

First Lutheran Church, Hayward

2022-23

We believe everyone is a theologian. Whether we realize it or not, we have an underlying personal theology (what we believe about God) throughout our lifetime. It might be what we have intentionally studied – going to Sunday School, church, VBS, Bible Camp, adult Bible Study, or read – or been how we have been influenced by what we saw and heard about God from our parents, grandparents, friends and role models. Some of us are able to articulate the core of what we believe and others are not. Most of all, we want our parents and faith formation leaders/helpers to recognize that underlying theology guides our words and influences the kids in our homes and ministries. No one has it all figured out - we all keep learning and growing together.

First is a Lutheran Church of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America). When people choose our church/denomination, they want and usually expect it to adhere to the general theologies of that branch of Christian Community. The ELCA is a diverse community, a big tent, and there is space for lots of perspectives. However, it is also important that we who are in roles of helping lead children and youth ministries understand what we share is impactful and will shape young minds. We hope this document is helpful to you as we partner in ministry at First Lutheran. Thank you!

IF/THEN or BECAUSE/THEREFORE?

Here are two statements that reflect possible ways to think about God:

- **If** you do the good things the Bible tells you to do, **then** God will love you.
- **Because** God loves you unconditionally, **therefore** you are filled with gratitude and want to live in good response. (This is where stewardship of all we are and all we have comes from.)

ELCA Lutherans believe the second....God creates, God forgives, God makes new. We act because God has acted. Start to really listen to yourself and others and you will begin to hear if/then and because/therefore.

CAT OR MONKEY?

- ELCA Lutherans believe that God always acts first with us and loves us unconditionally. We are all about grace!
- Think about this analogy:
 - Mother cats carry their babies by the skin on their necks.
 - Baby monkeys hang on to their mothers.
- In this illustration, ELCA Lutherans think about God like a mother cat – God does all the heavy lifting. We are dependent on God for life, food, movement, and growth. God always meets us first!

GOD

In the Creed of the ELCA, we say God is “the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” God is the Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end – always was and always will be. God continues to create. We are created in God’s image and are called to use our God-given gifts to serve and steward the world that God created. God is love and all that is good. God is worthy of our gratitude and praise.

JESUS

Jesus is God's ultimate expression of love for us and for the whole world! Through Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension in the four Gospels, God's love wins. God becomes flesh in Jesus (incarnate) and remains fully divine so that we will know that nothing will separate us from God. Nothing. Period. Again, it is God who acts, saves, redeems, sustains.

HOLY SPIRIT

As present as our breath, the air and wind – The Holy Spirit gives us faith that God is our Creator and Jesus is our Lord and moves us to serve God and others. The Holy Spirit is our greatest advocate, cheerleader, and comforter.

THE BIBLE

Christian denominations read the Bible differently. Some read the Bible literally and others allegorically, still others an inspired mixture of both. ELCA Lutherans believe the Bible is the living cradle for Christ (the Bible points us to God's love), but we also find God's Word alive through music, art, nature, and our relationships. The Bible does not say that everything happens for a reason.

SACRAMENTS

In the ELCA Lutheran tradition, a sacrament is:

- Something Jesus commanded us to do.
- Uses a physical element – something we can see, touch, taste, and encounter.
- Includes God's Promise and Action.

In Baptism, God promises to show up in water and word, calling us Children of God forever.

In Holy Communion, God shows up in the bread and cup, nurturing us in faith, feeding us and feeding others. Sometimes we use the term "Real Presence" meaning we trust that Christ is in, with and under the bread and wine.

It's not magic - it's Christ's Promise to be with us that makes these sacraments. Water, bread, wine, together with God's Word, help us see, taste and feel God with us.

SAINTS AND SINNERS

ELCA Lutherans often say that we live in paradox. A paradox is a place of tension when two seemingly conflicting ideas point to a greater truth together. We believe that we are simultaneously saints and sinners. Some would say that living in this tension of sinner/saint is also humble and hopeful.

Sinner – some Lutherans would call this the universal human condition. We act contrary to God's intentions that ALL people and the world are loved, respected, cared for, and fulfilled in purpose. We aren't all comfortable with the idea of being a sinner. Think about it this way: imagine if you had a screen over your head that displayed all of your inner thoughts throughout the day. It may show a dark side, right?

Saint – A forgiven sinner. Again, this is God's love for us, even when we don't do anything to deserve or earn it.

QUESTIONS ARE GOOD!

If you have ANY questions or you want to talk about these or other theological views, please connect with Pastor Joel (pastorjoel@firstlutheranhaywardwi.net) or Julie Jolivette, Children, Youth & Family Coordinator (612-210-5327).