Upstate New York Synod’s commitment to being Grounded, Growing, Giving & Graced People

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Thank you for participating in the first “Learning Together Across the Synod” Day on May 5. The content is based on John 21, the Gospel of the day in the Revised Common Lectionary. In particular we are exploring verse 7, “It is the Lord!”

The word “synod” literally means “walking together.” The leaders of this synod are committed to finding ways to be grounded in Jesus’ love together. This set of faith formation materials help to deepen that commitment by offering a variety of ways to learn and grow and notice God at work in the communities of the Upstate New York Synod. The content reflects material developed to be used in structured learning time and in the liturgy for worship. The team created and curated activities and liturgy so that participants can explore what it means to be grounded in Jesus Christ while exploring a story of Jesus with his contemporaries.

I am personally thankful to the planning team of Pastors Roger Griffiths, Johanna Rehbaum and Deborah Troester. In particular, Pastors Rehbaum and Troester were instrumental in the actual words and activity in the curricula. Pastor Troester, an ELCA missionary in our companion synod in Zambia, did this work with us through the power of technology. Her participation allows us to use some perspective from her years serving in communities in Africa.

My prayer is that you creatively use the materials we are giving you and renew your commitment to be a lifelong learner. I also hope you will share with others using the #UNYSLearningTogether

In wonder and gratitude,
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Part One: Introduction to the Learning Material for May 5, 2019

There are 5 categories of learning and exploring that determine the station areas. There are suggested activities for each category. Most activities (with slight adaptation) will accommodate multi-generation groups.

If your space permits, set up these stations throughout the building, giving opportunity to see that faith formation can happen in many places throughout the space where your community gathers for corporate learning and prayer.

Once you set up the stations for each portion of the interactive curricula you will need to choose how you will move between the stations. You may want to allow participants to move from activity to activity at their own pace. Another option is to break the group into smaller groups that will stay together and rotate through each of the stations. If you choose the rotation model you will need to determine how much time is necessary at each station. There may be other options that fit best with your situation. Have fun thinking about other ways to accommodate the unique needs of your people.

Each station should have at least one person who remains at the station and is prepared to guide the work and play at that station for the entire time.

Each station reflects the Biblical theme, but the activities are independent of one another. This gives you the freedom to eliminate stations if you do not have the time or space for the suggested activity.

Overview of the Content and Stations

“Think and Talk” station is a place to intentionally interact with the story.

“Create and Tell” station is a place where participants use art and other creative mediums to tell the story.

“Move and Play” station is a place for learning through games.

“Listen and Pray” is a good place for listening to God and one another through prayer.

“Plan and Act” is the station where folks think about ways Jesus asks us to participate in acts of justice with our neighbors.
Sample Schedule for the Use of this Material (based on a 45 minute learning time)

10 minutes:
* Talk about what it mans to be a synod. You may say something like this:
“We are part of the Upstate New York Synod. The word ‘synod’ means ‘walking together’. Today we are ‘walking together’ with other churches who are doing the same activities and lessons. Even though we are different in some ways we are baptized in the same baptism and believe the same things about having communion. We are all grounded in Jesus.”
* Read the story for the day. Ask those gathered to notice their favorite word from the story
* Song ELW 869 “We have seen the Lord”
* Introduce the stations and set the people loose.

30 minutes of time in the stations

5 minutes:
Gathering of the graces around what was learned. Gathering the graces is a time for participants to share where they noticed God in the activities. It can also be a time to name anything they may have learned about Jesus.

Possible Publicity For the Bulletin and Newsletter

LEARNING TOGETHER ACROSS THE SYNOD: FUN WITH FAITH FORMATION
“IT IS THE LORD!”
JOHN 21:7

On May 5, 2019, we will join with other congregations throughout the synod in the first “Learning Across the Synod Sunday.” We will be connected with others through use of the same materials for learning and liturgy. It will be a multigenerational time of learning through thinking and creating and playing and praying and planning for action. The theme for the day of learning and growing is “It is the Lord!” which is part of the Gospel we use in worship on May 5. This synod-wide effort is part of our ongoing commitment to build relationships with God and one another. We will also be connected to other who are doing the same things in their community.
Think and Talk

Materials needed: Chairs, fire pit (artificial or real based on location)

Set-Up: Make a fire pit area. This can be done inside or outside. If it is outside, consider using real fire pit. If it is inside you can use a variety of material to create a pretend fire. One way you can create an artificial fire pit is by attaching red, orange and yellow streamers to a small fan. Place the fan in the middle of a circle of chairs and aim the air flow toward the ceiling so the streamers are blown toward the ceiling.

1. Read the story again.
2. Some questions for discussion: (First to think about quietly and reflect on, then to share.)

— Where are you in the story? On the boat with the disciples? On the shore with Jesus? Jumping in the water with Peter? Are you with John, recognizing that it is Jesus, but hesitating to jump in the water? Are you watching as a bystander who decided to take a walk along the shore?

— Why is it so hard to recognize Jesus? What things in our lives keep us from recognizing Jesus, or that Jesus is at work in our lives and the lives of others?

— What keeps us from “jumping into the water” so to speak?

A lesson from our companion synod in Zimbabwe synod in Africa:
Fishing in Africa is a community endeavor – it takes more than one person to pull in a net. Often a number of people will station themselves along different parts of the net as it is pulled in. Once it is in, everyone helps to pick the fish out of the net and sort them.

Working together to haul in the fish – all listening to Jesus’ direction – in this case to provide food, livelihood, sustenance; but symbolically to bring in many “fish” to the church as fishers of people, and to accomplish the work of the church together.

Also, the charcoal fire is still typical in Africa. We tend to think of it as a barbeque, but in Africa, it is an everyday cooking fire, which nearly everyone would be familiar with.

(Here are some photos of people fishing with nets. Lake Rukwa is in southern Tanzania, not far from Zambia from Deborah Troester, ELCA missionary )
Create and Tell

1. Mural

*Materials needed:* Large paper (butcher block paper would be perfect) to use for creation of a mural, art supplies

*Set up:* Attach the butcher block paper to a wall and encourage participants to depict the story. Be sure to have many different art supplies on hand.

Paint or draw a mural on brown paper. Different groups could do different parts of the mural, such as crocheting the fishnet, making fish to attach to the mural, perhaps even gathering some sticks, grass, or sand, to glue to the “shore” where Jesus is cooking the fish. Be sure to have someone there to offer guidance, encouragement and support.

2. Knitting and Crocheting

*Materials needed:* Crochet hooks, knitting needles, yarn, patterns, scissors

*Set up:* Chairs in a circle with baskets of hooks, needles and yarn available

Recruit people who knit and crochet to teach basic stitches to those who would like to learn. Go to: https://seamenschurch.org/christmas-at-sea to learn more about the Seamans Institute and then print some patterns for projects to complete for the seamen.
Move and Play

1. Charades with the Biblical Story

*Materials needed:* Bibles, Paper, pens or pencils

*Set up:* space for a group to gather and act out the clues

Divide the group into teams with one person as judge. Each team quietly chooses 3 words from the Bible Story and writes them on individual slips of paper. The teams exchange clues. At the same time each team tries to act out each of the given words from the other team. Whichever team finishes first is the winner.

2. Game: Fish in the Net (From the Government of South Australia: fishinthenet.pdf)

*Materials Needed:* None

*Set-up:* Create a space where participants can run and move

Three players form the net by holding hands. They catch others by surrounding them. Caught players join the net and the game continues. (Play with 6 or more. Larger groups may start with more than one “net”)

*Safety*
> If indoors, boundaries should be away from walls or freestanding objects.
> Players should be familiar with space and player awareness activities such as All-in tag and Look out for others!


*Materials needed:* ball or bean bags, tape (to make a circle on the ground), stuffed sheep

*Set-up:* make a circle with tape and place the sheep in the circle. Make a boundary line where the participants are close enough to the circle to throw bean bag or ball

Players take turns throwing the “grass bundles” into the circle to feed the sheep. This game has the advantage that even people with somewhat restricted mobility can play. The leaders may discuss what it means to “Feed my sheep,” what real sheep eat, and what Jesus meant by that.

Here is the website where I saw this idea: http://www.catholicinspired.com/2010/11/feed-my-sheep-game.html
Listen and Pray

Materials needed: boat and/or tent

Set-Up: place the boat and/or tent in a space that may be a bit removed from the rest of the more active stations, maybe even in the sanctuary

Participants sit in the prayer boat and/or tent write prayers to God. If they cannot write you may choose to ask them to speak what their prayers. Consider sharing these prayers in worship or hanging them in a prominent place in the church.
Plan and Act

Material needed: Handout about tips for writing letters, paper, envelopes, stamps

Set-up: find an issue that is important in your community, set a table and chairs

Write letters to public officials about that issue.

Check out Lutheran Public Policy for ideas about what kind of advocacy you can connect to your congregations and community. Source: https://lutheranpublicpolicyca.org/advocacy-tools/how-to-write-a-letter

Letter writing world hunger

Helpful tool to practice being an advocate though letter writing

TIPS FOR ADVOCATES ON WRITING LETTERS AND EMAILS

**BE BRIEF** – Boil your message down to one page or less and attach any detailed information, charts, etc. on separate sheets.

**BE DIRECT** – Tell the elected official what action you want him/her to take, such as introduce legislation, cosponsor a bill, vote for (or against) a bill in committee, or on the floor. Ask him/her to respond to your letter. Be sure to include your address and phone number.

**BE CIVIL** – Don’t threaten, insult, wisecrack or name call.

**DON’T OVERDO IT** – Don’t write too often. Make your letters timely so your legislator can take positive action to help.

**PERSONALIZE** – Use your own words. You don’t need to type the letter – handwritten letters are very effective if you have legible handwriting. Avoid form letters and postcards.

**FOCUS ON ONE ISSUE** – Your letter will have the most impact if you speak out on one issue at a time.

**HAVE THE FACTS** – The more facts you know, the better. Refer to legislation by title or number. Cite experts to back up your arguments.

**COMPLIMENT** – Elected officials are human and like to be recognized and thanked for their work. Always write a thank you note if the elected official does what you ask.

**REMEMBER** – ON ANY ONE ISSUE, EVEN A FEW LETTERS CAN HAVE AN IMPACT. EVEN ONE LETTER, WITH A CLEAR-CUT PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT CAN BE A DECISIVE FACTOR
Part 2: Suggested Material to be Used In Worship

Note about this material:
This content may be used in worship on May 5.

You may want to use all of these suggestions or you may choose to just try one of the activities.

Some of the suggestions can be used throughout the year to create a varied faith experience in worship.

If you use this material please credit “Upstate New York Synod ELCA Faith Formation 2019”

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, + one God,  
Who forgives all our sin,  
Whose mercy endures forever.  
Amen.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and one another.

As you reflect, consider when this week you neglected to recognize Jesus’ presence, especially somewhere unexpected.

Most merciful God,  
We confess that we have been so absorbed in our problems, that we failed to notice your presence with us. We regularly fall short of loving and feeding your sheep the way that you call us to do. We say that we love you, but then do not follow in your ways. Have mercy on us, O God, and forgive us, so that we may delight in your will and follow in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of + Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. Amen.
**Children’s Message**

*Supplies needed:* shoe box, paper and scissors to cover the box, small items to place inside the box (this may include a stuffed animal, small match box car, a coin, spoon, ball, crayon, etc.)

Place random items in a shoe box. Choose things that are different sizes, shapes and textures. Cover the shoe box with wrapping paper and then make a small hole in the side of the box. The hole should be large enough for a child’s hand to fit into, but small enough that the child cannot see inside the box.

Invite the children to put their hand inside the box and make guesses about what might be inside the box.

Talk about how, sometimes, it is difficult to know what something might be if you can’t see it. Recount the part of the Gospel story where the disciples got excited about seeing that it was Jesus. Help the kids identify ways we can notice God and Jesus at work in the world today.

**Sharing the Gospel**

Consider ways you can actively tell this story. This may mean memorizing the text (or a portion of it) You could use multiple people in reading the text so that the words are heard from different voices. Perhaps you have folks who enjoy using drama to tell the Biblical story. Maybe you have a poet in the congregation who can write a poetic response and read it after you read the Biblical text.

**Sermon**

Consider ways to invite study and conversation during the sermon. In particular, are there ways to engage the scripture that invite the pastor and congregation into dialog? One particularly helpful study guide is the lectionary study “Light on the Lessons” from Lutheran Bible Ministry Resources found here: [http://www.bibleministries.org](http://www.bibleministries.org) This study gives insight and questions and prompts for action and conversation.

**Prayers of Intercession**

*Supplies needed:* small pieces of paper

Each week when we come to worship, we bring individual as well as communal joys, burdens, and curiosities. These affect how we experience worship in general, and our encounter with scripture in particular. The prayers could be used as a time to acknowledge this reality, and let peoples joys and burden guide our prayers. Below is a way to explore that.

During the prayers of intercession, invite people to form small groups (3-4) with at least one person of a different generation. (To facilitate this, you might consider giving people name tags of different colors, according to their generation.) In these groups, each person can share a joy, a burden, and a curiosity. From your conversation, write down a
couple of prayer requests, based on your conversation, and bring them forward to be read communally by the assisting minister. Consider singing a song while people bring forward their prayer requests, giving the assisting minister a chance to organize them, and then read them on behalf of the congregation. (Song suggestions: Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying, ELW 752; or, We Have Seen the Lord, ELW 869)

Dismissal

Materials needed: Post-it notes, pens or pencils

We often end our service with “Go in Peace, Serve the Lord.” Here is a way to think about that dismissal.

1. Place the post-it notes and writing implements on a table near the exit(s) of the church
2. Give this instruction to folks (either out loud or in the bulletin): “There are post-it notes near the exit. Before leaving the building today you are invited to write a way you intend to serve God and live Peace this week. Attach the post-it note on the door as an public intention and reminder and (perhaps) inspiration for others”
3. You may want to take a picture of these notes and post them on your social media accounts, being sure to tag the Upstate New York Synod sites in your post.