

Dear Friends in Christ,

I wanted to share our vision for faith formation for our children and youth moving forward.

In the past, we Lutherans as a whole, have tended to see faith formation as key events to "get done" and then take up a distant orbit around our church until a crisis happens. The outcome of this mindset is that our youth are losing saving faith and their connection to churches at a rate of 2/3rds, up from 1/3rd when I was confirmed many, many orbits around the sun ago :). Current generations have no attachment to organizations as compared to past generations. They are hungry for authentic relationships with people. Sadly, falling away from active faith tends to result in increased suffering and coping troubles during the lives of the youth over time.

In an effort to see the odds of our youth retaining faith for life, and thus have better odds of coping better through the rough times, we are going to be implementing a new paradigm. The basic idea is that the whole process is for the purpose of bringing the children and youth to a place where they have a strong personal relationship with Jesus, an active prayer life, and active participation in the life of the church.

Here is a summary:

1. Baptism (Seek this sacrament for kids at any age at which parents intend to have their kids participate in the life of the church or when high school youth want to participate in the life of the church when family participation is lacking). There is no point in or long term benefit from having a child baptized if they will not be participating in the life of the church.
2. JAM (pre-K-5th grade) - as is now (*JAM families, please let us know if having JAM during the 6:30pm worship service would help logistically with your other calendar commitments!*)
3. First Communion (*One session communion preparation classes will be available twice per year for kids in 2nd-5th grade as they show interest*). The purpose is to help kids understand communion better and thus benefit from it more fully, so ideally before they start taking communion. Kids already taking communion will be able to go through the first communion classes if they want for the same reasons. They may continue taking communion without classes per their former process if their parents feel they understand it well enough.
4. Cross Training (6th-8th grade) - as is now - it involves both teaching and interactive discussion groups!
5. Foundations Class (8th grade) - this will provide an introductory teaching on the core of our faith. Its purpose is to prepare youth to explore questions of faith during LIVE discussion groups the following few years and to prepare them for opportunities to participate in the life of the church community such as serving during worship. Unlike

times in our past, the class will not be a "comprehensive confirmation test" indicating you are done growing. Rather, it is the beginning of a quest to understand and apply the faith more fully and more meaningfully in relationships!

6. LIVE (9th-12th grades) - as is now - it involves both teaching and interactive discussion groups!

7. Beginning a Personal Relationship with Jesus as Savior "at the foot of the cross" by choice as an older youth. Youth growing up without faith will experience a "conversion experience" when they hear the gospel and accept Jesus as their Savior for the 1st time as an *older* youth. For kids growing up with faith from childhood, their conversion experience is more of a conversion from a childhood faith to an adult faith. While both are saving faith, the latter involves **both** an increased understanding of the faith content (i.e. Foundations Class) **and** a sense of their relationship with God being *their own*, rather than that of their parents! Because this is about a personal relationship between the youth and God, "Come and see, follow me!" Jesus says to them, it is best to let it happen when it happens rather than forcing a specific time. Generally speaking, our culture sees 16 as an age when older youth can start making lasting significant decisions for themselves. Why force a life decision on a younger youth when they are not making those in general? You will know when they have experienced this when your youth truly believes Jesus saved them *from their sins* "at the cross", when they can pray, desire to grow in faith, can *begin* to articulate the core of the faith, ask thoughtful or application type of questions, and *begin* to serve others. In other words, when it matters to them from within, when they *begin* choosing spiritual things when given a choice, and see their identity as a child of God and as a follower of Jesus. Don't expect perfection since we, as adults, are not either :).

8. Affirmation of Faith. This ceremony, historically called confirmation or affirmation of faith, will now celebrate youth experiencing a Personal Relationship with Jesus as an older youth rather than the completion of educational classes at a mandatory age. Remember, the goal of the whole faith formation process is to lead them to Jesus on the cross and let Jesus lead them forth from the empty tomb as **life-long followers and friends!** By restoring the relational model of discipleship Jesus gave us, we set our youth up to benefit from their faith in much deeper and more lasting ways. This, in turn, will help them cope better with distress and thus suffer less in this life! We adults will be able to stress a little less knowing our youth will be calling on the Lord in their distress and that they will never be truly alone :).

9. Young Adults Group (Starting in 2025 for post-Affirmation of Faith youth)

Your servant,

Pastor Jeff