Our vision for faith formation for our children and youth effective September 2024.

In the past, Lutherans—and churches in general—have often treated faith formation as a series of events to “get done,” with youth drifting away from the church until a crisis occurs. This approach has contributed to the decline of youth retaining a lifelong, saving faith: today, two-thirds of youth lose their faith, up from one-third when I was confirmed many orbits of the sun ago.

Current generations are less attached to organizations, but they are hungry for authentic relationships. Falling away from active faith can contribute to increased struggles in coping with life’s challenges over time.

To increase the likelihood that our youth retain faith for life—and thus have stronger resilience through tough times—we are implementing a new paradigm. The overarching goal: help children and youth develop a strong, personal relationship with Jesus, an active prayer life, and meaningful participation in the life of the church.

Here is a summary:

1. Baptism: Offered to children at any age when parents intend for them to participate in church life, or high school youth who have not previously been baptized and would like to publicly declare their union with Christ. Baptism is most meaningful when it leads to active involvement in the church family. 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) – Sundays at 10:15am, September through May. Age appropriate faith formation designed to engage and nurture early spiritual growth.

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 children understand communion and benefit from it more fully, so ideally before they start taking communion.

4. Cross Training (6th-8th grade) – Wednesdays at 6:30pm, September through May. Middle schoolers spend time digging deeper into faith topics, relating faith to their everyday life and forming relationships with a small group of peers and an adult through both teaching and interactive discussion groups!

5. Foundations Class (8th grade) – this packet completed by parents and an adult 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. 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) – Wednesdays at 6:30pm, September through May. A space for high schoolers to dive deeper into their faith—asking questions, discovering practical ways to live it every day, and building meaningful relationships with peers and caring adults. The experience combines teaching with 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, will 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 (Startup Future Goal for post-Affirmation of Faith youth)