

RELATE WITH OTHERS

For Spiritual Growth

INTRODUCTION

Clearly, God does not intend for disciples to make this faith journey through life alone. One of the first things Jesus did as He began His ministry was to gather a group to be with Him. The disciples of Jesus related to Him and to one another for spiritual growth. Since then, disciples have needed each other if they hope to grow in faith and mature into the image of Christ!

In this booklet you will find a collection of suggested Scripture readings, followed by some information and materials from the ELCA suitable for use yourself, with your family, or with a small group. If you would like to be part of a small group speak to one of us and we can either direct you to an existing group or we can discuss how a group might be formed.

Next we have included some lesson plans for small group that can be used in a variety of contexts and settings. This is offered for additional reflection and consideration for those who wish to delve deeper into matters pertaining to relating to others for spiritual growth.

For further assistance or additional information contact the church office or one of the pastors. Also, if you have other suggestions for how TLC disciples might “serve at and beyond Trinity” please feel free to share that as well.

God bless and guide you as you seek ways by which you might relate with others as a follower of Jesus, for in serving you do find a life that’s worth living!

Your fellow disciples in Christ,
Pastor Ron Miller
Pastor Mike Price

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 ⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? ¹² And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Matthew 2:1-15 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him

homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. ¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

Matthew 4:17-23 From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea-- for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. ²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Matthew 9:9-31 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰ And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." ¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins;

otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." ¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹ And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹ for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. ²³ When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶ And the report of this spread throughout that district. ²⁷ As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" ²⁸ When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." ³⁰ And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, "See that no one knows of this." ³¹ But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district.

Mark 1:16-27 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea-- for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. ²¹ They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²² They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴ and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching-- with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

Luke 2:21-39 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. ²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came

into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too." ³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

John 1:43-46 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Romans 15:1-6 We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. ³ For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." ⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:41-47 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 8:26 - 9:1 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to

Jerusalem to worship²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"³¹ He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth."³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"³⁷³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Acts 9:10-22 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord."¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem;¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name."¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel;¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus,²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."²¹ All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"²² Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

Acts 10:25-48 On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him.²⁶ But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal."²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled;²⁸ and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean."²⁹ So when I

was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"³⁰ Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me."³¹ He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.'³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.'³³ Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say."³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ-- he is Lord of all.³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree;⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles,⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said,⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"⁴⁸ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

faith practices:

INVITE

AS A CONGREGATION

The following are suggestions to assist your congregation to invite others. Check the ELCA Evangelism Web page www.elca.org/evangelism for more suggestions.

- Schedule two or more Friendship Celebration emphases during your year of discipleship. Consider utilizing planning guides and support materials developed to mobilize congregation members to invite their friends, relatives and neighbors to faith and worship.
- Offer training and opportunities to strengthen the faith-sharing skills of your members. Schedule an adult forum or small group study about sharing faith.
- Provide opportunities for people to get comfortable talking about their faith in the presence of others (e.g., periodic times of “testimony” during worship, before congregation council and other leadership team meetings, etc.).
- Gather a leadership team to evaluate and strengthen your congregation’s evangelism ministries. Use the self-scoring assessment tools at www.elca.org/evangelism to evaluate your congregation’s offerings.
- Engage the Go Public resources (video, workbook and compact disk) to strengthen your congregation’s communication evangelism efforts. Use the television and radio commercials and publicity materials (print ads, cards, signage, etc.) from the ELCA’s Identity Project to publicize the ministry of your congregation. Consider working together with congregations in your synod or geographic area to provide a common witness.
- Develop a Web site for your congregation. Include devotional and other materials as a part of your site. Build in links to the ELCA’s home page www.elca.org and www.elca.org/prayer. If you need help developing your web site, see www.elca.org/webministry.
- Consider a special outreach focus with the children in your surrounding community. Utilize the Pelican children’s evangelism materials to teach children in your Sunday church school how to share their faith and invite.
- Start an after-school ministry or kid’s club focused on serving the needs of families in your community.
- Host concerts, a series of classes or a special event to which members could invite their unchurched friends in the community. Provide inspiration, resources and advertising in the congregation and community to strengthen the possibility of congregational invitation and to encourage people beyond the congregation to participate.
- Mobilize a team of youth and adults to distribute information about your congregation's ministries door-to-door in targeted areas of your community.

- Schedule a “revival” (preaching, teaching, reaching event) for your congregation and community. Be sure to publicize the event and make sure that all in the community are invited by phone or in person.

AT HOME

This following material is part of a series on the seven faith practices, developed in conjunction with the ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship. Copyright© 2000

“Go therefore and make disciples of nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” — Matthew 28:19

Leader: As disciples, we are called to do those things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Inviting others to join the journey becomes easier as we experience God’s presence and power in our own lives. Shall we join the first disciples in sharing God’s Good News through our own life stories?

CONG: Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join your journey.

L: Shall we be open to letting God’s love shine through our actions and words so that others may seek Jesus?

C: Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join Your journey.

L: Leaders in homes and families, will you encourage one another to share stories of God’s presence and activity in your daily lives, with friends, neighbors and co-workers?

C: Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join Your journey.

L: Will you seek to engage others in conversations that will nurture their faith and increase their desire for growth in community?

C: Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join Your journey.

L: And will we invite others to join us in our congregational life and worship?

C: Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join Your journey.

L: Children, will you tell your friends about Jesus and invite them to follow him?

C: Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join Your journey.

L: Then join me, in prayer, as we honor our call to discipleship.

C: Thank You Lord for the opportunities you give us to welcome others and to invite them into faith and community. Amen.

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship as they look for ways to share God's Good News with others.

BRINGING IT HOME

Invitations are fun. An invitation grows out of our relationship with the person who invites us. Invitations often call us to join with others to celebrate life's important events, like weddings and birthdays, and to witness life's transitions, like funerals and retirement parties.

- *Think of some invitations you have received. Invite your family members to share some, too.*

We get hundreds of invitations every day to invest in products and programs. The average child is exposed to 400 ads a day. That adds up to 4,000,000 ads in a lifetime.

Name some ads or commercials. See if you can remember the key phrase or sing the jingles.

Though ads can be memorable, it is more important to remember that a relationship with Jesus has more benefits than a best-selling product. He offers a greater adventure than any party, cruise or safari. Yet we seem to shy away from finding creative ways to get the "good word" out. But rather than dwelling on the reasons for past failures, let's crash right through our insecurities and think about some ways you might creatively and naturally invite others to follow Jesus.

"The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead and write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates." — Deuteronomy 6:4-9

FINDING GOD'S STORY IN YOUR STORY

Learn to make faith connections in the ordinary places and events of daily life. Consider the following places as stage setters for inviting people to share God's Good News.

Gas stations: Filling a gas tank

Connection: Who fills your “tank” with all the things you need — like love, joy and good things?

Grocery store: Talking about prices

Connection: Think of some of the things God gives us for free.

Medical clinics: The amazing skills of doctors and nurses.

Connection: God made our bodies to fight disease, but God gifts people with skills that help us keep healthy.

Natural settings: Amazing sights and scenery.

Connection: People make lots of beautiful things, but only God can design cloud formations, a sunset or clear, starry nights.

Schools: People who teach us things.

Connection: God created the knowledge that others share.

Day care: Lots of people befriend and care for us.

Connection: God provides us with people who uphold and support us.

Here are a few more ideas. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt these to fit your situation.

- Take some time around the dinner table to identify some friends or neighbors you might invite to worship with you at your church. Pray for the opportunity to invite and for their openness to come.
- Pray that God will inspire your words and deeds to be reflections of God’s presence and activity.
- Look over upcoming programs and church activities. Identify occasions that might be natural entry points for unchurched friends who may already have a relationship with you or your children — like day care providers, coaches, teachers and co-workers.
- Invite neighbors and friends to come for an evening where they can experience God’s presence in your home as you provide friendship and hospitality.

Consider the call of Jeremiah... “Now the word of the Lord came to me saying... Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you: I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Then I said, ‘Ah Lord God! I do not know how to speak for I am only a youth.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say I am only a youth, for you shall go to all to whom I send you and you shall speak whatever I command you.’” — Jeremiah 1:4-7

- Open your heart each day and invite the Spirit to use you as an instrument of God’s will and God’s activity. Be yourself. Let your language and lifestyle reflect God’s love to and for others.

RESOURCES

- *101 Faith Place: Entry points for Nurturing Faith in The Home.*
- *Back and Forth: A Family Resource* by Debbie Trafton O’Neal

Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/328-4648.

Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.

faith practices: **ENCOURAGE**

AS A CONGREGATION

The following are suggestions to assist your congregation to encourage others. Check the ELCA Evangelism Web page www.elca.org/evangelism for more suggestions.

- Create a “tree” of faith and commitment for display in your congregation during the fall. Invite everyone to hang a commitment card on the tree, beginning with your Rally Day kickoff. Commit to follow Christ through active participation in the seven faith practices.
- Encourage all congregation groups to focus on discipleship and faith practices from September through August. Utilize the theme art and promotional resources to motivate participation.
- Schedule visits by pastor, staff or members of the congregation council to each of the homes in your congregation. Use these visits for conversation about faith practices and spiritual maturity. Deliver devotional or study materials that can be used in the home.
- Focus on involving older youth and adults in daily devotions, prayer and small group Bible study.

- Schedule a series of articles (written by lay people, including children and youth) for your congregational newsletter, offering insight and perspective on what it means to serve in your congregation and community as a faithful disciple.
- Host a local confirmation rally, high school youth gathering or young adult conference that addresses the theme of discipleship from the practical perspective of how to live faithfully as a Christian in this present day. If possible, include the planning help and participation of several congregations.
- Focus on prayer, worship or discipleship during Lent or Advent. Shape midweek worship around the themes and ask some in the congregation to present dramas that focus on the theme.
- Partner with Augsburg Fortress, Publishers to provide a consignment bookstore in your congregation. Offer books and resources on discipleship for all ages during fall.
- Offer a special focus on the ministry of your members in daily life. Focus on different ways discipleship is expressed by members.
- Find ways to encourage those living out their discipleship on our behalf in ministries beyond the congregation. For example, organize an occasional thank you “petition” for a local person running a soup kitchen, a missionary, etc

AT HOME

The following material will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship with a growing sensitivity to those who need to see signs of God’s presence and activity in their own lives. It is part of a series on the seven faith practices, developed in conjunction with the ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship.

Copyright© 2000

“For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” — 1 Thessalonians

5:9-11

L: As disciples, we are called to do those things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Encouraging others in faith nurtures the community and shows God’s love in word and deed. Shall we respond to the invitation to encourage one another and build each other up?

CONG: Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus’ name.

L: Shall we look for ways to reach out and support generations beyond our own?

C: Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus' name.

L: Shall we attend to those who face difficult transitions, such as separation and divorce? Shall we seek to sustain those who suffer bereavement; incarceration or physical or mental illness?

C: Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus' name.

L: Shall we speak for those who often cannot be heard, those who are hungry and thirsty or burdened with other issues of injustice around the world?

C: Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus' name.

L: Leaders in homes and families, will you encourage one another in faith, model healthy lifestyles, communicate in love and seek to live at peace with one another?

C: Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus' name.

L: Children, will you look for ways to show God's love in your words and actions?

C: Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus' name.

L: Then, join me, in prayer, as we honor our call to discipleship.

C: Lord, increase our sensitivity and desire to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Amen

"I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine." — Romans 1:12

BRINGING IT HOME

How many shoes in a shoe store? Hundreds? Thousands? There seems to be something for everyone!

- *Think of a time you tried on someone else's shoes. How did they fit? Could you wear them for a day?*

Imagine what it might be like to have for a parent to switch with a preschooler, or a teen with an older adult, a happily-married homemaker with a single parent working two jobs, an executive with a blue-collar worker, an American with an Ethiopian spouse. When little children shuffle around in adult shoes, we laugh because they look so out of character. And yet, we might tend to feel the same way if we actually walked in someone else's shoes through their average day.

“If then, there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

— *Philippians 2:1*

- *Talk about ways you can be more sensitive to people in need and encourage them in their faith.*

Look through the following ideas you can use to help increase your sensitivity to others and your willingness to nurture them in faith. Choose one, two or more.

- Leave a pair of shoes near your door to remind you to be sensitive to people in need.
- Purchase a pair of “heart-shaped” sun glasses from a party supply store. Try them on and think about how the color and shape of lens affects the way you see something. What difference would make if we looked at the following people through God’s eyes?
 - Kids on the playground
 - Teammates in athletics
 - Co-workers
 - People who seem to be different from us
 - Clerks, waitresses and service attendants
 - Refugee families throughout the world
- Write words of encouragement and affirmation on self adhesive notes. Stick them on mirrors, doors and other places where others in the family can see them.
- Invite grandparents to send frequent postcards to support the challenges and accomplishments of their grandchildren.
- Be kind to the people you meet. Offer a smile, a greeting or gesture as you pass by. Explain to your children that, “We love, because God first loved us” (1 John 4:7-8).
- Nurture unconditional love. Teach your family members to handle inappropriate behavior with a response, “I might not like what you do, but I’ll always love you.”
- Find ways to address some of the greater world challenges. Go to the Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs Web page (www.loga.org) to learn ways you can be advocate for change.

“For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, for your welfare and not harm, to give you a future and a hope.”

— *Jeremiah 29:11*

LOVE SHOWS ITSELF IN ACTION!

- Check out Big Brother and Big Sister programs in your community, along with shelters and hotlines for critical care. Consider how you can support these and other programs as a way to encourage others.
- Be available. Just as the little boy offered his fish and loaves to help feed the 5000 (John 6:9), our willingness to let God use what we have is almost more important than what we actually have to give.
- Be a friend to a new family in your church or community. Invite them into your home or meet them at a park or a fast food restaurant.
- Encourage your children to call a friend who has stayed home sick from school or who has missed an athletic game or a Sunday school class.
- Express thanks to those who share their time and talents with you — day care providers, public servants, coaches, dance and music teachers, home nurses. Celebrate the many gifts God has given them.

RESOURCES

- *Soul Gardening: Cultivating the Good Life.* Terry Hershey.
- *That Reminds Me: Family Story-Starters for passing On the Faith.* Jean Brown Eittrheim.

Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/380-4648.

Your pastors or church office have access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.

+ + + + +