



**Framework for  
Transformational Learning:**  
*A Lifelong Learning Plan*

First Lutheran Church  
Lincoln, Nebraska

May 2019

# The First Lutheran Church Lifelong Learning Plan Task Force

## CHILDHOOD

### **Emily Dorsey**

Assistant Professor of Practice in Special Education and Communication Disorders  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

### **Jennifer Wemhoff**

Communications Director  
The Groundwater Foundation

## ADOLESCENTS

### **Natalie Peters**

Recruiter  
Capital One

## TEENS - EARLY ADULTHOOD

### **Slate Mathes**

Student  
Nebraska Wesleyan University

### **David Schmitter**

Instructor of Math and Physics  
Southeast Community College Milford

## EARLY ADULTHOOD - MATURE ADULTHOOD

### **Patrick Hayden-Roy**

Professor of History; Associate Provost for Integrative and Experiential Learning  
Nebraska Wesleyan University

## STAFF

### **Sunni Richardson** (*Childhood, Early Adulthood-Mature Adulthood*)

Director of Discipleship

### **Sharon Hardel** (*Infancy-Early Childhood, Adolescents, Teens-Early Adulthood*)

Director of Youth and Family Ministries

### **Justin Eller** (*Adolescents, Teens-Early Adulthood, Early Adulthood-Mature Adulthood*)

Associate Pastor, editor of the *Framework for Transformational Learning: A Lifelong Learning Plan*

## Table of Contents

Invitation to Learning.....	4
Purpose.....	4
Core Values of Learning.....	4
Terminology.....	5
Common Foundations.....	6
I. Groundings of Our Belief.....	7
II. Ways We Learn.....	8
III. Infancy to Early Childhood.....	10
IV. Childhood .....	11
V. Adolescents.....	13
VI. Teens to Early Adulthood.....	14
VII. Early Adulthood to Mature Adulthood.....	17
VIII. Strategic Curriculum Development Cycle.....	20
<i>Appendix A. Management of Learning .....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Appendix B. Confession of Faith.....</i>	<i>22</i>

## **Invitation to Learning**

As disciples of Jesus, who recognize and respond to our call to transform the world for the sake of the gospel, we are lifelong learners. We acknowledge we all come into this learning endeavor at different points from different perspectives with different beliefs, questions, doubts, and traditions. We learn as community and in community. God invites us all to wrestle through the mysteries of the scripture to discover God's love and redemption, even when it seems confusing or contradictory. Through our lifelong learning, we are drawn into the living word of God and sent out to live our faith in the world.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this *Framework for Transformational Learning: A Lifelong Learning Plan* is to provide:

- parameters and guidelines for where we want all our learning opportunities to take us as people of faith, how we want to get there, and why we are choosing to go about our learning in this way
- a philosophy, lens, and spirit of what First Lutheran Church is trying to accomplish through Christian education and discipleship formation
- criteria and filters for evaluating curriculum, Christian education programming, service-based and liturgical learning opportunities
- a general understanding for families to understand how what we teach younger children is connected with what we teach parents and mature adults

This document responds to recommendations by the Learning Vision Group to the First Lutheran Church Council in December, 2016.

## **Core Values of Learning**

Instructing learners within a faith community in what and how to think and believe, without opportunity for question, practice reflection, or disagreement no longer serves the development of faith in today's church and world. Our core values of learning include: relationships, critical thinking/awareness, community service, dialogue, mutuality, and vulnerability among others, that invite us to make a shift in how we teach and reframe our understanding of Christian education principles.

To promote the transformation of society, community, and ourselves, we are all called to reimagine sharing and constructing knowledge in community. Knowledge that is acquired

and constructed in community, must be applied to everyday life so that it is useful and impactful. Once we apply and practice what we learn, the learning process moves toward how the applied knowledge affects and changes our attitudes, behaviors, conducts, and lifestyles. Then it is possible that what was once “something I know about” transforms into “I live my life differently because I have experienced...or know about...”

We imagine this framework for transformational learning as deepening throughout the life of the learner and educator. Each stage, with its distinctive learning areas, generally takes the learnings from the stages before it and “goes deeper.” Stated another way, as disciples mature with experience, wisdom, knowledge, insight, and understanding gained from life, the learning areas become more complex. When adults are new to the Christian faith or new to this faith community, they will explore and discern, with guidance, where they would most like to begin their disciple learning, or stated another way, where they would like to dive into the waters of lifelong learning of faith.

## Terminology

A word about the terms used in this document. There is a lot written about faith formation and Christian education. While these terms are often used interchangeably, at First Lutheran Church we understand *faith formation* to be different from *Christian education* and to be more on par with, if not equal to, *discipleship formation*. This means that Christian education is explicitly gospel-centered, liberating, and in the ethics, spirit, and Way of Jesus Christ and is an essential part of discipleship and faith formation. We are re-imagining and re-framing *Christian education* away from indoctrination and toward lifelong learning and transformation. While we learn throughout our whole life, we also form and re-form and trans-form our faith throughout our whole life and we grow into our identity and vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ throughout our whole life. For the purposes of this document, Christian education will be the commonly used wording.

If we begin from the premise that we are all *co-learners* and *co-teachers*, then to use the titles *teacher* and *learner* does not imply an imbalance of power, rather they simply state the primary role of the person(s). There are times when I am the student and other times when I am the teacher. We can switch roles as well as be in both roles at the same time. For example: as an educator I am always learning, thus I am simultaneously educator and learner, teacher and student. In FaithTrek, the practice is for teachers to be referred to as *guides* so that the children begin to understand the adult teacher is on the learning journey with them. For the purposes of this document, educator/teacher and learner/student will be the commonly used wording.

# Framework for Transformational Learning: A Lifelong Learning Plan

## Common Foundations

### Vision

Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

### Welcoming Statement

Each person is a unique creation of God and, through grace, is a child of God. The people of First Lutheran Church welcome all because God welcomes all, without regard for race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity or relationship status, physical or mental challenges, imprisonment, addictions, socio-economic circumstances, or anything else that too often divides us. First Lutheran Church is a spiritual community that celebrates the gifts of God that can empower us to engage in the struggles of life, to care for each other, and to serve Christ where we work and live. Our unity is in Christ.

### Learning Definition

Learning is a lifelong process of and commitment to integral growth in faith. With the help of the Holy Spirit, experience, practice and dialogue lead to change in knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This process equips us to engage the world around us, ask critical questions, and live lives that proclaim the gospel in word and deed.

### Learning Criteria & Filters

First Lutheran learning activities should:

1. Encourage the asking of faith-related questions
2. Present material/information appropriate for reflection
3. Produce critical/innovative thinking
4. Equip/empower people to act
5. Promote engagement in our church, community, and the world
6. Provide support to people in need of support
7. Inspire people to put faith in action
8. Educate toward growth in knowledge of that which is gospel-based
9. Encourage people who need encouragement
10. Create responsiveness in lifelong learners

# I. Groundings of Our Belief

*What we believe and how we come to believe comes from God.*

*Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are claimed as beloved children of God, we are reminded of and inspired by all that Jesus said and did. Our beliefs are rooted in the God who is revealed through the scriptures and grow and change throughout our lives.*

## Role of the Holy Spirit

When we believe that one of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to teach us and remind us of all that Jesus has said (John 14:26), we recognize the dynamic nature and vibrancy of God's Spirit within the lifelong learning in the Christian context. It is one of the many ways we "teach the faith," in terms of providing the building blocks for discipleship and faith formation, as we are instructed by Jesus (Matthew 28:20). The Holy Spirit grants opportunities to believers to instruct other siblings in Christ in ways that reveal God's presence and work in the world.

## Baptism

Holy baptism, as a sacrament, is a means of God's grace. It is a tangible sign of God's love and forgiveness, joining us to the family of God. Our identity as Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ is rooted in our baptism. Throughout our life, learning about being a beloved child of God is essential and from which we continually explore and deepen as we regularly give thanks for baptism. Baptism is a rite that can take place at any age in life and is a celebration to which one can never be late. In the Lutheran tradition, we use Affirmation of Baptism for adolescents who chose to affirm that God has been at work in their lives since their baptism as children and who chose to assume the responsibility to continue growing in their faith and discipleship.

## Discipleship

Our discipleship is grounded in our baptism and we are students of the Way of Jesus Christ. We are disciples in community. The community, being both *how* we are church and *where* we are church, holds the tension between the three legs of discipleship (worship-pray, learn, and serve) and provides the connecting point of each leg so that no one leg of discipleship is developed apart from the other two. We worship, pray, learn, and serve—an integrated and interconnected agenda—as a community and out in the community (Acts 2:42). As a Christ-centered community of faith, we journey together as we learn with and from each other, trusting that the triune God continually transforms us throughout the lifelong learning process.

### Christian Education as Gift

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 about the variety of the gifts of the Spirit. Within the gift of Christian education, Christians are taught about service to God and neighbor as well as the diverse activities that can come about through education and not indoctrination. In his letter to the Ephesians (4:11-13), Paul writes that some are called to be teachers in order “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Christian education has a direct affect on strengthening the church to participate in God’s mission in the world. Since we are church for the sake of the world, our engagement may take many forms: advocacy, service, and walking in solidarity with fellow congregation members and community neighbors, especially the poor, discriminated, and marginalized.

### Confession of Faith

We begin our grounding of learning in the teachings and confessions that we subscribe to as a congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. *See Appendix B. Confession of Faith* for the confessional groundings of First Lutheran Church.

## II. Ways We Learn

*As disciples of Jesus, we learn in a variety of ways. Having the space and opportunities to ask questions, be skeptical, and challenge traditional understandings of our faith leads to freer thinking and feeling. We believe that we learn throughout our whole life, we learn primarily through relationships with others and with God, and we learn through experiences, service and worship opportunities, and through faith in action in the community and world.*

### Lifelong learning

There is a continuum of learning that flows from infancy and early childhood through to mature adulthood and deserves attention, care, and accompaniment at all stages. Effective Christian education inspires Christians to become lifelong learners and explorers of sacred scriptures, the creeds, church and world history, different cultures, ways of praying, confessional traditions, how service transforms relationships, societal trends, and current events, all through the lens of faith.

### Question-posing learning

We believe we are all co-learners and co-teachers. Therefore, each one of us brings unique gifts, perspectives, and reflections to the Christian education endeavor from our own experiences. More important than having answers, critical and innovative thinking often results from questioning and exploring, including aspects that come from other faith traditions. Our framework of Christian education encourages disciples to ask questions

(Luke 2:46-47), modeling that it is acceptable to doubt, seek clarity, be curious, and struggle with self-awareness and the realities of who God is. Today we can have almost any answer at our fingertips within seconds, thanks to advances in technology. However, Christian education can give the permission to *not* have all the answers, especially with questions related to faith that may have no concrete or easy answer. Our approach to Christian education may shift the paradigm of Christian educator from being the “answer giver” to being the “question poser.” Questioning creates a strong base on which critical thinking and a critical consciousness is built.

### Relational learning

Relationship with God and one another is at the core of who we are as fellow disciples. It is a central axis around which our ministries at First Lutheran Church revolve. Learning, in our context, then is more of a goal to be in relationship with God and our neighbor than to simply instruct students from a particular curriculum. In order to address contemporary issues of faith and how we live it in the world, creativity, intentionality, and relationship are required on the part of the Christian educators and learners (and in the case of small children and youth, this includes partnerships with their families, parents, and mentors as well).

### Experiential (Service) learning

Learning takes place not only in the classroom, church building, and during the weekly learning hour, but also thrives through non-traditional educational methodologies, intentional service opportunities in our local community as well as distant communities, and in the most unlikely of spaces. We recognize and value experiential-service learning and its impact on faith formation because it shapes the role our lived experiences play in our biblical interpretation.

### Liturgical (Worship) learning

If we seek lasting profound, transformative, and meaningful faith formation, we have to include all of the members of our congregations in Christian education, where they feel included, important, needed, and valued. One inclusive space can, and should, be the liturgical celebration. Each rite, gesture, prayer, biblical reading, color, symbol, dress, tradition, etc. is a moment to teach more about the Christian faith. As such, the pastor, deacon, or religious leader has to consider and see the members of the congregation as ministers. Liturgy, the work of the people, is participatory Christian education. Everything that is said, prayed, done, observed and the reflection on where everything comes from invites believers to enter into the liturgical celebration in a way that grants them agency in their own Christian discipleship learning and empowers them.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Justin Eller, “Christian Education in Liturgical Practice,” in *Equipping God’s People: Popular Education in Christian Education*, ed. Kari Eller (La Paz: T’ika & Teko, 2013), 81-84.

### III. Infancy to Early Childhood

*Being raised “wet” uses everyday activities and family routines like bathing and bedtime stories to form faith in and with children. As Dawn Rundman shares in her book, Little Steps Big Faith, “Shaping a lasting foundation of faith in your child doesn’t require you to make sweeping changes to your family life- only to open up to seeing how everyday family life viewed through a faith lens and then adjusted to incorporate faith moments into these everyday times.”*

#### Being raised “wet”<sup>2</sup>

Much of the learning that takes place during this stage takes place in the home between parents and their young children, perhaps considering it family learning. A focus, then, can be on equipping parents and baptismal sponsors (godparents) with resources to be able to begin fulfilling the promises they made to their child(ren) at baptism. While the primary teachers and role models are the parents and guardians, the congregation supports, connects with, and strives to build relationships with the newly baptized and their families. Children in this age group experience rapid brain growth with millions of neural connections being made every second. We want to build and reinforce *faith language* connections. What children begin to learn during this stage is that they:

- are surrounded with love and promises - God’s, the faith communities’, the parent’s, and sponsor’s
- are named and claimed as God’s beloved children
- have a community to which they belong
- are created in the image of God
- will be shaped by some story, some value story; and baptism is “storied water” ushering a child into the story of God’s love revealed in Jesus Christ

Learning during this stage is less about formal education and more about learning *the language of faith*. Children learn and form connections through language - the way in which caring family members and caring adults talk to them, through hearing faith stories and prayers, through music, through touch and movement, and through routines and rituals.

#### Family role and routine

Growing young disciples requires intentional faith conversations and learning daily. The first (and strongest) faith formation guides and Christian educators are parents, siblings, sponsors, and extended family. The congregation aids families with helpful resources and support to make faith a daily learning. Routines are also very helpful with infants, toddlers,

---

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Erlander, *Let the Children Come: A Baptismal Manual for Parents and Sponsors* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 2. This is one of the primary resources for this learning stage.

and young children. That might include everything from preparing for bedtime to what they do when they arrive home at the end of the day. Faith formation, during this stage, can involve routines like saying a table grace before a meal, singing and stretching prayers while dressing, bedtime prayers and blessings, reading Bible stories, remembering baptism during bath time, etc. These simple routines will help young children understand that Christian faith is important to their parents and family. First Lutheran Church provides this learning on a larger scale each week as the young child experiences worship among God's people in spoken word, music, smiling glances, gentle touch while passing the peace, and other rituals such as communion and prayer. The goal is for children to know and experience God's love from the start. There should not be a time when the child did not know or experience God's love or be immersed in the "language of faith".

#### Growing "wet"

When older children, youth, or adults who are baptized, the above listed learning components still apply but on an age appropriate learning level. There may be more in-depth educational pieces depending on the age and maturity of the baptized person. What they may learn during this stage could be a more theological, historical, biblical, Lutheran, global, and practical understanding of the sacrament of baptism and how baptism grounds and nurture the development of their identity as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

### IV. Childhood<sup>3</sup>

*The basic tenet of learning for this stage is "God loves you." They can hear it first from parents and family members and then hear it echoed by the child's faith community. Students hear this message and see God at work in their lives through Bible stories, music, and fellowship together. They pray together and discover how they are called to be disciples of Jesus by sharing God's love and serving others. The elements they learn during these years form the foundation of discipleship they will develop throughout the rest of their lives.*

#### God's love

Students learn that God loves you and is always there for you. This is good news that we proclaim with our youngest members all the way to our mature members. God's love is proclaimed through word and deed and received through means of grace.

#### Prayer

Students learn that you can talk to God anytime, anywhere and in any way. Prayer does not have to be fancy, with big words or done in a certain way. God listens to our prayers.

---

<sup>3</sup> Sunni Richardson, "Key Elements for 3 year olds through 5th Graders," *FaithTrek 2017-2018 Evaluation*, First Lutheran Church, 2018.

Prayer is one of the most primitive and intimate forms of relating to God. Our prayer life begins with simple words, meal time blessings, and during bedtime routines. By beginning this practice when children are young, they learn the importance of being in continual holy conversation with God and not only in lifting up prayers but also in meditating on and discerning God's many responses. This element lives out the baptismal promise: *teach the child the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments and nurture the child in faith and prayer.*

### Storytelling

Students learn that we are all evangelists. We need to be story tellers and proclaim God's word. Our discipleship is closely linked with our apostleship. This means that our being students and followers of The Way informs and influences where, how, when, with whom, and why we are sent out to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ through words and deeds. We tell our personal stories that include how God is working in our lives and we hear the stories of others that include how God is working in their lives, recognizing that our stories, when woven together is a telling of God's story at work in the world. Telling stories and honing storytelling skills become crucial pieces as children grow in their faith. In a culture that silences, discredits, or devalues certain voices, stories, experiences, and people, telling stories is a tool of resilience and resistance to system of oppression. This element lives out the baptismal promise: *so that the child may...proclaim Christ through word and deed.*

### Serve

Students learn that our mission, participating in what God is up to, is both local and global, and everyone is called to serve and everyone has something to offer. This element lives out the baptismal promise: *so that the child may...care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.* Serving as a young person can happen in various setting and be done individually, in a small youth group, and as a family.

### Journey together

Students learn that being a disciple means walking together with others. We are called to accompany each other. We are committed to accompanying one another through the process of questioning-reflecting as we work together to face tough questions. Journeying together is one way we exist as a Christian community, living out the baptismal promise: *to live with the child among God's faithful people.* We begin to understand why and how we are accompanied by God and why and how we accompany one another through various stories in the Bible of how God was present with God's people throughout salvation history. We remember that the good news comes from Christ, who joins us whenever two, or three are gathered together in his name (Matthew 18:20). We, and our companions on the journey, are all part of the body of Christ. Participating in what God is doing in the world is a

journey, and this journey, taken with many companions, shows us the unexpected and sometimes unrecognized Christ who journeys with us.

### Bible

Students learn that the Bible is the story of God's people, our story, and studying the Bible is an important component of our learning. This element lives out the baptismal promise: *bring the child to the word of God and the holy supper and place in the child's hands the holy scriptures*. Bible stories used during the early childhood and childhood stages of learning come from the Old Testament and New Testament. Best intentions are made to read, tell, dramatize, and watch a variety of biblical stories from diverse perspectives (i.e., age, gender, culture, etc.) of the characters in the stories.

## V. Adolescents

*The adolescent years, include Middle School, and learning during this stage shifts the discussion to intentional conversations around how one related through different relationship spheres and faith practices. This stage of learning involves our entire church community to foster the growth of our young disciples through participating in discussions on what it means to be a disciple in Christ.*

### Relationship spheres

Adolescents is an exciting and sometimes challenging time to grow in one's faith and explore what it means to be a young disciple of Jesus. During these years, students will grow in their faith through: different prayer practices, Bible studies, reflecting on uncomfortable faith questions, visiting other faith traditions, discussing real life issues and exploring application of faith and discipleship as they relate to different spheres of relationship (peers, God, God's word, self, family, friends, neighbor, and world).

### Intentional conversations

Learning moves beyond a one-way speech from teacher to student. Instead, learning occurs in community through mutual conversations (dialogue). In addition to those who are called and equipped to be Christian educators, the entire congregation takes part in educating every other member of the congregation in a participatory way. In this framework, we move away from a "banking" model of one-way teaching of doctrine (indoctrination) where learners are seen as "empty vessels to be filled with the knowledge of the teacher."<sup>4</sup> We move toward a dynamic "participatory" practice of multi-way

---

<sup>4</sup> Paul V. Taylor, *The texts of Paulo Freire* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), 54. "Freire's description of the [Banking-Digestive Education] is well know and highlights the emphasis on transferring knowledge, on the passivity of the learner, the distance of teacher from learner, on the selective rather than the global perception of reality and on the alienation created personally and culturally for the learner who is regarded as a "deposit" or "object"."

education, that strives for a more horizontally natured education where each of us has “something to learn and something to teach.”<sup>5</sup> When it comes to dialogical/conversational education (problem-posing), critical awareness is fostered.

### Confirmation

In many faith traditions there is a *coming of age* period in a young person’s life when they learn specific topics in order to help them continue growing in her or his faith. In the Lutheran traditions, this period is commonly referred to as “catechism” (from the Greek word meaning to instruct or teach by word of mouth) or “confirmation” when young people are generally between 6th and 10th grade. At First Lutheran Church, this period of focused learning occurs during the 7th and 8th grade years. Topics typically covered in confirmation include, but are not limited to, those presented in Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* (published, 1529): Ten Commandments, Apostles’ Creed, Lord’s Prayer, Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, Confession, and Daily Blessings. Continuing in the same Lutheran spirit, we visit these important pieces of our faith, but focus more on their application and transforming impact through questions like: *what does this mean and why does this matter to a young person today?* Currently, confirmation training at First Lutheran Church is less about the rote memorization of Lutheran doctrines and more about connecting and strengthening the relational sphere of adolescents and their parents and learning through conversation to share and grow in faith together.

The learning during this period is twofold, one: for the confirmands to affirm God’s work of love that has already been going on in their life and God’s promises in their baptism, and two: to help their parents fulfill their baptismal promise to their child. Confirmation is also a time, space, and permission for adolescents and their parents to begin reconstructing what they believe.

## VI. Teens to Early Adulthood

*From teenage years to early adulthood, Christian education focuses on self-reflection and critical thinking about faith. We use language that reminds learners and educators that faith is not an individual journey, but requires accompaniment to actively engage and live our faith in the world. These tools highlight the role learners play as they enter new stages of life and prepare to transform the world through Christ.*

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., “In discussing counter-education, Freire presents “the creation of an authentic dialogue between the learners and the educators as equally knowing subjects, and second, there is the awareness of the real, concrete context of facts, that is of the social reality in which we are living.”

## Praxis

Praxis can be defined as “the action and reflection of people upon their world in order to transform it.” What is required then is *active reflection* and *reflective action*. What this looks like with Christian education is in the form of intentional engagement in the practice of reflection on how our faith and being followers of Jesus Christ influence the ways we act and behave in the world. At the same time, when we participate in God’s mission in the world, we are called to be mindful and aware of how our presence in the world helps us grow in our faith. Often the cycle of action-reflection praxis takes shape in “doing-being” something as a worshipping community or out in the local community, reflecting on it afterwards, and then letting that reflection shape how we “do-be” the next time. This leads us into a posture of continued learning.

When our learning action and reflection praxis extends outward from ourselves toward others in the community, fostering a mutual appreciation among different people working together on common projects, we venture into the realm of diapraxis, where there is “transformation of shared reality by means of dialogue and action through collective critical reflection and interaction.”<sup>6</sup>

## Critical thinking<sup>7</sup>

Christian education weaves together aspects of scripture, confessional traditions, liturgy, church history, spirituality, service to others, culture of the congregational context, and the interconnectedness of the church and the world. At this stage of Christian education, learners and educators continue to move beyond simple questions and enter the tension and struggle of placing “what was learned/taught in earlier years of *Sunday School*” alongside “what was learned in school” that may offer alternative, if not contradictory, perspectives to almost every subject. What this looks like in a faith community setting may mean learning new interpretations for previously unquestioned stories, lessons, beliefs, and practices<sup>8</sup> as well as opening ourselves up to previously unexamined biases, prejudices, and privileges that influence how we relate to our neighbor and the world.

---

<sup>6</sup> Lissi Rasmussen, “Diapraxis: Towards Joint Ownership and Co-citizenship,” *Politorbis* 52, no. 2 (2011): 59. The word diapraxis describe “a contextual approach to dialogue, where people meet to reveal and transform their shared reality.”

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *The texts of Paulo Freire*, 56. “Dialogue cannot exist unless it involves critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and people.”

<sup>8</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 33. “We need, then, an education which would lead [people] to take a new stance toward their problems—that of intimacy with those problems, one oriented toward research instead of repeating irrelevant principles...Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they were meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness. Indeed, its own naive dependence on high-sounding phrases, reliance on rote, and tendency toward abstractness actually intensified our naiveté.”

### Accompaniment

When we use accompaniment language at First Lutheran Church, we do so because we fundamentally understand that as disciples of Jesus, we are on this journey of faith together. We are neither Christians nor disciples alone, but always in community with others. Accompaniment is where we see what we believe turn into how we apply that belief and how that application influences, perhaps transforms, our lifestyle, attitudes, and behavior in the world. Accompaniment is then one way to understand how our Christian discipleship leads to the “transformation of the world.” It is through this kind of mutual dialogue with our neighbor that we are transformed. We are neither separated nor isolated from the world, rather we form part of the community, society, and world. So when we are being transformed, the community, society, world around us is simultaneously transforming.

How we teach the accompaniment model begins with age appropriate language with younger learners and goes deeper, more complex as it intensifies for more mature learners. Accompaniment is most critically learned through real life praxis, dialogue, and encounter. Accompaniment is much more than a subject to learn, as it is “a way of being” to be lived, helped and guided by the Holy Spirit.

### World transformation

As a community of faith, we understand one of the primary goals of learning at First Lutheran Church is stated in our Vision Statement: *making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. In order to be faith-filled agents of change in the world, it is important that Christian education be informed about the world and knowledgeable about how our faith relates to the world. “Transformation of the world” includes addressing issues related to being the church for the sake of the world that results from disciples being inspired to live lives that proclaim the gospel. Christian education can inform disciples in ways to speak truth to power, stand against injustices and inequities, fight for space where the church is called to be counter-cultural and transformational, and respond as faithful servants. As Christians, our faith develops where we are, in the midst of our context and realities. Equipping disciples to understand that their faith is not practiced in a vacuum or only within the walls of the church building leads to a rippling transformation of the disciple, the community, and the world, allowing them to work through hard questions from a faith perspective.

### Life transitions

From the teen years into early adulthood, there are a myriad of life transitions that occur. Christian education and discipleship formation remain accessible and age appropriate so that folks recognize that their growth in faith continues during and after they graduate high school. During many of life’s transitions, such as: high school to work force/higher

education, vocational discernment, dating, partnerships, marriage/divorce, “faith must provide a coherent orientation in the midst of more complex and diverse range of involvements and emotions. Faith then synthesized values and information and must further builds identity and outlook/world view.”<sup>9</sup> Personal transitions that continue through this stage of life include: biological sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. It is crucial that Christian education and discipleship formation include brave and safe conversations around one’s identity as it relates to being a beloved child of God, claimed by God through unconditional grace.

## VII. Early Adulthood to Mature Adulthood

*We grow in our knowledge and understanding of our faith, and our spiritual journey, to last a lifetime. We offer learning opportunities relevant to the experiences and needs of the many different stages along life’s way, from young adults and developing families, to parenting, getting older, dealing with loss, among other life adventures. We aim to appeal both to the mind and the soul, to engage and learn together, growing as disciples who serve one another and the world around us.*

### Introspection

By the time disciples transition into early adulthood (ages 20 to 35), and really throughout the rest of their adult life, living their faith in the world actively is balanced by continual *interior work* of introspection. Being a lifelong learner helps the ongoing examination of how one’s faith informs their actions and attitudes in the world. This is also the point at which individuals may ask, *Where does my faith fit my identity of who I am and where I am in my life?* It is not uncommon for adults to reach a period in their life and lifelong learning when they ask, *Is this all there is?* During these periods of introspection and reflection on how to live their faith, previous tightly held beliefs that were learned at earlier stages may feel less sufficient for the realities and struggles of everyday life. Often we see senior adults asking questions about faith when they transition through grief or into retirement communities and care centers. They are going back to their roots, checking signals, and seeing what is still relevant. Therefore, much of lifelong learning for adults develops in areas of faith deepening, problem-posing, and spirituality, looking inward to see if there are places within oneself that may need renovating.

### Critical reflection

Critical reflection on topics and subject matter leads to more critical awareness, which is a transformative process where one engages in a process of understanding how power and

---

<sup>9</sup> James W. Fowler, *Becoming an Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 45-49.

domination play a role in our discipleship in the world. This kind of reflection includes factors like class, 'race', gender, beliefs, and behaviors and their impact on our understandings based on our experiences.<sup>10</sup> Insights and understandings gained from critical reflection affect how we worship, pray, learn, and serve as we walk with one another (i.e., our accompaniment). Christian educators are encouraged to move toward critical consciousness themselves through reflection, so that they can be facilitators of critical consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

### Adult Christian Education

Currently at First Lutheran Church, there are several arenas in which adult lifelong learning occurs apart from experiential learning through service and faith formation in worship and prayer.

Adult Forum: invites presenters and speakers from outside and inside the FLC community to present on a topic that connects disciples and the world.

Bible Studies: read and discuss scripture through devotional, historical, literary, and theological lenses, always reflecting on "what does this mean for us today?" With this endeavor, there comes a fair amount of un-learning, re-learning, challenges to previous beliefs, and struggles to make sense and understand faith as we encounter God's word through adult eyes and life experiences.

Book Discussions: intentionally create space for dialogue around topics of faith based on a common book read by the group. Uncomfortable questions arising from the topics presented in the books, lived experiences of the group participants, and previously held misperceptions make adult Bible studies and book discussions fertile ground for new seeds to be planted.

Conversation Groups: gather folks of similar interests or demographics for conversation, learning, and fellowship. Sometimes a guest speaker is invited to speak to the group, other times there is a guided discussion using resource materials, and still other times the conversation may center around what other family members are learning (e.g., parents of Confirmation students).

---

<sup>10</sup> Jan Fook, "Reflective practice and critical reflection," in *Handbook for practice learning in social work and social care*, ed. J. Lishman (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015), 440-454.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *The texts of Paulo Freire*, 58. Freire writes, "We have to re-educate ourselves to an understanding that rejects that assumption that we are merely *in* the world, not *with* the world and with others: that we are spectators and not recreators. It is this possession of social consciousness, of being-in-relationship, that identifies us as social and political beings."

Lifelong learning with adults includes further development, scaffolding, and review of previously presented areas throughout earlier stages of life. If adults transition into life with a partner or children, and choose to have their family form part of a faith community, they will naturally revisit all the previous areas, but in the mentor-supporter role of another growing disciple. Adult Christian education can take place when one chooses to continue learning personally or with other adults, when one facilitates Christian education for children, when there are whole congregation learning events, and through family conversations as young people begin exploring and struggling with what *they* believe.

### Continual transitions

Most people spend the majority of their lives as adults, which means there are lots of transitions, both positive and negative, that present the basic need of growth in faith and spiritual care. No matter the transition, reflecting on *how God is present* and *what God is up to* is essential to continual discipleship formation. Some adult transitions are:

Surviving: illness, grief, job loss, migration, death of loved one, etc. During these difficult times, support in the form of accompaniment from others (e.g., visitors, shared activities) and resources (e.g., materials, meals, help around the home, prayer) may be helpful.

Identity (Who I am in relation to my vocation and call): living as a single adult, living in partnership with another adult, living with family.

Starting over: asks, if I had it to do over, what did I always want to do? What are my gifts, talents and resources and how do I use them?

Lifestyle changes: new job, career move, retirement, partnership, divorce, empty nester, the kids are back again, living as the sandwich generation, balancing care (care of self, children, early adult children, siblings, parents, in-laws, grandparents). As adults progress through these lifestyle changes, they may find meaning in later becoming mentors for the next generation of individuals who experience the changes. Individuals experiencing these transitions may find comfort and meaning through the process of engaging with others who have also experienced those changes. Similarly, adults may benefit from engaging in learning opportunities with peers experiencing the same type of lifestyle change. House groups, book groups, classes on a variety of topics can be designed to meet specific needs.

Financial: wills, trusts, stewardship, estates, giving, investing, downsizing – it's all God's.

Legacy: might ask, *How one has left her or his mark? Does she or he like the legacy being created? Are time and resources being allocated in a way that reflects true priorities?* As part of this legacy, adults may find meaning in mentoring or teaching children and young adults in the congregation, sharing their wisdom, experiences, and even mistakes to the benefit of others.

## VIII. Strategic Curriculum Development Cycle and Evaluation

In project management, there is a common circulation made up of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating.<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of the development of this *Framework for Transformational Learning*, we have chosen to adapt a project management cycle to help us meet our learning goals as well as ensure we remain on track with where we want to go with lifelong learning and Christian education. This strategic curriculum development cycle or evaluative learning circulation should happen at all levels of learning and Christian education.

**Planning – Implementing:** Each year, typically during the summer months, First Lutheran Church staff responsible for the various programmatic areas of Christian education gather with teams of educators to discuss: ideas, plans, directions, and possible themes; they recruit, train, craft scope and sequence, and consult with educators for the following year, and they touch base with the Lifelong Learning Team. While lesson planning may continue from week-to-week throughout the learning year, major structures and direction for the year are ready to be implemented by the time the learning year begins in early fall.

**Monitoring – Evaluating:** During the implementation stage, there is continual monitoring of the learning atmosphere, methodologies, activities, lessons, units, educator–learner needs. This helps us as a learning community ensure we remain on the learning path we hoped to travel and make minor adjustments in real time as the need arises. At least two times during the year: December for *mid-year* and May for *end-of-year*, in-depth evaluations occur to look at the past several months or look back across the learning year, make relevant observations and major modifications or shifts as the need arises.

**Reporting – Learning:** Two reports are generated throughout the learning year. One in December by the Council Liaison to the Lifelong Learning Plan Team for the First

---

<sup>12</sup> Karin Columba, “ELCA Global Mission Planning, Monitoring, Evaluating,” Presentation, Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida en Argentina-Uruguay, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2015.

Lutheran Church Annual Meeting. The other one in May by the staff member responsible for learning. From the reports, we learn from past successes and failures in order to inform future direction as we celebrate what God is doing in and through us as we learn together.

## Appendix A

### Management of Learning

#### Lifelong Learning Team

- Serve as the Christian Education Committee as defined by the FLC Church Constitution:
  - *C13.09. A Christian Education Committee shall be appointed by the Congregation Council. Committee members shall be voting members of this congregation.*
- Oversee and maintain the vision, goals, objectives, evaluations, outcomes, for programmatic learning areas
- Consist of representatives from programmatic learning areas

#### Church Council

- Appoint a liaison to the Lifelong Learning Team (LLT) to accompany and report back to Council pertinent learning advances
- Accept names of LLT members brought to them by the LLT through the Council-appointed-liaison

#### Staff

- In coordination with the LLT, staff involved directly with learning will form part of the LLT
- Staff roles may include, but are not limited to: sharing the progress of the various learning endeavors, keeping this *Framework for Transformational Learning: A Lifelong Learning Plan* before the LLT, serving as Christian educators with different programmatic learning areas, writing curricula, ensuring that the learning vision and philosophy/theology is woven across the programmatic learning areas, training Christian educators and facilitating orientation sessions

## Appendix B

### Confession of Faith <sup>13</sup>

- C2.01. This congregation confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- C2.02. This congregation confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.
- a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
  - b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
  - c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.
- C2.03. This congregation accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.
- C2.04. This congregation accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this congregation.
- C2.05. This congregation accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.
- C2.06. This congregation accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.
- C2.07. This congregation confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scripture and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.

---

<sup>13</sup> First Evangelical Lutheran Church Constitution, Lincoln, Nebraska, amended June 2, 2017.