

The Baptismal Covenant and the ELCA Faith Practices

Our baptism is a significant part of our faith journey as we come from the baptismal waters to live a new life as children of God. Marked with the cross of Christ and sealed by the Spirit, we receive a new identity as followers of Jesus, and the story of Jesus becomes our story. It is often said that we need to be attentive to the words we say, and this is especially true as we examine the words that are said at baptism. Together we hope and pray that those being baptized will be nurtured in the faith, grow into their baptism, learn to trust God, and live as disciples of Jesus.

What does the disciple's life look like? Well the best way to describe it might be to look at the baptismal covenant that is derived from the Baptismal liturgy and declared in the service of Affirmation of Baptism:

You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

*to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?*

Each person responds:

I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.

Our baptism sets us out on a **lifelong journey** that is characterized by our relationship to God, our relationship to our faith community, our relationships with various parts of our neighborhood and community, and our relationship to the wider world. The **baptismal covenant** describes this lifelong journey with God.

Then the question arises, "How do we live out this lifelong journey with God?" In other words, what are the behaviors, disciplines, signposts, tools, activities, paths, or practices that demonstrate in our words and in our deeds our intention to live out this lifelong journey with God?

The ELCA Churchwide Office Faith Practices Team currently encourages individuals and faith communities to see the baptismal covenant not only as a thorough description of our lifelong journey with God, but also to see the covenant as a lens to examine how to practice the faith.

Another approach is to view the baptismal covenant as the broad description of the lifelong journey with God and to see the faith practices as the ways that express how the baptismal covenant is lived out in our everyday lives. The "Teach Discipleship" teams for the Youth Gathering-2015, are using the 7 faith practices that were developed by the ELCA in its "Living the Faith: Call to Discipleship" program in the year 2000. These 7 faith practices are; Pray, Study, Worship, Invite, Encourage, Serve and Give.

Whether one understands the fivefold promises of the baptismal covenant to be a similar list of faith practices, we need to keep in mind that faith practices:

Draw us to God;
Shape and form us;
Nurture us in faith;
Conform us to Christ;
Deepen our relationships with God, our faith community, and our world
Align us to the pursuit of God's will and God's kingdom.

Here is one way to understand the connections between the Baptismal Covenant Faith Practices and the 7 Faith Practices:

<i>To live among God's faithful people</i>	_	Pray
<i>To hear the word of God and Share in the Lord's supper</i>	_	Study and Worship
<i>To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed</i>	_	Invite and Give
<i>To serve all people, following the example of Jesus</i>	_	Serve
<i>To strive for justice and peace in all the earth</i>	_	Encourage

The connections between the two sets of faith practices above are open to many interpretations and therefore there is no correct or incorrect interpretation. For example, "encourage," "worship," "give," "serve," "study," and "invite" could all also be understood as ways "to live among God's faithful people."

It takes a community to form disciples. Discipleship is not some content or information that is learned, as much as it is a way of life that is lived in a community of faith. Discipleship is an enculturation process, and the faith practices are ways we learn to live out our faith.