



WITH NEW VOICES — THE SMALL CATECHISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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THE BASICS

1. What is “With New Voices – The Small Catechism in the 21st Century”? Who is it for?

“With New Voices – The Small Catechism in the 21st Century” is an invitation to all congregations and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to engage Luther's Small Catechism in a new way. It is an invitation:

- to hear the Lutheran witness of the Christian faith that we share from new voices – voices that perhaps we did not hear in our earlier faith experiences; and
- to be renewed in our own voices as we join in the witness of the whole Christian community for the world.

2. When are ELCA congregations and members invited to do this?

“With New Voices” invites ELCA congregations and members to re-engage the Small Catechism by reading, studying and discussing it with others in their communities of faith during the time from the 2016 Churchwide Assembly (August, 2016) to October 31, 2017 (the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation).

3. How do we participate?

“With New Voices” encourages a renewed engagement with the Small Catechism in a way that is most promising for your community of faith and most fitting for the relationships your community has in all of life – not only in church, but also in families and among friends, with co-workers and neighbors.

This toolkit makes some suggestions and recommendations, and it points to some resources. It assumes, however, that you are in the best position to decide what will work best in your community and context. Use what you think will contribute to the most fruitful experience for your congregation or group. If you have wisdom, best practices, stories, or other resources to share with others, please send them to 500@elca.org. When you do, others can benefit greatly from your insights and experience.

“About five years ago I decided to work with Luther's catechisms, small and large. I was surprised and blessed by how these resources enhanced my preaching and teaching. Most Sundays I was surprised at the connections and the way the catechisms could deepen my sermon or teaching. I regularly wove the catechisms into my proclamation. I was struck by how often people expressed appreciation for my sharing of Luther's thought. I loved it when people would say, ‘I had never thought about it like that.’ I continue to turn to this resource regularly.”

— Bishop Jon Anderson,
Southwestern Minnesota
Synod

4. Why are we doing this?

For almost five centuries Martin Luther's simple explanations of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion have been a treasure for generations of Lutheran Christians. The Small Catechism has given Lutherans ears to hear God's mercy in Christ and eyes to see reconciled neighbors in the places where the Spirit is leading them to service.

Today the Lutheran community of faith includes a rich and diverse choir of voices through whom the Holy Spirit can fire our imaginations with new passion for serving this message of God's forgiving and reconciling mercy in Christ. A world filled with yearning and hope for God's promise eagerly awaits the witness of God's people (Romans 8:17).

"With New Voices" invites you into a fresh engagement with the Small Catechism as a way of turning to this world with renewed passion for proclaiming and embodying this promised hope from God. It is not an attempt to return to some imagined purified Christianity in the 1500s nor an attempt to recapture some nostalgia rooted in the 1900s. It is an invitation to hear the gospel anew in our time and to be renewed in our voices for this day.

GETTING PREPARED, GOING TO WORK

1. First Steps

Recruiting or designating a planning team or coordinator is a key first step. Don't assume that only pastors are qualified to take this role, but do consult with your pastor. They can offer insight and experience. Some other people to consider for this role:

- Teachers, especially those with experience in life-long and inter-generational learning and parent education
- Worship planners and musicians who can help bring the Small Catechism into the congregation's worship
- Event planners and activity directors who have insight and experience with organizing and managing projects
- Counselors and other professionals who have insight on relationships and group dynamics
- Artists and writers who know how to move from creative imagination to tangible results
- Anyone with deep appreciation and passion for the Small Catechism in their faith life

Identifying partners in the work is an important next step. Engaging all ages in a common learning experience can be a challenge. It can also be a great joy and renewal when long-overlooked assets are re-engaged in the process.

- Look for partners who are ready to collaborate in their area of knowledge or comfort.
- Look for established groups and regular activities in your congregation's life that are open to a new opportunity and fresh energy.
- Look for people with gifts and passions that have never been engaged because they've always been asked to do routine tasks.
- Look for people who are eager to grow in their faith.

2. Beginning Work

Begin with a plan. Don't aim for perfection. Be ready to begin soon with some learning experiences or projects that can be easily accomplished. Allow for the possibility of an unexpected opportunity. Begin planning with an expectation that the Holy Spirit will work with you and others.

A plan for all ages in your congregation or all groups in your ministry will include several elements. A simple calendar may work in some places. A fuller planning matrix may help in larger communities. One helpful approach could be to identify opportunities for all as a gathered community, opportunities for various kinds of groups, including families, and opportunities for individuals of all ages.

Opportunities for all to engage the Small Catechism as a whole community include:

- A sermon or message series based on one or more parts of the Small Catechism
- Using hymns or a worship order based on the Small Catechism
- A congregation-wide activity of weekly reading, discussion or reflection and creative response based on the Small Catechism
- A congregational retreat (or the first in a series!) that explores a part of the catechism in learning experiences and activities for all ages

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Opportunities for groups can be shaped for the needs and interests that they have in common with others, including:

- One or more groups to support parents in introducing the Lord’s Prayer, Commandments and Apostles’ Creed to younger children and in supporting older children as they explore the questions that emerge in later childhood and adolescence.
- Established small groups or new affinity groups (groups formed around some commonality – for example: students, young adults or retired workers, etc.) who are open or eager to explore contemporary ethical questions (Commandments), spirituality (Lord’s Prayer) or another topic in relation to the Small Catechism.

“With New Voices” encourages congregations to consider inter-generational learning experiences and other groupings that allow participants to hear insights from others who have different life and faith experiences.

Opportunities for individuals provide spaces for people who find it difficult to join in group experiences on account of their schedules or distance, or who prefer to learn through guided reading and writing or similar individual approaches. Possibilities include:

- A daily devotional resource based on the Small Catechism
- Online videos or podcasts that individuals can access at home or elsewhere
- A handbook based on the Small Catechism (and/or Large Catechism)

3. Following Through

Following through on a plan for your congregation or community will likely include some of these tasks for a coordinator or planning team.

- Publicizing or promoting reading and study opportunities through multiple communications channels
- Ordering and distributing resources, or distributing links to online resources
- Scheduling and preparing meeting spaces for large and small groups
- Assisting and supporting discussion leaders

When all Small Catechism related activities have been completed, it’s a good time to thank both leaders and participants one more time and to do some final evaluation.

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RESOURCES

A growing number of resources for a variety of audiences and contexts are available from a wide range of sources. Here are a handful that can provide new perspectives even for those who have deep, life-long familiarity with the Small Catechism.

1. Worship and preaching

- The *Reformation 500 Sourcebook* includes suggestions and guidance for incorporating into worship the Small Catechism, including Martin Luther's hymns based on each part of the Small Catechism (Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Lord's Supper). The sourcebook also includes a series of Bible studies on Luther's hymns that can be used in conjunction with worship or independently. Available from Augsburg Fortress (<http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/21657/Reformation-500-Sourcebook-Anniversary-Resources-for-Congregations>).
- In 2017 *Sundays and Seasons* will include suggestions for making connections with the Small Catechism in preaching, based on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for each Sunday. Available from Augsburg Fortress.

2. Education

- *Connections: Faith and Life* is an experiential learning resource based on the Small Catechism and designed to help participants meet God in their everyday lives. Free and available online (<https://www.wartburgseminary.edu/resources/connections-resource-congregations>).
- **Videos and study guides on the Small Catechism** are available from **Luther House of Study** (<https://www.lutherhouseofstudy.org/category/index.php?Category=Catechism>) and Augsburg Fortress in *Colaborate* (<http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/20491/Colaborate-Lutheran-Confirmation-DVD>). These videos can be used in a variety of settings and with a range of ages, including inter-generational groups.
- *Ecological Christianity through Luther's Small Catechism* takes a back-to-basics approach in order to see the entirety of Christian faith as permeated with creation care. Free and available online from Lutherans Restoring Creation (<http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/Home/lutheran-ecological-theology/ecological-christianity-through-luther-s-small-catechism>).
- A **commentary on Luther's Small Catechism** written by a team drawing on African descent experience in the United States is in preparation and will be available at www.elca500.org/withnewvoices.
- *Exploring Luther's Small Catechism* is a set of new study resources for elementary grade students. Available from Augsburg Fortress (<http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/search?ss=Exploring+Small+Catechism&c=0>).

3. Individual reading, devotion and prayer

- *Free Indeed: Devotions for Lent 2017* takes readers through Lent with daily readings from the Small Catechism. Each daily reading is accompanied by a photo, a quote to ponder, reflection and prayer. Available in both pocket and large-print editions from Augsburg Fortress (<http://augsburgfortress.org/store/product/22245/Free-Indeed-Devotions-for-Lent-2017-Pocket-Edition>).
- A **Small Catechism app for mobile devices** from Augsburg Fortress is available as a free download from the App Store and Google Play (<http://info.augsburgfortress.org/luthers-small-catechism-new-mobile-app>). Multiple print editions are available directly from Augsburg Fortress.
- *Prayers Based on Luther's Small Catechism* and *Praying Luther's Small Catechism* are two of several resources that provide guidance for prayer based on the Small Catechism.

A more complete listing of resources, along with additional information about "With New Voices—The Small Catechism in the 21st Century," is available at www.elca500.org/withnewvoices.