Our Dream

Our congregation’s deepest desire is to help people live and thrive in the love and grace of God where people experience a life-shaping faith in Jesus Christ through:

- transformational worship
- life-giving relationships
- renewing faith practices
- meaningful rituals and traditions, and
- servant opportunities that address the needs of our local and global communities.

The faith forming opportunities we offer reflect an understanding that:

- Faith is formed in the context of community that include settings at and beyond the congregation.
- People experience God and express their faith differently based on their life experiences, learning styles, and spiritual types.
- Faith formation is a lifelong process that is practiced daily.

We believe that everyone has a gift to share, a story to tell, and a next step for growing deeper in faith. We recognize that everyone is a student as well as a teacher and that there is much wisdom to be shared among generations. We affirm that the world we interact with daily is our mission field and view our homes as hospitality centers and mission outposts in our community. Mindful of God’s abundance in our lives, we help people grow in gratitude as they care for people and all of God’s creation through the wise use of their time, talents, and treasures.

Our Plan

For those seeking spiritual growth and a life of discipleship, our congregation has developed a blueprint for engaging people’s heads, hearts and hands in faith forming activities. Specifically, this plan focuses on three primary pathways for forming faith:

- **Worship and large group experiences** where people are introduced to Jesus, interpret the Christian life, learn Bible stories and biblical concepts, celebrate milestones, and are taught renewing faith practices.
- **Small groups** where people build relationships, connect faith with daily life, and have the opportunity to discover, develop, and deploy their gifts in service to others. Understanding home as church, too, we consider households to be small groups.
- **Independent study, reflection, and dialogue** where people can learn what they want, where they want, when they want. Typical experiences include devotions, Bible reading, participating in webinars, online courses, and book discussions, and through listening to sermon podcasts, participating in online lectionary studies, reading and responding to blogs, posting and following tweets, and contributing to Facebook questions and conversations. In addition, this pathway includes mentoring opportunities such as meeting with a spiritual director.

For the sake of the Gospel,

The Faith Formation Team
Faith formation leaders focus on doing what matters, not what's easy, when forming faith.

1 | PEOPLE MATTER

Life-giving relationships play a critical role in the faith forming process. The term “familiying” is used to describe the relational process the Spirit uses to create and sustain people in life and faith. Faith communities strive to create a web of support where individuals are cared for, encouraged, challenged, and empowered with new possibilities for forming faith every day.

The circle serves as a reminder that thriving faith communities always make room for others. It reflects the importance of being an inclusive, intergenerational community where people commit to following in the way of Christ while encouraging others to do the same.

2 | PRIORITIES MATTER

The triangle suggests that Christians gather as a community to 1) Connect with God, 2) Connect and care for each other, and 3) Connect with people in our community. The triangle points people 1) toward being AWARE of God's presence in our lives, 2) toward creating an atmosphere of BELONGING where people experience grace-filled, life giving relationships, and 3) toward providing opportunities for people to CONTRIBUTE to God's transforming work in the world. Thriving churches engage peoples’ heads, hands, and hearts in faith forming experiences that help people to gather, grow, give and go.

3 | PRACTICES & PLACES MATTER

Viewing faith as a verb, churches offer faith forming experiences that include prayer, learning, service, and celebration opportunities. The compass symbolizes the 4 practices (Pray | Learn | Serve | Celebrate) and the 4 places (below) where faith is practiced in daily life:

1-Congregation: During worship and large group experiences, people are introduced to Jesus, interpret the Christian life, learn Bible stories and biblical concepts, celebrate milestones, and are taught renewing faith practices.

2-Households: Understanding that the home can also be church too, spiritual practices are taught in the congregation that can be replicated at home. Homes are learning laboratories for faith formation.

3-Online: Online platforms serve as connecting points to share life and faith stories, learn spiritual practices, and pray for and encourage one another. They provide opportunities for independent study, reflection, and dialogue. They allow people to learn what they want and when they want.

4-On the Go: Churches find ways to partner and dialogue with community organizations, local congregations, and other learning institutions. Tapping into community resources expands faith forming capacities to grow exponentially.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How might you surround people with caring disciples who model a vibrant faith?
2. Which faith forming priorities influence the decisions you make related to forming faith?
3. Which spiritual practices are we emphasizing? When and where are they practiced?
TRANSFORMATIONAL WORSHIP
Our weekly worship settings are designed to usher people into God’s presence and to experience the sacred in their lives. Through music, liturgy, and the sacraments, it’s our desire to create spiritually rich experiences where people grow in faith, celebrate what God has done and continues to do in people’s lives, and help people interpret the Christian life. Using the narrative lectionary, we view worship as one of the prime opportunities for people to experience the Good News, learn about the stories and people found in the Bible, and to translate these stories into a faith that relates to daily life.

We will use worship and large group experiences as vehicles for teaching people faith practices that can be replicated at and beyond the congregation. These practices include praying, reading and reflecting on scripture, having faith-related caring conversations, and introducing meaningful rituals and traditions. These experiences will include “take home” activities that can be used in homes, cars, workplaces, and community settings.

WAYS FAITH PRACTICES WILL BE WOVEN INTO WORSHIP & LARGE GROUP SETTINGS

CARING CONVERSATIONS
- Have people share responses to a question during the Sharing of the Peace.
- Challenge members to “Take the Caring Conversation Challenge” during October.
- Highlight helpful resources to encourage Caring Conversations twice a month.
- Have people share what they do to engage in Caring Conversations regularly.
- Have young people teach a Caring Conversation practice during onsite and online events.

DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES
- Highlighting Taking Faith Home questions and prayers to be used during the week.
- Inviting members to listen and discuss the sermon at home (or in the car) via a podcast.
- Inviting people to weekly blog postings related to the sermon theme.

SERVANT OPPORTUNITIES
- Offer the Forming Faith in Daily Life Preaching & Teaching series
- Highlight (through story and video) one ministry opportunity a month.
- Share stories of members involved in ministry and deploying their gifts.
- Provide ideas and opportunities for “Sharing God’s Love this Week.”

MEANINGFUL RITUALS & TRADITIONS
- Celebrate (and teach the significance of) Baptism & Anniversary of Baptism Milestones.
- Celebrate (and teach the significance of) First Communion, Welcome to Worship, First Bible, Entering Confirmation, Confirmation, and Graduation Milestones.
- Celebrate (and teach the significance of) Commissioning Services for Stephens’s Ministers, servant groups, local and global missionaries, etc.
- Celebrate (and teach the significance of) Civic holidays including Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, New Year’s Day, etc.
- Celebrate the completion of study courses (Keryma, Crossways) and training events (Stephen Ministry, Dependable Strengths, Peer Ministry).
TRANSFORMATIONAL SMALL GROUPS
Small groups provide intimate settings for building significant relationships, affirming each other’s gifts, and expressing one’s faith. Our desire is to help small group leaders find ways to make their settings intentionally faith forming, transformational experiences. We will demonstrate weekly worship settings by Four Keying (Caring Conversations, Devotions, Service, and Rituals & Traditions) every gathering.

In congregational settings, gatherings such as meetings, band and choir practices, and service groups often get overlooked as small group settings. We recognize these gatherings as opportunities to form faith everyday, everywhere. Likewise, we view families and households as legitimate small group settings where faith is forming activities abound on a daily basis.

WAYS FAITH PRACTICES WILL BE WOVEN INTO SMALL GROUP SETTINGS

CARING CONVERSATIONS
- At the start of a meeting, include time to check-in and have Caring Conversations.
- Use questions found in books such as If, Talk Triggers, or Would You Rather.
- Use questions from downloadable resources listed in the Faith Formation Tools section of the website.
- Share responses to questions listed on Taking Faith Home inserts.
- Have young people teach a Caring Conversation practice they’re learning in Sunday School or in confirmation.

DEVOOTIONAL PRACTICES
- Read one of the Scripture passages found in the weekly Taking Faith Home insert.
- Identify a scripture passage that you regularly read as a family (i.e. Colossians 3:12-17).
- As a family or small group, listen to a sermon via a podcast.
- Teach households ways to engage in Lectio Divina or Examen devotional practices.
- Watch a Christian music video clip via YouTube or iTunes.
- Discuss the pastor’s sermon during a Sunday meal.
- Participate in monthly home-based book discussions and/or Bible studies.
- As a family or small group, read one of the Bible stories highlighted in the Spark Bible.
- Discuss the pastor’s weekly blog postings in the car or during meal times.
- Create and regularly review a list of people that you’re regularly praying for.

SERVANT OPPORTUNITIES
- View household chores as opportunities to serve friends and family members.
- As a family or small group, plan a servant event to participate in each month.
- Send two Birthday, Get Well, or Thinking of You cards to people every week.
- Identify a mission project you jointly agree to financially support each month.

MEANINGFUL RITUALS & TRADITIONS
- Celebrate Birthdays, making them significant and sacred moments.
- Provide households and small groups For Everything a Season to recognize family milestones such as a member starting a new career, the family moving into a new home, the death of a pet, or a family member getting a driver’s license.
Recognizing that people are at different stages in faith, have different needs, and may have time constraints that limit their involvement in congregational learning opportunities, our desire is to help people become aware of the many fine resources available online, through our congregation, and through the local faith communities to support one’s ongoing efforts to grow in faith.

Our website offers a wealth of recommended links and resources that are available 24/7 to support people in their faith journey. We encourage members to participate in our virtual communities found through blogs, Facebook groups and pages, and through Tweets.

WAYS FAITH PRACTICES WILL BE WOVEN INTO INDEPENDENT STUDY SETTINGS

CARING CONVERSATIONS
- Participate in monthly Facebook Parties sponsored by Vibrant Faith Ministries.
- Engage with pastoral staff through the church’s weekly blog postings.
- Reflect on the questions found in the downloadable resources listed in Faith Formation Resources found online.
- Respond to our pastor’s “Text Question of the Day.”

DEVOOTIONAL PRACTICES
- Sign up to receive daily devotional messages.
- Participate in lectionary reading conversations found at workingpreacher.org.
- Listen to our pastor’s sermons via a podcast (or download other recommended podcasts).
- Read one or more books from our congregation’s “Recommended Reading List.”
- Read the book of the month and then participate in the monthly book Facebook Party.
- Watch Christian music video clips via YouTube or iTunes (view our YouTube channel).
- Listen or watch lectures on Christianity, the Bible, and religion from the Great Courses.
- Participate in online study courses from Select Learning or a seminary.
- Begin meeting with a Certified Spiritual Director to increase awareness of God and discern where God might be leading you now and in the future.

SERVANT OPPORTUNITIES
- Send two Birthday, Get Well, or Thinking of You cards to people every week.
- Get involved in a community service project or serve on a local board.
- Help manage our congregation’s website, Facebook pages, blog, or Twitter account.
- Identify a mission project you jointly agree to financially support each month.

MEANINGFUL RITUALS & TRADITIONS
- Take a neighbor out for his or her birthday.
- Host an annual barbecue at your home the same time every year as a way to befriend and deepen friendships with your neighbors.
- Recognize the milestones in your own life and discern the significance of them for you.
Our Mission
Faith practices are means of grace that help people more fully experience God in their lives. Our desire is to provide tools and training that help people to practice faith every day, everywhere, with everyone. Common faith practices include the following:

1. Caring for the Body
2. Managing households
3. Keeping Sabbath
4. Extending Hospitality
5. Forgiving
6. Relating
7. Eating Well
8. Reading Scripture
9. Being in Community
10. Savoring Beauty
11. Serving Others
12. Doing Justice
13. Celebrating Life
14. Discerning
15. Praying

Practicing Faith through the Lens of the Four Keys
We encourage households to practice faith through the lens of the Four Keys or categories of faith practices. These include caring conversations, devotions, service, and rituals and traditions. The Four Keys strengthen the faith life of individuals and communities within households and congregations through these intentional practices being woven into worship settings, small and large group activities, mentoring situations, and through online and social media channels.

Caring Conversations
Caring conversations express an interest in others, their hurts, their joys, their concerns and dreams, their values and faith. Caring conversation requires time to be available to listen and to speak. Congregations are encouraged to help families identify the holy ground of their lives where precious, caring conversations take place and where lives are strengthened and nurtured by the love and mercy of God through the support, guidance, and genuine interest of others.

Devotions
A devotional life is a way to practice the presence of God through the word of God. Many families and individuals need help with the language of prayer and faith in daily life. A devotional life is more of a consciousness and way of life than a formula to accomplish a certain task. Family devotions connect the generations with faith, hope, and love in a world that speaks and operates on a different basis than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Service
Service to one’s neighbor is the calling we all are given through the life and message of Jesus Christ. For a Christian, service is motivated out of the love we have first received from God. Service communicates that love to others and is a concrete expression of one’s own faith and values. Family service projects have been shown to be a vital way to pass on faith from generation to generation. Children and youth are greatly influenced by what they see in the lives of others, especially parents and other family members.

Rituals & Traditions
Rituals and traditions are those patterns of behavior that occur on a routine basis and communicate certain meaning in life. The way people greet one another each day, a table grace, bedtime prayers, the blessing of a Christmas tree, and a birthday or baptismal anniversary celebration are all examples of family rituals and traditions that can effectively communicate the good news of Jesus Christ.
**AN INTRODUCTION TO MILESTONES MINISTRY**
Milestones are one of many pathways our congregation provides to help people form faith. Milestones are meaningful, memorable moments marked with the Cross of Christ. They are opportunities to recognize the sacred moments and holy ground in our lives, providing opportunities to reflect on what God is up to in our lives, and to consider next steps in our faith journey. Milestones Ministry brings an awareness of the presence of God to people of all generations through a vital partnership between home and congregation.

**THE FIVE COMPONENTS OF A MILESTONE CELEBRATION**
- **Name it:** We provide a title to describe a milestone being celebrated such as baptism, first entering middle school, or retirement.
- **Equip it:** Equipping brings the generations together, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. Opportunities are provided here to model faith practices for the home. Every Milestones Ministry Module offers detailed information for organizing and carrying out a successful cross-generational event.
- **Bless it:** Blessing the individual, and marking significant occasions in a worship service or in the home, declares God’s presence in meaningful ways. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred, something that each Milestones Ministry Module recognizes.
- **Gift it:** Gifting is a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life. Gifting has the potential to engage the talents and skills of many people in contributing to the milestone event and connecting people to one another in new, meaningful relationships as well.
- **Reinforce it:** The reinforcing process reminds participants that the celebration is more than a one-time occurrence. Reinforcement activities often include follow up support groups, online training, watching a DVD, Skype sessions, webinars, and more.

These five elements – Naming, Equipping, Blessing, Gifting, and Reinforcing - can be incorporated into a milestone whether it is a birth, a baptism, a new puppy, a graduation, a wedding, joining an AA group, a retirement, a funeral, or any occasion.

Milestones celebrations are faith forming activities that involve parents, caregivers, and other caring adults during specific stages in life. Listed below are milestone **celebrations we currently offer** to our households of faith.

**HOME**
- Birthday Celebration
- Anniversary Celebration
- High School/Post-High Graduation
- Home Blessing
- Driver’s License
- Retirement

**CONGREGATION**
- Baptism/Anniversary of Baptism
- Welcome to Worship
- First Communion & First Bible
- Confirmation and Graduation
- Completion of a Training Certificate
- Wedding & 20th Anniversary
Age-Specific Faith Formation Outcomes

Our faith forming activities are designed to engage the head (knowledge and understanding), heart (reinforce key values), and hands (developing essential skills and practices needed for lifelong faith) and are attentive to people's ages and life stages. Listed below is a BRIEF summary of what we hope people between birth and age 18 will know, be able to do, and will regularly practice.

BY KINDERGARTEN, WE STRIVE TO HELP A YOUNG PERSON …
- Know when they were baptized and how baptism makes them part of God's family.
- Know that God created the world and loves all of God's creation.
- Know the name of our congregation, our denomination, and our pastors.
- Know the stories and characters mentioned in the SPARK Story Bible.
- Be able to identify the altar, baptismal font, the lectern, and organ if asked.
- Be able to recite scriptures related to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.
- Be able to recite the Lord's Prayer, and at least two mealtime and bedtime prayers.
- Be able to summarize the Christmas, Holy Week, and Easter stories.
- Practice Caring Conversations, mealtime and bedtime prayers, and serving the family at home.
- Experience the Baptism, Welcome to Worship, and First Bible milestones celebrations.

BY 5TH GRADE, WE STRIVE TO HELP A YOUNG PERSON …
- Know that there are two parts of the Bible and can name all 66 books.
- Know that Jesus cared for the poor and sick, taught the disciples, and challenged Jewish leaders.
- Know the six seasons of the Church and the colors associated with each of the seasons.
- Know our congregation's order of service and the meaning and significance of each element.
- Be able to define sin, repentance, church, congregation, parables, apostles, and disciples.
- Be able to recite the Ten Commandments and the Nicene Creed.
- Be able to describe God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (or Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer).
- Be able to connect our celebration of communion with the Lord’s Last Supper.
- Practice reading stories from the SPARK Story Bible to their parents and grandparents.
- Practice singing songs and hymns at home with family members.
- Experience the Communion and Going to Camp milestones celebrations.

BY 9TH GRADE, WE STRIVE TO HELP A YOUNG PERSON …
- Know the history, uniqueness, mission and vision of our congregation (and denomination).
- Know how the Bible was created, the types of Bible literature and ways people interpret scripture, and how our congregation interprets scripture.
- Be able to define grace, worship, stewardship, tithing, vocation, and spiritual gifts.
- Be able to describe your faith to others and learn about other people's understanding of God.
- Be able to name the Fruits of the Spirit and describe the birth and growth of the Church.
- Be able to name “next steps” in their life and faith journey.
- Practice praying daily (privately and publicly), reading scripture, and serving others.
- Experience the Confirmation Milestone, a short-term mission trip, and Peer Ministry Training.

BY 12TH GRADE (OR 18 YEARS OF AGE), WE STRIVE TO HELP A YOUNG PERSON …
- Know (understand) stewardship as a way of life that involves one's time, talents, and treasures.
- Practice taking ownership of his/her faith by seeking out guides and resources for the journey.
- Practice participating in God's Kingdom work/Christ's mission by using one's skills and abilities.
- Practice being a leader by framing conversations, asking questions, and modeling the way.
- Experience multiple ways to serve the local and global community.
Forming Faith with Adults of all Ages

Understanding faith formation as a lifelong process where everyone has a “next step” for going deeper in faith. We believe this process begins with helping people of all ages establishing daily and weekly rituals and routines that continue to connect them to God, to each other, and to the needs of their community. Therefore we invite every adult follower of Christ to:

- Begin and end each day in prayer; immerse each day in prayer at meal times, while in the car, at school or work.
- Worship weekly.
- Take time to read and reflect on scripture.
- Have caring conversations with the people you encounter each day.
- Find at least one way to serve at the congregation.
- Find at least one way to serve the local and/or global community.
- Continue to grow in generosity, seeking to move up to and beyond tithing one’s income for the sake of building God’s kingdom.

Embracing the ideas that everyone is a theologian, we offer the following faith forming cohort study groups that include readings, blogging sessions, Facebook Parties, and optional webinars. These study groups are launched on a quarterly basis and address three main topics: Congregational Leadership, Biblical Studies, and Practicing Faith 24/7.


Additional opportunities we will provide to further the spiritual maturity of adults include:

- Individual and group spiritual direction.
- Small groups that address life transitions, dependencies, and vocational discernment.
- Online courses offered by Select Learning, The Great Courses and ELCA seminaries.
- Reading, reflecting, and interpreting scripture; meditating on God's Word.

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## Adult Faith Formation Opportunities

Our two-year plan for supporting adults to go deeper in their faith

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<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Worship Sermon</th>
<th>Small Groups</th>
<th>Facebook or Blog</th>
<th>Independent DVD/Book</th>
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What do we need to write or say about . . .

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<td>• Meditation</td>
<td>• Small groups/affinity groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scripture reading &amp; reflection</td>
<td>• Classes/forums</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sabbath keeping &amp; solitude</td>
<td>• Immersions/Retreats</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Serving</td>
<td>• Servant events</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fasting</td>
<td>• Mentors/Spiritual Guides</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Worship &amp; celebration events</td>
<td>• Community/College/Seminary classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Study &amp; discussion</td>
<td>• Books/Book studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discerning &amp; developing callings</td>
<td>• Videos/YouTube/</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Giving joyfully &amp; generously</td>
<td>• Audiobooks/podcasts</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE PORTALS WE’LL USE TO POINT PEOPLE TOWARD FAITH FORMING ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Church website</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Worship slides &amp; bulletins</td>
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<td>• Worship announcements &amp; sermons</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Church newsletters &amp; annual reports</td>
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<td>• Church Facebook pages &amp; groups</td>
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<td>• Church Instagram &amp; Social media</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conversations at leadership meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Small group/affinity group settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Classes, forums, &amp; programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Immersions &amp; retreat settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Servant &amp; advocacy activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mentors, spiritual guides, &amp; coaches</td>
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