

Dear Brethren,

Thanks be to God for the gift of His Holy Word and for eight years of ministry in your midst. Reflecting on those years, especially in teaching the Faith to the children, and now as my own children begin growing and maturing, I have spent the last couple years intensively reading and studying confirmation and catechism instruction in the Church. With the consent of the Parish and its leadership, I am prepared to offer some changes to our programming in the hopes of better instructing our children in the Faith as we go forward together in Christ.

In his Preface to the Catechism, Doctor Luther laid out his own design for how instruction in the Faith should take place. He urged that, first, the youngest children be instructed in the primary texts which all Christians should know by heart: the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer. They should also be taught the words of our Lord concerning Baptism & Communion. Second, children should then be instructed in the meanings of these texts (the Explanations in the Catechism, "*What does this mean?*"). Third, the children are instructed in the Large Catechism. CPH, the publishing house of our Synod, now has resources to help us accomplish exactly that. Thus, after careful study and with resources now available, we are hoping to better instruct our children—and all Members—that the Faith can be confessed by the next generation.

Below, as a hand-out, I give the reasons and fuller accounting for the changes and programming I am recommending as explained in "Catechesis: Teaching the Faith in Our Parish." As always, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to visit with me! Thank you!

—The Rev. Gregory H. Volbrecht
July 21, 2019

CATECHESIS: TEACHING THE FAITH IN OUR PARISH

Our gracious Heavenly Father calls us His own dear children and would have us grow together in fear and love in His household of faith, the Church, adopted by grace and treated as brothers by Jesus our Lord. Like the Apostle Paul, every child of God is called to a life of discipleship, to “*press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:14). As God’s children, we never stop growing in our fear and love of our dear Father and we gladly hear and learn the preaching of His Holy Word (3rd Commandment). We recognize that our Father as the Creator has also given design and purpose in our lives, particularly, with the holy orders of marriage, parents, and children. The faith that is gifted to us by the Holy Spirit through the preached Word of God is meant to be nurtured and grow over the course of our lifetime. The faith is also to be passed on from one generation to the next. Moses wrote, “*And these words [the Scriptures] which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up*” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). The Apostle Peter preached, “*For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*” (Acts 2:39). Our Heavenly Father has loved us in Christ Jesus; He sent His Son to take away the sins of the world, your sins and mine, that we might be made the children of God. We have freely received the gift of eternal salvation; it is ours by grace, alone, and in joy and thanksgiving to our gracious God we sincerely desire what He desires, that all would repent and believe this Good News (the Gospel!). This is especially true of our nearest and dearest neighbors, our spouse and children. We desire that they too would know the love of God for them in Christ Jesus, that their sins would be washed away in Holy Baptism and they would be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, born again as Jesus instructed for admission to His Kingdom, and that they would learn with us the Holy Scriptures, God’s own self-revelation of who He is and what He has done for us men and for our salvation. To put it rather simply, the sincere desire for us is that our children—and all of our neighbors in this community—would love Jesus even as we have learned to love Him. This comes only through the regular hearing of the Scriptures, repentance, faith, and receiving God’s good gifts given through the Ministry of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. It is this foundation that informs the Catechesis, or instruction in the Faith, which takes place in this Parish.

I. THIRD COMMANDMENT

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it” (LSC). Our gracious Heavenly Father has spoken to us His dear children. When parents speak their children are to listen. Fathers and mothers speak to their children so that their youngest children would learn to know their voices; it is how we learn language, by listening to our parents; it is how we learn who we are, what to do, and what not to do. “*God, Who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...*” (Hebrews 1:1-2a). God the Holy Spirit has spoken through the patriarchs and prophets and apostles, and by the lips of the Savior, Jesus Christ, and as His own dear children we desire to listen to our dear Father, to learn who we are, what to do, and what not to do as His children.

Thus, every Sunday attendance in Divine Service is the ordinary standard expected of all God’s children. Whenever additional services are held, whether Advent, Lent, Holy Week, or even Funerals, it is to be expected that God’s children will seek to be present because of our sincere desire to gladly hear and learn God’s Holy Word. We rejoice in hearing our Father’s voice through the Scriptures, as they are read to us, spoken and sung in our worship, and as they are preached to us. In corporate worship, we are gathered with our brothers and sisters as the household of faith—a family. In worship, our Father speaks to us and He feeds us, by means of the Lord’s Supper, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The entire family is expected to worship together, husband and wife, parents and children. Yes, it is not always easy to get everyone up on time, fed, clothed, settled, but our Father calls us all to gather together. Jesus sought out the little children in the midst of the crowds, no less than the adults (Mark 10). The best way for children to learn and grow in the Christian Faith, is to be in worship together with their father and mother. Put the hymnal and bulletin in their hands, guide them through the service, Sunday after Sunday. Parents must worship with their children. This is a basic requirement for catechesis, and children cannot be expected to take seriously the Father’s Commandment if their fathers and mothers do not take it seriously. Attendance is a key component for those seeking Confirmation. Absences/exceptions will be handled case-by-case by the Pastor. If anyone needs help getting to worship on Sunday mornings, please speak to Pastor.

II. HOLY BAPTISM

“What is Baptism? Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s Word,” and, “What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare” (LSC). Our life of faith begins in Holy Baptism. Jesus teaches this to Nicodemus in John 3 and instructs His Church to baptize and teach all the nations in Matthew 28. The Apostle Paul has taught that our union to Jesus Christ, His Person and Work, is accomplished in Baptism in Romans 6. From the Holy Scriptures, we believe, teach, and confess that infants can and do possess faith as much as any adult. Why? Because faith is God’s gift. It is not earned. It is not accomplished through our reason or senses, a maturity of thought or brain development. Our gracious Heavenly Father works faith where and when it pleases Him, and He is pleased to work it even in infants and children.

Parents are to bring their children to Holy Baptism. We have the words and promises of God and those beautiful benefits as reviewed for us in Doctor Luther’s Small Catechism. Children must be baptized. This sure foundation of their faith, grounded in the words and promises of God, is what they will return to every day for the rest of their lives. This is so because we still have the old adam, our fallen, sinful human nature with us until our last breath. This must be fought against. This is further explained in the Catechism’s fourth chief part on baptism, “What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (LSC). You can read more about this in Romans, Chapters 6 through 8, where Saint Paul unfolds these truths in more detail. Our children must be baptized, for only then, reborn as God’s children, united to Jesus Christ, sins washed away, and having received the Holy Spirit, can they “*fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life*” (1 Timothy 6:12a). Before the child is born, all parents are to meet with the Pastor, to review what our Heavenly Father teaches about Holy Baptism, and to learn how to begin raising up their child in the Faith. Baptism should take place as soon as possible. Only the regenerated can desire fellowship with Jesus Christ and His Church, to come to the Father’s Household, and to receive His good and gracious Gospel gifts.

III. HOUSEHOLD

In his Small Catechism, Doctor Luther included a “Table of Duties” which carries the caption, “Certain passages of Scripture for various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities” (LSC). From the Scriptures, we learn that our Heavenly Father, as Creator, has given design and purpose to the entire universe, but also, particularly, to the human race. Each and every person is placed by God in “various holy orders and positions.” It means that your life, no matter what position you currently hold, has purpose and meaning—from God! This is a great joy and blessing when there are so many uncertainties in the course of our earthly lives—when we move, when our jobs change, etc. We can review the “Table of Duties,” and be reminded by our Heavenly Father of the “various holy orders and positions” that He has put us into by His wisdom and grace, and to hear what He says to us in His Word concerning those positions.

Two of those holy orders are “Parents” and “Children.” Luther cited the Apostle Paul in the instruction “To Parents,” “*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). In the instruction “To Children,” “Children, obey your parents, for this is right. ‘*Honor your father and your mother*’—which is the first commandment with a promise—‘*that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth*’” (Ephesians 6:1-3). Our Heavenly Father is the One who as Creator brings together a father and mother in marriage, and He is also the author of life, the gift of children, resulting from the one flesh union. Together the parents and children constitute a household. Our Father gives us purpose and meaning in our life together as an earthly family, and His Word instructs us that children are to honor their parents and that parents; fathers in particular, are not to exasperate children but raise them in the Word of the Lord. This happens **at home!** In other words, our faith is not only to be practiced in Sunday worship, it is lived out **daily**. At home. This should remind us of what God said in Deuteronomy 6 as cited earlier. The Catechism is meant to help guide parents at home in the instruction of their children. These are the primary texts that we Christians are to know by heart. Just as we teach our children language and manners and tying shoes and riding bikes at home, so also, we teach them the basics of the Christian Faith at home—how to pray, when to pray, who Jesus is, etc. Pastor can help model and teach this during home visitation.

IV. SUNDAY SCHOOL

The most important formation for our children's faith takes place at home, as parents model the Christian Faith in their own prayer and devotion to the Holy Scriptures. As parents listen to their Heavenly Father and go to Him with their prayers, so also their earthly children will seek to listen to the Father and pray to Him as well. This is further nurtured in the Divine Service, through the regular and faithful hearing of God's Holy Word, and the receiving of God's good gifts in Baptism, Confession, and the Altar. As a further auxiliary to this—but not as a substitute for teaching at home or hearing in worship—our Parish has Sunday School. Our teachers serve under the oversight of the Pastor, and their instruction of your children is meant to supplement what is taught and practiced at home and in corporate worship. Children, beginning around ages 3 or 4, at the parents' discretion, are welcome to join the Sunday School. After the parents and children have worshipped together with the Congregation, all are invited to come to the parish hall for a treat. Before Sunday School begins, there will be a brief catechism review with the Pastor and the adults, and then the children will either go upstairs to the balcony for music or they will go to their separate classes. In our Parish, currently we have a class for younger children, ages 3+ to about 7 or 8 and a class for older children, usually 8+. Everyone else is encouraged to stay for Bible Study with Pastor. All programming usually ends by 11:00 a.m. most Sundays. The term each year loosely follows the local schools, with Sunday School beginning the Sunday after Labor Day and ending by the third Sunday in May. The schedule is a little different in the month of December, with time devoted to preparation for the Christmas Eve Children's Program. During the term, there will be opportunities for the Sunday School children to sing during the Sunday Divine Service, and several additional fun events. Sunday School programming is devoted to learning the Bible narratives, what God has revealed in the Scriptures about Himself and what He has done for His people; as well as learning the primary texts of our Faith in the Catechism (Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer). The older children will also learn the Explanations of the primary texts ("What does this mean?"). All the texts, Bibles, Catechisms, and crafts are provided free-of-charge to all families. The children are welcome to bring a modest offering (dollars or coins) collected on behalf of the missionary family we support in our Parish.

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church, it has been our practice over the centuries to have a particular time of pastoral catechesis in the life of our baptized children (and for adult converts joining the Church). The Pastor is the primary teacher in the Parish. To distinguish this particular teaching from the rest of the catechesis, which is to be taking place at home, in worship, and in Sunday School, “Pastoral Catechesis” is an additional opportunity to learn the Word of the Lord. This pastoral catechesis has been, historically, tied to the preparation and reception of the Sacrament of the Altar.

In recent generations, confirmation has typically taken place in the late middle school/junior high years. Unfortunately, this timing for pastoral catechesis is less than ideal. Many children beginning in 5th grade are receiving school instruction in sex education, Darwinian evolution, and other teachings and practices contrary to our Heavenly Father’s good and gracious will. Between their peers and widespread access to the Internet, they have already been exposed to many harmful things. Bullying, harassment, social media, and pornography are already confronting our young people. Not only would we do well to better equip our children to do battle against Satan, to rebuke the lies of the evil one, and take comfort in the gift of confession and absolution, and the promises of God and His Word, but also to receive the comfort and peace to be found in the frequent reception of the Sacrament of the Altar. The delay of pastoral catechesis is also unfortunate in that in terms of mental development, many children by late junior high are no longer eager questioners and learners but have begun the maturation toward independence and adulthood. It also makes memory work more difficult the older the child is. For these reasons, it is the recommendation of the Pastor that our children would be better served by receiving earlier “pastoral catechesis.”

Finally, having reviewed the Prefaces that Doctor Luther wrote for his catechisms, and having read various articles and books on the subject, as well as consulted with brother pastors, it is time to return to the design given to us by Luther himself. When Luther wrote the catechisms, he gave them with a design and purpose. Over the years, this design has been neglected and replaced by other things. It is the judgment of the Pastor that it would be both easier and better for us to return to the original design given by Luther for pastoral catechesis with his catechisms.

Practically, the design for pastoral catechesis is as follows: **first**, *around* the child's tenth year of life, the parents will present their child to recite to the Pastor the three primary texts (Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer); Pastor will meet with the child and the parents to plan a time and schedule for pastoral catechesis (which can be, but is not limited to, an hour on Wednesday afternoons during the course of the school year); during this first term, the focus will be primarily on the texts of the Six Chief Parts, the Table of Duties, and Christian Questions and Answers; the child will recite each week a portion of the Catechism, so that the entirety of the Six Chief Parts is covered; the parents (at least one, but both if possible) will meet with the Pastor to discuss catechesis and will continue to meet with the Pastor and child once a month thereafter, for the entirety of the child's pastoral catechesis; **second**, the child will continue pastoral catechesis going through the Large Catechism. This entails an additional term's worth of instruction (minimum ~30 hours). After this is completed, the child will then be presented before the Congregation for Public Examination (reciting the primary texts by heart as well as Christian Questions & Answers), to be followed the next Sunday by the Rite of Confirmation (if possible, on the Feast of Pentecost in the spring of the year). During the time of pastoral catechesis, the child will be expected to faithfully attend Divine Service with their parents, they will be devout in their prayers and devotions in their household, they will attend Sunday School, and read and attend to their studies with the Pastor. During pastoral catechesis, the young boys will receive training and serve in the Divine Services as the Pastor requires of them as acolytes/servers. The young girls will serve with the Altar Guild and/or the LWML as time and talents permit. After being confirmed, the children will be encouraged to begin attending the Bible Study with the Pastor and adults on Sunday mornings, in addition to continuing their faithful Sunday attendance in the Divine Service with their parents and their household devotions.

As has been the practice here previously, children will both receive instruction in pastoral catechesis and will be confirmed as they are willing and ready per the judgment of the Pastor. Nowhere do the Scriptures, nor does Doctor Luther, give specific age requirements or parameters; neither are we tied to any particular calendar date or local tradition. God has given us Christian liberty in such matters. What is not negotiable is faithfulness to our Father, and devotion to His Holy Word.

VI. BIBLE STUDY

In the Book of Acts we read, *“Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so”* (17:10-11). Our Heavenly Father has spoken to us His children through the Holy Scriptures. As Saint John testified in his gospel, *“These [Scriptures] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”* (John 20:31). We are to diligently listen to our Father. We are so richly blessed to have the gift of accessible Scriptures, to have the liberty of literacy, to possess our own copies of God’s Word. The Pastor currently offers a Sunday morning Bible Study to which all confirmed members are invited. It is a time to study what God has revealed to us about Himself and our salvation, and to ask questions, to deepen our faith and understanding, and a time for Christian fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the Faith. Our study of God’s Word is meant to be taken into our daily lives, and is not limited to a formal time with the Pastor. There are many options for daily Bible study, please see the Pastor for ideas or recommendations.

RESOURCES

Younger Children (ages 3–7+)

Parish Catechism Booklet & The Story Bible

Older Children (ages 8+)

My First Catechism & Faith Alive Student Bible

Pastoral Catechesis (children age ~10+, and adult converts)

Martin Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms (CPH:2019)

All Households in the Parish

The Catechisms, the Lutheran Service Book (hymnal) and the Holy Bible

Nuts & Bolts Summary:

What our Heavenly Father expects of all of us His dear children.

1. Faithfully attend Sunday services.
2. Bring your children to Holy Baptism as soon as possible.
3. Teach and practice the Faith at home **daily**.
4. Beginning at age 3 or 4, young children are welcome to begin Sunday School instruction. That is also the time when you should begin reciting at home the primary texts of the Catechism so that these would be learned by heart by the little ones. The child is given “The Story Bible” and the “Parish Catechism Booklet.”
5. At about age 7, the child will receive “My First Catechism,” and be encouraged to begin utilizing this at home with their parents and in preparation for joining the next Sunday School group, at about age 8.
6. Beginning around age 10, after already reciting and learning at Home and in Sunday School the primary texts of the Catechism, the parents can present their child/children to the Pastor to begin Pastoral Catechesis. They will receive the “Faith Alive Student Bible.” They will also receive “Martin Luther’s Small and Large Catechism” (CPH:2019). Pastoral Catechesis will take place in two parts:
 - A. Term One, Learning & Reciting the entire **Small** Catechism.
 - B. Term Two, Learning the **Large** Catechism, followed by Confirmation.
7. The children will continue to faithfully attend Sunday services and be encouraged to join the adults in Bible Study.

+The pastoral catechesis is not tied to any particular time frame, but rather, the necessary teaching recommended by Doctor Luther will be covered in its entirety with each child to the pastor’s satisfaction. We will also strive to accommodate the parents’/ children’s schedules.

**A note: This recommendation by Pastor is also experimental and is designed to be fully implemented over the course of several years. Adjustments can be made as other improvements, resources, challenges, or opportunities arise.*

APPENDIX:

This is patterned off of Doctor Luther's teaching in the Preface to the Catechism:

“But with the young people stick to one fixed, permanent form and manner, and teach them, **first** of all, these parts, namely the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc., according to the text, word for word, so that they, too, can repeat it in the same manner after you and commit it to memory...

In the **second** place, after they have well learned the text, then teach them the sense also, so that they know what it means, and again choose the form of these tables, or some other brief uniform method, whichever you like, and adhere to it, and do not change a single syllable, as was just said regarding the text, and take your time to it. For it is not necessary that you take up all the parts at once, but one after the other. After they understand the First Commandment well, then take up the Second, and so on, otherwise they will be overwhelmed, so as not to be able to retain any well.

In the **third** place, after you have thus taught them this Short Catechism, then take up the Large Catechism, and give them also a richer and fuller knowledge. Here explain at large every commandment, article, petition, and part with its various works, uses, benefits, dangers, and injuries, as you find these abundantly stated, in many books written about these matters. And particularly urge that commandment or part most which suffers the greatest neglect among your people. ...”

Triglotta (1921), Small Catechism Preface, pages 535-537.

RESOURCES

These are the books and articles Pastor read and reviewed in preparation for the “CATECHESIS” recommendations for Fall 2019.

Doctor Martin Luther’s Small & Large Catechisms

“Catechesis at Peace Lutheran Church & Academy” Hand-out

Redeemer Lutheran Church (Fort Wayne, IN) Confirmation & First Communion Hand-out

“Rebuilding the Church from the Family Up” – Ryan C. MacPherson

Catechetics: Fixing Confirmation – Lincoln Winter

That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther’s Catechisms – Charles P. Arand

The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home – Susan Wise Bauer & Jessie Wise

Concordia Journal: Volume 44, Number 2 – CSL

Confirmation and First Communion – Frank W. Klos

Teaching the Faith at Home: What does this mean? How is this done? – David L. Rueter

Teach These Things: Catechesis for the Lutheran Parish – Lincoln Winter

Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology: Luther’s Two Catechisms Volume XVI, Number 4

Lutheran Catechesis: Catechist Edition (&Other Resources) – Peter C. Bender

Learning the Bible with Martin Luther: The Workbook for Luther’s Small Catechism – Peter Kucenski

Attended the Concordia Catechetical Academy conference in Milwaukee, WI (received various hand-outs)