

Expanding Our Welcome

June 2024 Edition

Consider This

Martin Luther gave Lutherans a legacy of an accessible Bible translated into the common tongue. His hope was that engaging directly with scripture would aid Christians in their relationship with Christ. The book of Acts shares a story about needing others to help us understand scripture (Acts 8:26-40) Bible study groups can help fill this role today.

To help your Bible studies be more welcoming, consider the texts chosen. Are they the entire book or only selections? How is study led or shared? Are a variety of Biblical translations available and are commentaries or guides also used? Is there a goal to 'find a shared truth' or is it to share many truths, voiced by all participants?

The Bible is not an easy read. Nor is it an answer book. It is a love-filled work filled with some of the most thought-provoking historical accounts, mythologies, essays, letters, and wisdom-literature spanning the ages. This means it also includes events describing many hard-to-read challenges of humanity, including murder, incest, rape, lying, jealousy, rage, pride, slavery, war, famine, and more. The role of economy, customs, justice and government are often included. It also celebrates when good people do the right things, even when reviled or persecuted for opening their hearts, and encourages us to follow suit.

Some sections of the Bible are baffling to understand. This is where considering a broad context and multiple perspectives can be so helpful. Reading when, where, what audience, what events happened before or came after in the story often provides key context. The stories offer important information. Not a step-by-step recipe, not a rule book.

Sadly, the Bible has often been used as a weapon to judge, bludgeon and shame rather than the instrument of salvation, love and grace that is the most common theme throughout the entire text. It is not uncommon for people to stay away from church because they feel unworthy due to their divorce 20 years ago, or because a family member died by suicide, they are gay, formerly incarcerated, or feel judged for any number of other reasons.

The next time you attend or set-up a Bible study, remember many views are present. Some perspectives are likely closer to the message the author is trying to share. Work to create a brave space where folks are encouraged to share what is authentic in their reading. This can be done by having up-front Ground rules which create guardrails without blocking open, creative expressions of God's message through us all. Bible study is not about declaring winners and losers. It is about wrestling together with texts that, in their complexity, bring us into encounter with the living God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

~Newsletter articles written by ELCA Lutherans in the SWWA Synod who support RIC

RIC Work Team

The RIC Work Team serves as a resource for congregations and ministries throughout the synod as we all seek to expand our welcome in creative and life-giving ways. In this new publication we hope to provide practical ideas for your congregation to consider. Each month will have a different focus and some resources you may find valuable.

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Southwestern Washington Synod
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God's work. Our hands.