

RE•FORMATION

THEN • NOW • ALWAYS

Spiritual Practices & Activities for Congregations & Conferences

Try one or more of the five following group activities!

Knots of the Past

Need:

A piece of string (thinner is better) for each participant and a few facts or ideas from the Reformation.

Example:

Luther promoted the idea of the “priesthood of all believers,” that all the baptized can do “priestly work.” As Luther saw it, whether milking cows, shining shoes, changing diapers, or preaching God’s Word, all were vocations that God called people into, each according to their gifts. This was freeing for the people Luther encountered and can be for us as well.

Reflection:

Take your string and make knots as you consider the following questions:

- For what vocations are you most grateful for today? Why?
- How do you see God at work in those around you?
- What gifts has God given the people you encounter for “priestly work”?

Re-Forming Repentance

Need:

A Bible and a candle (or try an LED tea light!) at the center of the group as a reminder of God's presence.

Example:

Luther sought to change the practice surrounding indulgences in the Catholic church. Luther was against the practice of selling indulgences to ensure one's place in heaven. Indulgences served as what one might call "confession insurance." Luther, however taught that the only assurance one could have was that we are saved and forgiven by God's grace, not by our actions, but by God's action on our behalf.

Reflection:

Lectio Divina on 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1. **Read** through the verse (1-2 minute/s silence)
2. **Reflect:** What words/phrases/images come to mind when you hear this text?
 - a. You may choose for the whole group to be silent or invite members to share a word or phrase of what they're pondering. No group responses, allow the silence to bear witness to what was spoken.
 - b. Follow with 1-2 minute/s silence
3. **Respond:** This is a time for you to have a conversation with God. Talk about what's hitting you, questions you have...
 - a. You may choose for the whole group to be silent or invite members to share a sentence of two of what they're pondering. No group responses, allow the silence to bear witness to what was spoken.
 - b. Follow with 1-2 minute/s silence
4. **Rest** (1-2 minute/s silence)
5. **Close** in a short prayer

Words of Truth

Need:

A paper cross large enough for your group to write on with markers. Suggested song for the activity “The Word” by Sara Groves.

Or...

Consider using Twitter & Power Point to see all the group’s responses live.

With the help of the letterpress invented by Gutenberg in the 15th century, Luther’s writings spread explosively through the whole country and therefore, also his used language. Luther’s translation of the bible into German was the foundation of the formation of one uniform German written language. For the first time, people of lower educated classes got access to language, communication and media. The letterpress replaced the clerical position, which up till then represented itself as solely salvation – mediating institutions. God’s word was basically open to everyone who could read now. The Reformation ensured an enormous education boost because the literacy of the whole population – girls and boys! – became the new education ideal.

- from <https://www.luther2017.de/en/reformation/and-society/>

Isaiah 55:10-11 says,

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

In our media-driven 21st century context it can be easy to take for granted how radical the invention of the printing press was for the people of Luther’s time. And by translating ancient languages into the current language of the people, God was using Luther to give voice to a larger purpose, to accomplish God’s ministry in all in the world.

Take a moment and consider the ways God’s Word is true in your life. Questions to consider:

- What Bible verses come to mind? What do they communicate about God in your life?
- What are your thoughts about God and how you experience the Divine in your daily life?

Write these words and thoughts on the cross...or tweet them for the whole group to see. After the group has completed this individual brainstorm, take a few minutes to read them aloud. Close in prayer, thanking God for all the ways God is at work in the lives of the community and in the world.

Notice

Luther noticed the oppression and injustice taking place at the hands of the Catholic church. Although Luther did not wish to actually separate from the church, he did want to shed light on the injustices. Just as in Luther's time, injustice exists today. As Christians we are called to help others, seeking to "defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed" (Psalm 82:3).

What are the organizations you support as an individual? Congregation? Conference? What needs may exist in those places of ministry and how might you further attend to those places of need?

Action:

What can you do today to help in this need? Briefly discuss these places of possibility and end in prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Crossroads

Need:

A prayer labyrinth or any walking path. You can even set-up a taped path in a church fellowship hall or sanctuary.

Jeremiah 6:16 says,

Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

Luther's struggle was real. Nailing 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, set the course for the Reformation, a path from which he could not turn. Luther's resolve is a gift to us today. He wrestled at the crossroads.

We are often confronted with crossroads in our lives, places where we look and ask God for ways forward. However big or small, these are important moments. Answers do not always come easily or quickly. Yet, this is not the point. The most important thing to remember is that no matter what, God is present. Step forth in faith and trust God to work out the path.

Activity:

Before entering the labyrinth or a walking path, consider a decision in your life you are wrestling with. With each turn or stop, pray for God's guidance and peace, regardless of how clear or unclear the situation feels. Thank God for walking with you in all seasons of life and faith.