



As Lutherans, we teach and study the catechism frequently, but we might only discuss who Martin Luther was in passing. Our young people often do not fully understand the importance of the Reformation and how it impacts our faith. Rather than provide a history lecture, why not engage students with a fun and educational celebration of our church background?

Reformation Day is a perfect occasion to offer teens a learning opportunity in a relaxed setting. We can guide students to enjoy activities related to the life and work of Luther and take some time to review the events in his life, exploring who we are as Christians and as Lutherans. Coming at the end of October, a Reformation Day event might provide a positive alternative for teens who wish to stay away from Halloween parties and could also be held in conjunction with a Fall festival. There are several games, snack, and even craft ideas that can be included with such a celebration. You might wish to incorporate activities in the context of a simple Sunday School hour or hold an evening full of festivities. However, the event runs, encourage youth to learn and enjoy!

### Sixteenth-Century Games

No youth night is complete without games and learning about Martin Luther provides a fantastic backdrop for some fun ones. Select activities that can either be done as a large group together or create stations that teens can walk through in rotation. Be sure to have a written or discussed explanation of each game to describe how it coincides with the life of Martin Luther. Here are a few possibilities:

- *Pin the theses to the wall*: provide a foam or cardboard "wall". Give each student a card or strip of paper with one of the 95 theses written on it. Blindfold the student and have them attempt to place the card on the wall. (Connection: posting the 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg Church.)
- *Papal Bull toss*: Provide students with a rolled up "scroll" representing the Papal Bull. Challenge them to stand back and toss the paper into a container of some sort representing fire. (Connection: Martin Luther received a Papal Bull describing all the doctrinal "deviations" he had been teaching. Martin Luther burned the document.)
- *Escape to Wartburg Castle race*: Set up a creative obstacle course, inside or outside, and have students run to challenge one another in getting through it. (Connection: Luther hid away in the castle to avoid arrest and trial as a heretic.)
- *Translation race*: Provide students with passages of Scripture. For extra challenge, consider writing them in German! Have teens copy passages by hand onto another paper, perhaps doing so in teams and by time to see who finishes fastest. (Connection: in the earliest days of Bible distribution, monks hand-copied Scripture. Makes you glad for the magic of keyboards, doesn't it??).

- *Photo Booth fun*: set up an area with items reflecting Martin Luther, and perhaps some of his friends and his wife, as well. Allow students time to pose with the props and take pictures of themselves with Luther connections.

### Snacks and More

Middle and high schoolers might not be as eager to create "crafts" as young children, but artistic activity offerings can still be a fun tool. Depending on the timing of your event, it might be enjoyable to incorporate some snack items, as well. Come to think of it, food is generally always welcome at an event involving adolescents, so snacks will always be appreciated.

- *Diet of Worms*: use this play on words to enjoy a tasty snack of pudding, cookie crumbles, and gummi worms. If short on time or resources, just enjoy the worms!
- *Pretzels*: Along with being very Bavarian, pretzels were reportedly made by monks and inherited their shape from the look of crossed arms in prayer. Enjoy pretzels soft or crunchy to celebrate.
- *German fare*: if this is a longer evening, share a traditional German meal with elements like bratwurst, sauerkraut, cucumber salad, or strudel (you might include some hot dogs for the less adventurous).
- *"Stained glass" art*: depending on timing, materials, and ages, consider making a version of real colored glass. Alternatively, use crayon to color in a shape pattern, and rub with baby oil for a shiny appearance.
- *Movie night!* If you'd like to make this an extended event, consider showing the 2003 *Luther* movie, or clips of it (the entire movie is two hours).

### Bible Study Offerings

With all of the fun activities surrounding Martin Luther's life and influence, it's important to remember what Martin Luther taught and stood for. Luther emphasized faith in Christ first and foremost. He desired to make Scripture available to all and to follow God's Word closely. We can learn from Luther's life and draw inspiration from his example. Most importantly we want to recall the roots of his message and make sure we are focusing on what matters most. Depending on the set-up of your event, it might be helpful to hold the Bible Study portion first, followed by the games and other activities. If that is not ideal, incorporate the devotional element in the middle or towards the end of things, as desired. Feel free to expand upon questions and readings if you have more time.

**Begin** by reciting or reading Luther's morning prayer. This might be familiar already for some students, but for those who might not know it as well, it's always a good way to go to the catechism to focus attention.

**Introduce** the person of Luther, with as much detail as time and interest levels allow. There are several good books from CPH that might help guide as well. If you have not already discussed it or students are not familiar, review some of the events of his life and what he stood up for. Discuss his departure from law school to enter a monastery, and some of his subsequent struggles with guilt and the concept of redemption. Describe the corruption of the church at the time, and the sale of indulgences to encourage people to purchase their own forgiveness (and that of others). Luther wanted to bring the church back to focus on God first and foremost, and to the understanding that we are saved by grace and not our own works. Even faith comes not from our will, but from the Holy Spirit. Luther's ideas were not always popular with the church leaders of the time. In fact, the

Catholic leaders came up into direct opposition with Luther. If this sounds familiar at all, consider another figure who came into opposition with church leaders....(Jesus!)

Discuss with teens the occasional opportunities we might have to stand up against authority.

Describe examples of people in history who have disobeyed the law in order to follow Jesus. God does call us to submit to those who are in power over us, but when those powers defy the teachings of Scripture, we must choose to serve Christ first and foremost. Taking a stand for truth is not always popular. Going against the grain often has consequences. But God is with us when we serve Him. We can take heart and take courage that His ways are right and true.

### Specific Scripture Study

One of Luther's emphasized studies was the book of Romans. In fact, he wrote an excellent preface to the book, and highlighted its message on faith and grace. Home in on a chapter or specific passage from Romans for your study, in honor of Luther. If you'd like to focus on one chapter in particular, the sixth is especially replete with wisdom. Here are a few elements to highlight if you choose to review verse by verse:

#### 6:1-7 Dead to sin, alive in Christ

Sometimes it is tempting to think that since we are already forgiven, we are free to live however we want. The blood of Jesus has washed away our sins and justifies us before God. In Baptism, we have been buried with Christ, united with Him in His death so that we might live in His life. We are "dead to sin" but alive to God in Christ. We still sometimes feel tempted, and we still sin. But baptized into Christ we have new focus and center. We have new life in Jesus.

#### 6:8-14 Sin has no dominion

These verses continue the theme of a new life in Christ, reminding us that we do not need to be mastered by sin. Adolescence is a critical time in which addictive habits can begin forming. It's essential to direct teens to placing identity and worth in God. Denying sinful temptations is not about white knuckling it in challenging times, but placing hope and trust in Jesus, and knowing that relying on Him for strength is powerful and worthwhile.

#### 6:15-18 Slaves to righteousness

Sometimes we tend to instruct students in a negative manner, urging them to avoid certain dangers or behaviors. This passage focuses on replacing sin with righteousness. Being "slaves" to good things sets us free from bondage to damaging sinful behaviors.

#### 6:19-23 The gift of eternal life

A lot of our Christian understanding boils down to the message of Romans 6:23: we deserve death as a result of our sins, but instead of paying for our wrongdoing, we receive eternal life. The greatest reversal in history occurred when Jesus took our place and died on the cross. All of the punishment required was heaped on Him instead of us. We have eternal life rather than death. Thanks be to God!

### Closing

After reviewing the passages together and engaging in discussion, encourage students to apply these wonderful truths in daily life. Invite them to consider privately sins of thought or deed, and how they can use prayer and Scripture focus to be "slaves of righteousness." Pray with students and thank God for His grace and thankfulness.