



# book of faith

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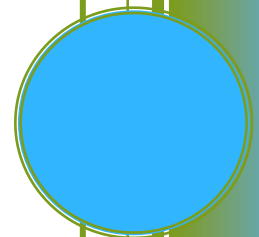
## A STORY FOR ALL AGES

*Age-appropriate biblical benchmarks for congregational Christian education programs*

The purpose of this document is to provide those leading and planning congregational Christian education programs with guidance evaluating and planning their specific programs.

Prepared by the NC Synod Book of Faith Task Group

Spring 2015



# A Story for All Ages

## ***Age-appropriate biblical benchmarks for congregational Christian education programs***

“Kids these days do not know who Moses from Mickey Mouse.”

“Young people come into our confirmation program biblically illiterate. There’s a lot of ground to make up.”

These types of comments were the impetus for the NC Synod Book of Faith Task Group to come up with age appropriate biblical benchmarks. The purpose of this document is to provide those leading and planning congregational Christian education programs with guidance evaluating and planning their specific programs.

There are several ways to use this benchmark document. It can be used to evaluate the general progress of your programs. It can be one of the criteria used in evaluation Sunday school and other curricula. It can help with lesson planning.

These guidelines are not intended to be used to evaluate individual students. The guidelines are desirable goals but it would be counterproductive to make them legalistic requirements. These benchmarks are not a complete solution to the problem of biblical illiteracy but one tool to aid your efforts.

These benchmarks are arranged by age. Within each age grouping you will find reference to the four lenses used by the churchwide Book of Faith effort, namely: Historical, Literary, Lutheran (Theological) and Devotional. Here are descriptions of these categories.

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### **HISTORICAL**

We use the term “historical” in two ways. First, much of the Bible is a history, or at least a chronology, of God’s actions in human events and history. Leaving aside the historicity of certain events, i.e. The Flood, it is important to understand these events as laid out in the Bible because other writings in Scripture and throughout Church history refer to these events and assume a knowledge base that includes these

events and people. We also need to see how God's plan works out. We need to understand such concepts as Jesus being David's son.

The second use of the term "historical" signifies the placing the events of Scripture in a larger historical context based on the best archaeological and anthropological information. This broadens and deepens our understanding of the Bible. As much modern biblical scholarship relies on this material, the benefits of this scholarship will inform much of the material used.

### **LITERARY**

Scripture is not just one form of writing. There are poems, histories, dissertations etc. Understanding these forms informs our understanding of what we are reading. There are also some exegetical concepts peculiar to the Bible. Certain things the reader should know to enhance the reading experience. This can range from simple things such as knowing there are two great sections of the Christian Bible (Old and New Testament). Also standard literary criticism doesn't have much to say about prophets. Also need to know things like how to read a Bible reference, e.g. Jn 3:16. So we want to make sure that along the line we are giving children the skills and knowledge they need to better understand what they are reading and to use reference materials like Bible dictionaries and annotated Bibles.

### **LUTHERAN (THEOLOGICAL)**

But we are not just reading a historically interesting old book! What it has to say affects our lives individually and corporately. Lutheran principles of biblical interpretation guide our efforts. The concept that Scripture interprets Scripture is just one of those ideas. The relationship of Law and Gospel informs our faith lives and is a central hermeneutic principal. While there may not be explicit statements of Lutheran or theological objectives for each age level, it will be behind all that we do.

### **DEVOTIONAL**

The interpretive concepts mentioned so far run the danger of being dry and academic but the devotional aspect is, by definition, personal. This is where dry "facts" are processed to become meaningful personally. For example, Jonah tried unsuccessfully to get away from God's call by going to the most distant place he knew. In the light of that, what is God calling me to do and how am I trying to run the other way? The whole concept of setting up biblical benchmarks is grounded in faith formation and not just boning up on facts so we can impress our friends when "The Bible" comes up as a Jeopardy category.

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## **CONTRIBUTORS & FEEDBACK**

*This document was prepared in Spring 2015 by the NC Synod Book of Faith Task Group: Todd Rauscher, Chair; Catherine Fink; Rebecca (Pebbles) Cloninger; Shea Berbaum; Jennifer Manis; and Dan Voelkert.*

*Much of this material was first developed by First Presbyterian Church of Oklahoma City. Their efforts can be viewed at*

*<http://fpcokc.publishpath.com/Websites/fpcokc/Images/Christian%20Formation%20Guidelines%20Benchmarks.pdf>*

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***We covet your feedback as this document continues to evolve! Please send comments and suggestions to [synod@nclutheran.org](mailto:synod@nclutheran.org) and include “Book of Faith” in the subject line.***

## TWO AND THREE YEAR OLDS

At this age we are not concerned so much with the HISTORICAL or LITERARY categories but more with the DEVOTIONAL and LUTHERAN. By age three children should be familiar with the following:

### DEVOTIONAL/LUTHERAN

God is love. (1 John 4: 16b)

God created all things. (Adam and Eve, Genesis 1)

God loves me.

Jesus loves me

Jesus loves children

Jesus is my friend. (Mk 10:14)

I belong to God's family

The Church loves me.

The Bible is a special book.

To say thank you to God, we pray and share.

Memorize short Bible verses

These concepts can be developed using various faith formation methods but age-appropriate retellings of select Bible stories should certainly be part of the process. Some examples are cited above.

## FOUR AND FIVE YEAR OLDS

In this age group story-telling can play a bigger role. By age five children should be familiar with the following:

### HISTORICAL

The Creation Story

The Nativity (Luke 2)

The Easter Story

### LITERARY

The Bible has two parts (Old Testament is before Jesus is born. New Testament is about Jesus.)

### DEVOTIONAL

The Golden Rule (Mt 7:12)

Other short Bible verses

How do I know Jesus loves me? How do I show others Jesus' love?

## FIRST AND SECOND GRADES

Reading skills are developing which can enhance the biblical learning experience. Use an age appropriate children's Bible such as the Spark Bible. By the end of second grade children should be familiar with the following:

### HISTORICAL

Adam and Eve

Tower of Babel

Noah and Flood

Abraham and Sarah (God's promise of child fulfilled in old age)

Jesus in the Temple

### LITERARY

Learn about early hymns, the Psalms-learn Psalm 23

Name the four Gospels

### DEVOTIONAL

The Lord's Prayer

Begin teaching how to compose a prayer and share it with class

## THIRD AND FOURTH GRADERS

By the end of fourth grade, children should be familiar with the following:

### HISTORICAL

Basic knowledge of major events in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Stories of Old Testament Characters

Abraham    Samuel    Moses

Isaac        Saul        Solomon

Jacob        David        Joseph

### **LITERARY**

Be able to locate Old and New Testament, Genesis, Psalms and the Gospels

Read a bible reference (e.g. Jn 3:16)

Learn books of the Bible in order.

### **LUTHERAN AND DEVOTIONAL**

Learn seasons of liturgical year with emphasis on how it relates to Jesus' life, death and resurrection,

Learn Bible verses and psalms

Where/how do I see God acting in these stories?

## **FIFTH GRADE**

If you compare the following list to the earlier lists, it seems fifth grade will be an exceptionally busy year. The listing below is of an expected knowledge base and skill level gathered over years. Much of this material would have been introduced at earlier ages. Fifth graders will have the maturity to collate this information in to a more congruent whole. Fifth graders should be familiar with the following:

### **HISTORICAL**

Be able to list in chronological order and give information about

Adam	Joseph	Samuel	Jeremiah
Noah	Moses	Saul	Ruth
Abraham	Miriam	David	John the Baptist
Isaac	Joshua	Solomon	Jesus
Jacob	Deborah	Isaiah	12 Apostles & Paul

Be able to summarize stories of Christmas, life of Christ, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Pentecost.

Have a sense of the chronology of the following events

Creation, flood, wanderings of patriarchs, slavery in Egypt, Exodus, Giving of Ten Commandments, settlement in Canaan, rule of judges, time of kings, Exile, Return to Jerusalem, birth of Jesus, crucifixion and resurrection, Pentecost, Beginning of the Christian church

### **LITERARY**

Be familiar with Biblical reference sources (Bible dictionary, atlas)  
Location of all books of the Bible

### **LUTHERAN**

Learn Biblical roots of Lutheran liturgy including those items taken directly from Scripture

### **DEVOTIONAL**

How do the behaviors of these followers of God (see people in “Historical”) shape how I, as a follower of God, behave?

## **MIDDLE SCHOOLER (6<sup>TH</sup>- 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS)**

While it will vary from congregation to congregation, Confirmation studies often fall within this age range. Coordinating this material with the structure and requirements of the confirmation program is essential. By the end of eighth grade, students should be familiar with the following:

### **HISTORICAL**

Know the story of the Book of Acts.

### **LITERARY**

Know how to categorize biblical writings i.e. law, prophet, epistle, history, etc.  
Know how to use a Bible concordance and commentary

### **LUTHERAN**

Be aware of the biblical bases for teachings in Luther’s Small Catechism

### **DEVOTIONAL**

What does baptism mean for me? What does it mean to affirm my baptism?

## **HIGH SCHOOLER (9<sup>TH</sup>-12<sup>TH</sup> GRADES)**



By high school students will be grappling with how all of this impacts their lives. They are ready for bigger ideas and can think more abstractly. By graduation from high school, a student should be familiar with the following:

### **HISTORICAL**

Understand relationship and effect of great events in biblical times on people of faith i.e. The Exodus, the Davidic Kingship, The Babylonian Captivity, Roman Conquest, Fall of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple.

### **LITERARY**

Have a basic understanding of Biblical prophecy based on specific study.  
Have a basic understanding of Pauline theology

### **LUTHERAN**

Have explored concepts of Christian theology especially Lutheran concepts such as the relationship of Law and Gospel, the means of Grace, Christian liberty, simul justus et peccator (at one and the same time, saved and sinful or saint and sinner.)

### **DEVOTIONAL**

Applied faith to life situations in service to others

## **ADULT**

We never come to the end of biblical learning. The emphasis may change as we age. It will vary from person to person. Some may find straightforward biblical scholarship uplifting; others may want to explore how the Bible speaks to issues in the world around them or in their personal lives. As a certain amount of maturity on the part of the student is assumed, it is hard to list specific goals. Not everyone will have met the goals outlined for children so, for them, filling in those gaps can be beneficial. While there is undeniably a personal aspect to faith there should be a commitment to further formal learning in group settings as we are called to community. It is in these communal settings that we benefit from what Luther called “the mutual consolation” of hearing the Word as it has impacted those in our faith community. Private devotions and study are indeed worthwhile but you cannot get those experiences at home by yourself.

