

## **Sharing Life Sharing Faith Description**

### **Introduction**

Many people in our society are hungry for spiritual things. This is evidenced by the multiplicity of “spiritual” experiences available, even in a small town like Pagosa Springs. As well as the more traditional, main-stream religions, with a little searching one can find Unitarian, Eastern and New-Age practitioners here, as well as a wide range of “make-it-up-as-you-go” personal theology. Along the same lines, many Lutherans would like to share their faith with their friends, but feel that they are not knowledgeable or articulate enough to do so, or are fearful of rejection and the loss of those relationships that are most important to them. Our purpose is to assist our members to recognize opportunities to talk with their friends and associates about their faith, and to give them the tools they need to do so in a non-threatening, respectful manner.

### **Objectives**

- To follow the Great Commission of Jesus as we find it in Matthew 28:18-20 to “go and make disciples of all nations”, and to do so in context of the following specific goals:
- To help each member increase his knowledge of God through the Scriptures and increase his understanding of Lutheran theology in the same context.
- To allow members to interact and build new relationships of trust with other members of the congregation by discussion of faith and spiritual concerns.
- To give each member “permission” to share his faith, and the peace and joy he has found in the gospel of Jesus Christ, by learning how to recognize and use opportunities in his day-to-day contacts with friends and associates.

### **Key concepts**

The thought of talking about our faith to others can be intimidating. There is the fear that we might offend someone who believes differently than us, or the fear that our friends will no longer respect us. However, with the right attitude, it can be very rewarding. The following principles are key to our understanding “evangelism”.

- Most people like to talk about, and have a hunger for spiritual things.
- Everyone has some kind of personal belief, even if it is some form of unbelief.
- Most people like to compare and contrast those beliefs with those of others. People like to do so with people they already know and trust, rather than with strangers.
- To talk effectively with others requires two-way communication, where each person truly listens to the other with genuine interest and respect for the other person’s position.

- Trust is essential in all our relationships. Therefore, pushing beliefs on someone else, or trying to coerce someone into adopting our beliefs is not ethical. “Results” are not to be “expected”.
- It is not necessary to “correct” every false idea or teaching of the other person.
- It is not necessary to be a trained theologian or public speaker to discuss faith. Expressing our faith simply and with our hearts in our own words is very effective.
- As we share our faith with others, we find that it helps us to clarify and express our own thoughts.

### **Pilot Program**

Initially, one group of 6-8 people would be organized with selected individuals invited to participate. The group would have a leader, an assistant leader, and a “host” (someone who helps arrange meeting times, places, coffee and snacks, and also keep notes in a “group journal”). The pilot group would meet once a month for a period of time (three or four months) in order to establish the meeting agendas, and then evaluate and modify them as needed.

After the pilot program has been stabilized and any obvious bugs worked out, the program would be expanded, and all members will be invited to participate. When the group reaches a certain size, approximately 10-12 people, that group would divide into two smaller groups, with either the same leader participating in each group, or the assistant leader becoming the leader of the new group, with new assistant leaders and hosts starting in each group.

This process would remain fluid throughout the program, with groups dividing and possibly combining to keep group size within these established limits.

### **Structure**

Ideally, each group would meet once a month. Meetings could be scheduled at times that are convenient for all members of the group, remaining flexible so that some groups might meet during the daytime and others in the evening.

All members of the congregation will be invited and encouraged to participate.

It would be desirable for each group to have one of the elders as a member to help provide leadership and support, although this is not an absolute requirement. The elder would not necessarily have to be a leader or assistant leader, but their participation in the program will help encourage others to participate as well.

In order to build and strengthen friendships within the congregation, people may find themselves in a group with others with whom they may not normally spend much time. This is to be encouraged.

The format of the program will remain under the direction of the Pastor, to assure that each group follows essentially the same program and that each group stays focused on the goals of the program..

Each group would keep its own journal, to consist primarily of notes from the meetings. In the cases where individual privacy is concerned, confidentiality of those individuals are of prime importance, and pseudonyms may be used in place of real names of those individuals. All confidences must be respected at all times. Group leaders will be responsible for using discretion in matters of confidentiality.

### **Cautions**

Also, the point should be made and continually stressed that people don't have to have deep theological discussions. Many times a simple witness is more effective than a complex thesis. The goal is not to "convince" anyone, but simply to invite them to church, allow them to experience the Word of God through the Pastor's office, and then let the Holy Spirit work!

### **Method**

Each group session would have the following structure:

- A topic of basic Lutheran Theology, which would be approved by the Pastor, who will have significant input. Each group would be presented with the same material, from the Bible as well as other sources. (Refer to the Tentative Agenda section below for more detail.)
- A basic discussion about another belief system with which we may not be very familiar. The material to be presented will be approved by the Pastor, and each session will cover a different group. This could include other Christian denominations as well as non-Christian faiths and secular worldviews. By gaining a better understanding of other worldviews, we learn to better communicate with people who hold those views, and therefore can be more effective when sharing our own views. This may include role-playing, where someone pretends to be a member of a certain group, or hold a certain belief, and the kinds of dialog one might expect with someone who does profess such a belief.
- A time for sharing what the gospel of Jesus Christ has meant in each of our lives. This may not be easy to do at first, but learning to share our faith in the safety of the group will not only increase trust in and love for the other group members, but will give us practice in articulating our thoughts and given us confidence in our own abilities to express our faith to others.
- Each member of the group will be encouraged to keep a notebook/journal of the people with whom he has spoken, the topics discussed, and his perception of the receptivity. While many of our conversations with people contain personal information, only the

parts that are non-confidential should be disclosed to the group. The group can then offer suggestions and thoughts that may help the member continue the discussions.

- Prayer for each other and the people we are talking with.

### **Evaluation**

The program will be evaluated quarterly, with a progress report given to the congregation in the quarterly meetings. This evaluation will be based on the three stated objectives of the program, as outlined above, including also the levels of participation, numbers of active groups, and perceived enthusiasm of those members. The evaluation is not to be based so much on “results” or “numbers”, although, of course, it is hoped that new people will come to our church with the desire to learn about our teachings because of this program. It is recognized that the evaluation of our stated goals must by their nature be somewhat subjective. However, the evaluation process is an important one as it will help us continue to fine-tune the program to better meet the needs of our members, as well as the people in our community with whom we hope to share our faith.