

Introduction to the Theme

Imitate My Heart



The 2006-2007 *Christian Education Planning Guide* might well be called *Discipleship Anew!* This year marks the seventh year of Christian education materials in support of the *ELCA Call to Discipleship*. (see the following page) Such a milestone deserves a fresh, new look at discipleship. It warrants a radical change in the way we see ourselves as disciples. Followers? Yes! But much more. Our call to discipleship is an attachment to the heart, mind, and soul of Christ that propels us to act as Christ would in our daily encounters with others and in our growing relationship with God.

This year's planner highlights the life and ministry of a radical "contemporary" disciple. In 2006 the world commemorates the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This passionate Christian theologian, activist, and martyr is among last century's most influential citizens. While a rich and profound legacy is left to us in Bonhoeffer's teachings and writings, it is his faith, life, and witness for which we honor this remarkable man. Bonhoeffer knew the heart of Christ and responded to the call to discipleship with strength and unwavering conviction, even unto death.

This program planner should probably come with a big warning label slapped across the front of it:

WARNING: *Using this Christian Education Planning Guide could result in having your entire congregation decide to STOP GOING TO CHURCH.*

That's right. At the heart of this planning guide is the idea that the LAST thing real disciples do is "go to church." Real disciples know the church isn't a place you can "go" to, at all. Because the church isn't a place! Although the church often finds it useful to have a building, in which to gather for worship and learning and the kind of stuff friends like to do together, the church isn't a building. Likewise, although throughout history the church has found it useful to create institutions to organize our efforts, the church isn't an *institution*.

The church is people!

The church is *people* who have received the gift of reconciliation with God through faith in Christ and who are answering the call to share that gift with everyone. The church is *people* who have been created by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. The church is *people* who have been blessed by God, and through whom God is at work today, loving and blessing the whole world. The church is *people* who are ready to follow Jesus, to imitate Jesus, everywhere they go!

As disciples, we know we can't "go" to church. Or "leave" church, for that matter. Because we ARE the church! We are the church whenever we gather (for worship or learning or serving or just to have fun). And we are the church wherever we go. We are the church at home, at school, and at work; on the playground, on the street corner, and at the local diner. Wherever we go and whatever we do, we are the church.

The goal of this resource is to help you equip the children, youth, and adults of your congregation to

- embrace the connection between being a disciple and being a member of Christ's church
- understand that *they* are the church whenever they gather and wherever they go
- explore the ways in which God is (and wants to be) at work through them, loving and blessing the whole world, as they follow Christ!

And, hopefully, the end result will be a whole lot of people in your congregation who STOP GOING TO CHURCH. Because they realize that, to be a disciple, is to be a part of a church *on the loose!* A church through which God is at work "out there" in every neighborhood, in every home, on every street, and in every classroom bringing reconciliation, blessing, salvation, peace, justice, hope, and joy to the whole world.