

Discipleship and Lifelong Learning Through the Lens of Akaloo

It's here! Augsburg Fortress Publishers has launched Akaloo, a program of intentional discipleship that covers the entire lifespan, children through adults! Visit www.akaloo.org

“It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression “follower.” He never asks for admirers, worshippers, or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for.” Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard’s claim has a deep-rooted biblical basis: Jesus came across two fishers casting their nets from the seashore, two ordinary people doing their ordinary jobs, and he said, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” That simple invitation—or, rather, the person who issued it—would change those fishers’ lives forever. With a few words they became disciples of Jesus Christ. Not admirers (though they surely admired him) and not adherents (though they surely agreed with his teachings), but *followers*.

Jesus strolled into their everyday surroundings as they went about their everyday work and called them to follow him. It’s noteworthy that Jesus’ disciples struggled mightily with the task of following him. They peppered Jesus constantly with questions, they bickered with one another about which of them was the best, they panicked when the seas rose around them, and in the end they abandoned him and hid like cowards. It seems that whatever of Jesus’ attributes the disciples acquired, they did so because of close proximity to him. They didn’t become his disciples through their own effort or will, but simply by experiencing Jesus firsthand. They were present when he healed the lame, fed the hungry, and raised the dead.

Jesus’ invitation—“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people”—is an invitation to become an inviter. In fact, the call to discipleship is the act of sinful, imperfect beings inviting other sinful, imperfect beings, not to become perfect or sinless, but to follow the one who is. Discipleship means to gather up in as close proximity to Jesus as we can as often as we can and experience him, the Word of God made flesh in all his healing, feeding, resurrecting glory, until he comes again.

Akaloo is a theologically consistent approach to congregationwide faith formation with the single, clear goal of making disciples—of all ages and especially those who haven’t yet heard the invitation to follow Jesus. Two critical balances characterize Akaloo as a disciple-making program. First is the balance between the “individual believer,” who must acquire ownership of his or her faith life over time to grow and be effective, and the Christian “community,” whose guidance, support, and correction act to shape the individual, who in turn shapes the community. Second, Akaloo engenders a balance between “planned activity” whose aim is stretching and challenging faith growth to ensure structured support and care, and “spontaneous revelation,” the “Aha!” that occurs naturally when openness is cultivated as both an individual and communal value.

Akaloo,
from Greek
(akolouthēin)
means
“to follow.”

Questions drive a conversation forward; answers tend to stop it. Learning environments that are strictly answer-based tend to favor the instructor at the expense of the learner, while environments that are question-based favor both equally. The learner becomes fully engaged, a full partner in her or his own growth, resulting in greater retention and greater ownership. Do this long enough, through enough of life's ups and downs and across enough spiritual growth spurts, and you can prepare someone well for a lifetime of meaningful Christian service.

In *Akaloo*, questions activate the whole process. From age 3 to 103, the questions individual disciples naturally ask form the basis for their own faith formation. From the simple curiosities of children to the challenging provocations of high school students to the quiet but profound questions of adults, Akaloo tracks along with learners step for step, providing the appropriate challenge and support they need to keep on growing.

Akaloo represents an acknowledgment that the patterns of life for growing Christian disciples—communication, interaction, growth—the ways people move and talk and engage the world around them, have evolved. *Akaloo* maximizes the local congregation's unique power to gather and shape disciples as the united body of Christ, an environment that cannot and will not ever be replaced, but it also maximizes the uniqueness of the home environment and family life as an essential partner in the process. Through use of the Internet, breakthroughs in curriculum delivery, and powerful, memorable learner resources, *Akaloo* commandeers both church and home environments to create a single, effective environment for faith growth.

Shifting the way you do things, especially in church, can become difficult in many congregations, but *Akaloo* carries with it the potential to transform every part of a congregation's life for the better. Worship, fellowship, service, evangelism, learning, and even governance can all become reinvigorated and unified when gathered together under the single purpose of making disciples.

Taken in part from the *Akaloo Guidebook* Introduction

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AKALOO