

**NE MN Synod Discipleship Challenge:  
Love Like Jesus!**

**Children's Discussion Guide APRIL 2014: ENCOURAGE!**

The NE MN Synod faith practice focus for April is "*Encourage*." You are encouraged to use this discussion guide with younger children in your home or as part of a Sunday school class or church children's event. As a family you might do this after a meal, for nightly devotions, as you drive from one activity to the next, on a Sunday afternoon – whenever or wherever you have the opportunity to dwell on and discuss what it means for us as individuals and as a family of faith to Love Like Jesus! There are no right or wrong answers, no right or wrong way to do this...the point is to make room in your lives for thoughtful and deliberate faith conversations.

Remember – our spiritual hunger to grow and deepen our faith has nothing to do with success, getting the "right" answer, or works. It's all about living – fully living – into the grace of God as God's children...as discipleship, following Jesus in our daily life!

Thank you for your partnership in the gospel and for your willingness to help younger children grow in their discipleship to Christ our Lord!

For more information and resources on the Discipleship Challenge:

**[www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship](http://www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship)**

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Practicing encouragement with our children helps create a sense of belonging in our church and in our community. As a church, we need people of all ages and of all abilities and passions to come together to reflect the Body of Christ. We need to encourage all people to shine with the light God has given them. When we practice giving encouragement by naming gifts in our youth and offering words of encouragement rooted in the love of Christ, our children are

blessed. God gives the gift of faith to the community, and encouragement is a practice that helps us all to continue to believe and live a life of faith.

**Introduction:** **Ask:** **Have you ever been to a football game, basketball game, or another kind of sport event? What do the people watching do?** (Cheer, hold signs of praise, clap their hands, do the wave). **Why do we do this?** Talk about how the crowd is offering encouragement to the team. You can also discuss ways that a crowd can be discouraging (booing/yelling bad things) and how that makes people feel and affects how they play. **How can we encourage people in other places or activities we are a part of?** (At school, at home, at church)

**Story/Bible Reading:** The Apostle Paul wrote many letters to churches to encourage the people to live as God's people. Share the Paul's idea of the body of Christ found in: 1 Corinthians 12:4-18. You can read it from the bible, but it might be better understood if you tell it in your own words or use a children's bible like Spark Story Bible (Augsburg Fortress).

**Ask:** **What are some of the gifts or talents you have? Are they the same as everybody else's? Why is it important that they are not all the same?** Connect to the idea that God draws all people together to become the church. We need all gifts to be the body of Christ. We need to encourage one another to use the gifts God has given them. **How can you encourage people to use their gifts/talents?**

### **Craft/Activity Suggestion:**

Have children write a letter or make a card for someone they know in their church to offer encouragement. Think about people who do things in the church that do not receive a lot of recognition but are important in helping the church be the church (people in worship of all ages, altar guild members, ushers, cleaning crew, teachers, kitchen team, those who visit homebound, youth leaders, or others...). Let them know how much their gifts are valued and encourage them to keep sharing their gifts.

Or have a Sunday school talent show! Have each class share some of their talents. Encourage all types of gifts to be celebrated (singing, joke telling, art skills, music skills, organizing skills, writing, faith practices, etc.). Invite the congregation to attend and offer encouragement! After your event, think about ways you can incorporate these gifts of the children into the life of the church and how to continue encouraging them to use these gifts in all areas of their lives.

**Closing Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for making us each unique. Help us encourage one to use our gifts and talents to praise you. Amen.