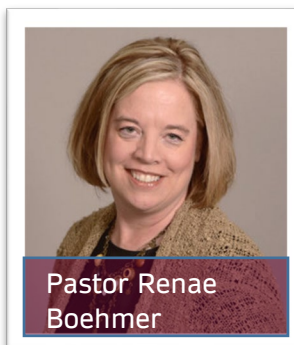


An Interview with Peace Lutheran Church Sioux Falls, South Dakota

www.peacelutheran.com

by Diane McGeoch, CENetwork of the ELCA

Associate Pastor Renae Boehmer and Director of Faith Formation (Teen and Adults) Holly Marty shared how Peace Lutheran Church is engaging the Life of Faith Initiative.



Describe Peace Lutheran Church:

Peace Lutheran is on the west side of Sioux Falls and has 4,000 members. There are 6 worship services, including one on Wednesday and Saturday. The average worship attendance is 1,100 during non-pandemic times with a mix of ages. We are busy all the time, with a preschool and daycare on site. We are surrounded by low-income apartments and have a history of reaching out to our neighbors. We shifted to online worship and zoom meetings during the pandemic but are now doing in-person and parking lot worship with safety guidelines in place. However, our online presence continues.

What was the spark that caused you to connect to the Life of Faith?

Peace has an annual council/staff retreat. We ask at this retreat: What do we do well? What do we do not so well? How can we engage our faith wherever we are? Our confirmation kids invite their friends to church. We wanted to further dig into invite and welcome. What does this mean? We were asking questions about faith in daily life before we attended the immersion experience at Westwood Lutheran Church in St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

Describe the Life of Faith Initiative at Peace Lutheran Church:

Three people from Peace attended the immersion experience in October 2019, the church council president, Pastor Boehmer and Director of Faith Formation Holly Marty. We were excited to capture this experience and bring it back to Peace. We realized this would take everyone buying into it. Life of Faith is not another program; it is a culture change. How can we be and do church? How can we live out our relationships wherever we are in life? We are engaged in life together wherever we are. It is best described as a ministry of accompaniment.

What were some of your first steps in Life of Faith?

We formed a committee so we would have the same language and the same understanding of our ministry of accompaniment. We gave the initiative a name: CLAIMED AND CALLED. We created a vocabulary list allowing people to use key words in different programs. We did a sermon series, adult studies, and a Lent study in early 2020 that included adults and confirmation students, based on the book Love Without Limits. The underlying foundation of these first steps is the radical sense of belonging we first received through Christ, that allows us to take that love out into every aspect of our daily lives.

What were some of the challenges and how did people respond to Life of Faith?

It was challenging to get it up and running. We formed an accountability team. We wanted to establish the language first, before putting CLAIMED AND CALLED on our website. The vocabulary list helped a lot here. This is a ministry that is hard to measure. We wondered – would people connect to this and own it? Would people name this in their own lives? We surveyed the congregation after several months. The survey affirmed that there is an eagerness to talk about faith in daily life and that it is important to people. The survey helped us realize we as a congregation were further along than we thought.

Describe some of your ongoing efforts to engage Life of Faith:

We are equipping people for a change in the way they view their faith; it is not confined to a church building. People want to share their stories and it doesn't have to be at church. I can share my faith anywhere. One practice proved to be very important. We used the *Prayer of Good Courage* (see below) as our closing blessing at the end of worship. One member who was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer shared with us that she uses the Prayer of Good Courage and that it has a very special meaning for her. Peace has a prayer shawl ministry. These shawls used to be for members only, and now the ministry has expanded to include non-members. This ministry is one example of how people at Peace are being equipped to do ministry in everyday life.

We formed some new affinity groups in the summer and fall of 2020. There is a hunger to connect in new and different ways. The groups form around a point of commonality and share their highs, lows, and challenges. We have a group of health care workers, a grandparents' group, and a pandemic lament support group. New things have opened up to us as we did these groups, and the story groups (see below) seemed a good next step from the affinity groups.

What are your next steps?

We are doing a monthly MY STORY. What is your story? Our hope is to discover stories from individuals and our community reflecting how our faith is interwoven throughout our lives, in our relationships and in the various roles we have. The goal is to hear one another's stories and to get to know someone different from you. We had a police officer share his story. We invited someone who struggled with addiction. We have also heard from someone in the LBGQT community. Going forward, we've proclaimed 2021 as the YEAR OF STORY. To aid in this process, Pastor Boehmer and Holly Marty will attend story telling training in 2021. The Prayer of Good Courage has helped Peace Lutheran think about our shared community story. We are just beginning to think about what our story is.

What is your advice to other congregations?

It is about integrating it into congregational and daily life. Life of Faith shows up now all on its own, without us having to introduce it or remind folks. It is not so much how we can do this – it is there even though people may not be able to name it. We were already asking key questions before the immersion experience. This is a culture change with its own language. It is not just

what you do at church; it is your everyday life as it is now. It is important to use several people to build support and accountability. Remember you are not doing it alone; the Life of Faith website <https://lifeoffaith.info/> has great resources. Life of Faith speaks to our need for connection, community, and affirmation. We are empowering people wherever they are.

The Lutheran Prayer of Good Courage

Lord God,
you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.