

THE SEVEN L's of LATAH VALLEY

A Catechetical Training
In The Christian Faith
For the Post-Modern World

1. Latah Lives —

the fullest life of community that God intends us to live, according to the witness of Holy Scripture.

2. Latah Listens —

to the stories of people near and far and especially to God's Story through them.

3. Latah Lingers —

in the places where, and in the moments when, people need to hear about the love of God in Jesus Christ.

4. Latah Laughs —

at the serious business of the world, knowing that even the best methods of human beings won't make things perfect.

5. Latah Learns —

from those humble people who are willing to admit that they don't always know for sure.

6. Latah Loves —

by the power of the Spirit of Christ, who trains us in forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion.

7. Latah Longs —

for the coming kingdom of the risen Christ where there will be no church, no temple, no suffering, no sighing and no death... "but the Lord God will be their light."

4. Latah Laughs —

at the serious business of the world, knowing that even the best methods of human beings won't make things perfect.

Focus Areas:

- The Spiritual Condition of Sin
- Discernment
- Hospitality

Ice Breakers:

Name one Christmas present, electronic gadget, appliance or household item that you have had the privilege of assembling with or without the aid of an instruction pamphlet or manual. Were you successful in putting the pieces together on your own? Or did you need help?

Read.

"Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision..." (Psalm 2:1–4, NRSV).

Review.

Consider the way that God is personified in this passage. What reasons does the Lord have to laugh? Are there specific, contemporary circumstances that might provoke his laughter today?

Reflect.

Contrast the laughter of God "in the heavens" with the laughter of Sarah in Genesis 18:12 and the following verses:

"So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'"

Is God somehow offended by Sarah's laughter? Why? Or why not?

Latah Valley Presbyterian Church laughs (or makes light) of those methods by which we hope to prove our self-sufficiency before God and before others. Formulaic representations of faith are no substitute for the genuine hard work of nurturing the relationships that God has given us. Expressions of the spiritual condition of sin must be acknowledged and forgiven within specific contexts. Following repentance and reconciliation, the practice of discernment allows us to laugh at ourselves. Hospitality happens as we welcome those who get the joke and those who don't.

Spiritual Condition of Sin Exercises.

In his book, *A Christianity Worth Believing*, Doug Pagitt writes the following about sin:

“Adam and Eve [See Genesis 3] were created for seamless life with God, but they had stepped away from that life. As a result, their lives would be full of struggle and strife. Birth would bring pain. The ground would not only give life but also take it. When they were in sync with God, they had only life. But being out of sync with God would bring death.

Yet even in the midst of this struggle, Adam and Even partnered with God... Their story goes on, with the whole creation living in fits and starts of participation with God.

This story never suggests that the sin of Adam and Eve sends them into a state of depravity. There is nothing in the story that tells us that God steps over the other side of some great chasm once Eve bites down on that fruit. Certainly there is sin, but the result of sin is a change in our relationship with God and with others, not a change in the basic makeup of humanity.” (p. 136)

Divide into triads, or smaller groups of three, and invite each member to share her/his understanding of sin. For starters, is it more like...

- A Great Chasm Or An Insurmountable Distance?
- A Physical Injury Or Deformity?
- A Break-Up or Disintegration of Relationships?
- A Simple Misunderstanding?
- A Terrible Defeat At The Hands of An Enemy?
- A Tragic Lack of Knowledge?
- A Hereditary Disease?

Return to the large group and consider how the spiritual condition of sin might be dealt with differently according to each understanding of the problem.

If it helps, draw a picture, or cite a Bible passage, to reinforce your remedy below:

Discussion: *Discernment.*

Take a short break and prepare to view Scene #22 from the DVD/film, *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*. What makes the instructions from “the Book of Armaments” about the “holy hand grenade” so funny? Are the steps we take to fix or eradicate sin equally as laughable?

Read the following from *Spiritual Theology; The Theology of Yesterday For Spiritual Help Today*, by Diogenes Allen:

“Discernment is the ability to assess our spiritual condition. Part of the difficulty is knowing on what basis we are to make an evaluation...We often think that our only problem is doing what is good and refraining from evil and we assume it is not difficult to tell good from evil. Those who are spiritually mature know that this is frequently not the case; they know how often they have been fooled into thinking that something is good, realizing only when well into its pursuit that it is not. Similarly, it is easy to find an important discipline or practice oppressive at first, only to realize later that it is really good for us. Only by practice and after repeated mistakes – which take courage to admit – do we develop discernment, if we develop it at all.” (p. 94).

Name one or two things in your life experience, or faith journey, that you had initially thought of as good, “realizing only when well into its pursuit that it is not.” Can you laugh about those things now? Do you imagine God as laughing *with* you or *at* you or both simultaneously?

1. _____ 2. _____

Hospitality Exercise.

Review the church bulletin bloopers below. How might a winsome acknowledgement of these faux pas’ encourage Latah Valley and other congregations to be more hospitable or welcoming to others?

THE BEST CHURCH BULLETIN BLOOPERS

These sentences actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services:

Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, will be speaking tonight at Calvary Methodist. Come hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.

Announcement in a church bulletin for a national PRAYER & FASTING Conference: "The cost for attending the Fasting and Prayer conference includes meals."

The sermon this morning: "Jesus Walks on the Water."
The sermon tonight: "Searching for Jesus."

Ladies Bible Study will be held Thursday morning at 10. All ladies are invited to lunch in the Fellowship Hall after the B.S. is done.

The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use back door.

The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church basement Friday at 7 PM. The Congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

Weight Watchers will meet at 7 PM at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.

Mrs. Johnson will be entering the hospital this week for testes.

The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new tithing campaign slogan last Sunday "I Upped My Pledge - Up Yours."

Read Romans 12:3–8.

Author Marva Dawn translates the Greek word, *hilarotes*, in verse eight, as "Hilarity." In *Truly The Community*, she writes:

"The profound gladness this word signifies arises from a deep sense of the rich treasure of God's grace for us, from an awareness that God's love sets us free to enjoy being truly ourselves, and from trusting the Grace-Giver to work through his gifts to us. Hilarity in the Christian community comes from being transformed rather than conformed. It expresses itself in generous love for others... It depends upon the renewal of the mind, though that doesn't hamper its spontaneity." (p. 136)

Invite members of the large group to share a humorous anecdote that illustrates the connection between *Hospitality* and *Hilarity*, as Dawn describes it.

Pray.

Dear God, because of your hilarious love for me and for others, I can laugh in ways that I've never laughed before. Continue to teach me how not to take myself so seriously. As the world events and the daily news may turn grave, give me a glad and generous heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.