

# **Statement of Philosophy**

**for**  
**The Board of Youth Ministry and the Youth Groups**  
**of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**Hartland, Michigan**

## **Introduction:**

Of all the animals in God's creation, he prefers to call us his sheep. Why? What makes us comparable to sheep? Do we walk on four legs and travel in herds? Maybe it is because we prefer warm wool socks on a cold day. On the contrary, it is not how we travel or what we wear. Rather, it is because like sheep, we are helpless and straying. Without a shepherd, wolves attack and devour us. We are completely dependent upon a shepherd who so faithfully guides, protects, and saves us from our sin. Read how God's Word compares us to sheep:

*"When (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Matthew 9:36.*

*"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves." Matthew 10:16.*

Indeed we are like sheep going astray. Therefore, we need the help and safety of a loving shepherd, simply because we cannot help or save ourselves. Jesus Christ is that shepherd.

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11.*

*"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me -- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father -- and I lay down my life for the sheep." John 10:14,15.*

We are his sheep and he is our shepherd. Always providing for his flock. Ever working for the good of those who love him. Saving us from sin and bringing us to everlasting life through the redeeming merits of his blood on the cross. Read how the Lord speaks of his flock in Ezekiel 34:11-15.

*"For this is what the sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all places where they are scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord."*

Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord portrays his love for us with eloquent style. But what does this stuff mean? Well, we can understand this text if we remember three things: 1) Whenever we hear of the "mountain (heights) of Israel," God is speaking of the good and faithful churches in which his people are fed. The Church is, as he says, "our own land." It is the way and culture outside of the ways of the ruthless world. 2) What is the "feed"? The good pasture mentioned is none other than God's Word and Sacraments, the means by which he rescues us. 3) Finally, our shepherd is God himself, and he promises to take care of his people through faithful pastors and teachers.

Hearing and knowing how much God loves his sheep, we eventually come to John 21:15-19 where our Lord, sitting on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, instructs the apostle Peter to feed his sheep.

*"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?'*

*'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'You know that I love you.'*

*Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'*

*Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?'*

*He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'*

*Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'*

*The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'*

*Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'"*

Notice that Jesus first commands the feeding of his lambs. A Bible commentator writes regarding the text:

*"Jesus mentions the lambs first, but certainly not because they are less valuable or require less care; rather the reverse is true...Jesus here places his most beloved possessions into Peter's care. The spiritual feeding and nourishment of children is here made the first part of the great apostolic office...'feed my lambs' stands in the sacred record as their first essential work."*

We see that the first and foremost job of God's people is to teach the children the Gospel. Not that the adults are any less important, rather Christ takes care to remember his lambs first, and this is always in combination with faithful parents. He then continues by commanding us to take care of them, to nurture them in the faith and continually bring them to the mountain heights of Israel, their home in God's church, where they can receive all of the gifts he has to offer.

### **Constitutional Overview:**

In accordance with the Constitution of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hartland, Michigan, the Board of Youth Ministry will consist of *"four elected adults and a minimum of four youth representatives."* (Bylaws of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church Hartland, Article III, Youth Ministry.) With regard to the function of the Board of Youth, the Constitution states: *"The Board of Youth Ministry shall involve the young people of the congregation in its work, be concerned for their spiritual growth and nurture, provide opportunities for service, and promote Christian fellowship."* (Bylaws of Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church Hartland, Article VI, Youth Ministry Duties.) When referencing the "Youth Group" we are speaking of the both the Junior High (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade) and High School (9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) Youth groups as traditionally distinguished by the congregations since its inception.

### **Statement of Philosophy:**

#### **1. Parental Responsibility and Involvement**

We believe that before God, parents and not churches have the primary responsibility for the spiritual nurture of their children. *"And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons..."* (Deut. 6:4,5). Therefore, the Board of Youth is committed to encouraging and assisting families in the sacred task of raising young people to be faithful in attending the Divine Service, the hearing and study of God's Word and the receiving of His Sacraments. The vast majority of "youth ministry" really should take place in individual homes where parents invest the time and energy necessary to remain faithful to their God-given roles as parents. This includes family activities like Bible study, devotions, etc. Indeed, parents are responsible for developing a plan for spiritual nurture in the family and encouraging participation in extra Youth Group activities as opportunities to continue learning and growing in

the Word, as well as enjoying the fellowship of other Christian youth. A “one-size-fits-all” youth group is not going to be successful at providing complete spiritual nurture for all of its members. It is an easy way to approach youth work, but it is not the best. We want to be sure not to remove the spiritual involvement and oversight of parents and other mature adults. Whatever the Board of Youth, in terms of service to youth, officially provides will always be done with a heart to involve and support parents.

## **2. Cross-generational**

We are committed to building the body of Christ, not cultivating a separate youth culture. You’ll notice that many of our activities are open to both youth and parents. Technically, they could be considered as “Church” activities and not “Youth” activities. Whether it’s the Talent Show, Paintball or the Youth To Russia Project, each event is open to participation from youth and parents, and it is always promoted in such a way. However, our cross-generational mindset does not preclude occasional activities and events designed for specific age categories. We believe that segregating young people from adults is the invention of secular humanists, not biblical Christianity. Many churches buy into the alleged value of keeping the spiritual nurturing of youth as a separate culture, a place where youth can “feel safe” and “get away” from parents to learn about Christ in their own way. We believe the opposite. We believe that God’s Word encourages interaction, unity and faithfulness to tradition. We define “tradition” not as “the dead faith of the living,” but instead it is “the living faith of the dead,” a faith that is passed along throughout the generations in the church and delivered to us today; and this is not limited to the adults, but it is for the youth as well. *“O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth... We will not hide them from our children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.” (Psalm 78:1-6).*

Logically speaking, wisdom and maturity are not developed through interaction with youth peers. Interaction with such peers is where the spiritual wisdom and maturity learned from faithful parents is put into practice. *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” (Psalm 119:9).* While the concern of some parents is that their teens don’t spend enough time with friends their own age, the tone of the Holy Scriptures on “socialization” promotes “cross-generational” interaction. Older saints are admonished to teach the younger, and the younger are admonished to humbly receive this instruction.

Finally, when young people are confirmed in the faith at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, according to congregational Constitution, they become adult voting members. If we as a congregation confess this to be true in our Constitution, then we certainly attest to the faithfulness of the cross-generational teaching philosophy presented above.

## **3. Christ-Centered and not Activity Centered**

Receiving our Lord’s wonderful gifts of forgiveness in the Divine Service is the center of our life in Christ! Everything else that happens, whether they be youth activities or casual gatherings, are just spokes on the wheel in our lives as Christians. Christ is the center. He is the axel. He is the support for all that we are in every aspect of our lives. The primary activity encouraged by the Board of Youth and the Youth Groups will always be that of faithful attendance to the Divine Service and Bible Study on Sunday morning. We certainly encourage families to become involved in fellowship events and activities sponsored by the Board of Youth. The calendar

is full of choices. These events offer wonderful opportunities for Christians to enjoy the benefits of the Christian community. However, many families struggle with having too much in their schedule. As a church, we do not want to intensify this problem; rather, we want families to pick and choose from ALL of the activities in their life, considering which would be the most beneficial for the spiritual nurture of their child.

#### **4. Solid “Word and Sacrament” Teaching**

A clear focus on God’s Holy Word and the precious Sacraments is absolutely essential in “youth ministry.” Many churches would not agree. In fact, the common approach to study on Sunday mornings in many churches is to be different each and every Sunday. We believe that youth need more than lessons on felt needs and relational topics. We desire to cultivate a reliable and consistent appetite for the meat of God’s Word and an expectation that youth will engage in meaningful study of the Scriptures. (Of course while we are always sensitive to the levels of comprehension at any given age, we guard carefully against the “dumbing-down” of God’s Word.)

On Sunday morning, the High School youth of Our Savior begin with time to socialize, offering the opportunity for Deacon Thoma to find out what’s new in the lives of the youth, make announcements about upcoming activities and meetings, as well as giving opportunity for the youth to network with Christian friends from other schools. After a minimum of ten minutes, the youth recognize the lesson as “God’s Time.” During this time, Deacon Thoma leads the youth through the Gospel reading for that Sunday, teaching the Law and Gospel as well as directly relating the reading to our life of worship in the Divine Service. This is the consistent and reliable schedule that ties the faithful study of God’s Word to the active worship life of the youth. It is a comfortable schedule that students find dependable.

#### **Conclusion:**

In God’s Word we see our Savior’s love for us. Though we sin and fall away, our Shepherd comes to us, saves us from despair, and brings us back to the good grazing land of his Church! That’s the wonderful Gospel! Our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, loves us so much that he gave up his own life to pay for sin in our stead.

With this in mind, we remember the most important task to be minded by the Board of Youth Ministry and our beloved parents: to feed the lambs of Christ this good food of the Gospel! The very same task commanded by Christ to his disciples on the shores of Tiberias. A task that spans the centuries and reaches through time into the hearts and minds of all the people at Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church! May the Holy Spirit continually encourage and strengthen us to complete the task we have been given!

Signed,  
The Board of Youth Ministry  
and  
Deacon Chris Thoma

March AD 2003