

INTRODUCTION

Most Christians and many people who don't claim Christianity know of John 3:16, but don't know the source of believing. What if people knew chapter 3, verse 16 from a different book of the Bible? The title of this curriculum, *Dwelling in You Richly*, is part of a verse that is at the foundation of the Word Without Walls ministry: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

The curriculum that follows intends to accomplish in the lives of young people what Paul commands in Colossians 3:16. The cover art provides a visual image of what living water flowing richly in our lives might look like. Huge volumes of water flow together, flowing down, then over and around obstacles and coming together into a beautiful pool before overflowing and thus flowing on toward other places. The Old Testament and New Testament flow together to reveal the riches of God's grace, wisdom, and redeeming work. The witness of nature also flows, together with the witness of the Bible, to provide broad and deep insights into God's will for us and work in and among us. Palm trees remind us of the shade and rest the promises of God provide, and boulders remind us of the enduring love of God for us.

We hope and pray that the Word of Christ flows richly into the lives of the teachers, students, and families who use this curriculum, bringing all the blessings of God's grace to you and then through you to others.

THE PROGRAM, AT A GLANCE

What *is* a Christian according to Jesus? In His own words, "If you remain in My Word, you are My disciples in truth, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). To be Lutheran, as Martin Luther was, means "the truth, no matter what." For these two foundational reasons, this curriculum for education is at all times immersed in and based on the Bible. As the sun is the center of our universe, as all things revolve around the sun, as our life depends in every way on the sun, so this curriculum is at all times a product of God's Word. Each stage of this curriculum works through the Bible, each time looking more deeply into the biblical text and making application to our lives, as growing in years brings more challenges that only God's Word and Spirit can equip us to meet. Added to a solid biblical study as the foundation, we add social and service elements in order to build relationships as the Body of Christ.

CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

There are several parts to the strategy of this curriculum:

1. **Life-long learning.** This curriculum views Christian education as a lifelong process in which the same text is continually re-encountered but at deeper levels and from different directions.
 - **Pre-school/kindergarten**—The Bible in one year, in order
 - **Grades 1-4**—The Bible in four years, in order
 - **Grades 5-7**—The Bible in three years, as related to the Small Catechism
 - **Grades 8-12**—The Bible in five years, as related to topics
2. **Comprehensive.** This curriculum intends to take in all the biblical text from grade 5 on. It also includes studies in the Small and Large Catechism and the Lutheran liturgy.
3. **Biblical order.** Rather than skip around by theme, this curriculum takes children and young adults through the Bible, every time, in the order of the text. This allows the student to have and retain the "big picture" and to add to that a better understanding of how specific events or texts fit into that.

4. **Small and Large Catechisms.** The Small Catechism is introduced already at the pre-school/kindergarten level. The Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, and many of the supporting Bible passages are present as memory work in Grades 1-4. This allows the students to have the bulk of the Small Catechism memorized *before* they reach catechetical instruction. The Large Catechism is encountered over the summer of the third year in the grade 5-7 curriculum.
5. **Worship.** Like the catechism, elements of worship/liturgy are introduced at the earliest levels. Sunday school opening (held in the sanctuary) and classroom time help the students make connections between season of the church year, color of paraments, hymns, and pericopes. This is an excellent time to demonstrate the way all biblical texts relate to each other. For example, texts from Genesis and Exodus help explain the purpose of Advent and Christmas. Texts from the Pauline epistles add perspective to Lent and Easter.
6. **Simplicity of lesson + diversity/flexibility of supporting material & activities.** Each lesson is formatted in a simple way that offers an essential skeleton. This prevents the teacher from being overwhelmed with material to digest before the class. This also gives credit to the teacher for being familiar with the texts, having his/her own ideas, and being able to select what supporting material or activities are best suited for that particular class. A large selection of supporting material allows for variety from week to week (word search this week, coloring next, puzzle, acting out, etc.).

STAGES OF THE PROGRAM

NOTE: In this first edition of the curriculum (2026), only the beginning portion of the high school curriculum is currently available. The other components are forthcoming.

- **Pre-school through kindergarten.** This curriculum is based on [*The Child's Garden of Bible Stories*](#) by Arther W. Gross. One Bible story a week takes a year and the curriculum is repeated each of these years as the children are just becoming familiar with the basic facts of the stories.
- **Grades 1-4.** This curriculum is based on *The Bible in Pictures* by Rev. Ralph Kirby. It takes four years to study one Bible story a week from this text. This allows a broader and more in-depth study of the basic stories, which builds on the previous curriculum. This curriculum also includes study of worship and Small Catechism.
- **Grades 5-7 catechetical* instruction.** This curriculum begins to build on and take advantage of the factual learning that has taken place in earlier grades. Now the students begin to think about the meaning and application of the Bible texts. They also relate individual texts to the larger Biblical scheme. (A more complete explanation can be found in "A, B, Cs of Catechism" in the specific guide for this age group.)
(*Note: You'll note that throughout this curriculum, I will never call this level of instruction "confirmation" class. See "key terms and definitions" for more information.)
- **Grades 8-12.** This curriculum has three main approaches to study: Bible books, Small Catechism, topics. The format of this curriculum is more oriented toward the larger life of the youth in the congregation and toward their personal lives. The first activity is to eat together, check in on announcements, and take roll by means of asking students to say or read a section of the Small Catechism. This keeps the Small Catechism in their minds and reinforces memory. Next, the students are asked questions which are relate to the material coming, but draw them out in regard to the particulars of their own lives. Then we begin a study of the Bible together, and finish with prayer.

In four years of implementing this high school curriculum, the number of youths who came for Wednesday after-school study increased from seven to 42. Within those same four years, we changed from rarely seeing young people after catechesis was complete to a congregation of young people who rarely missed Sunday services or midweek studies. Working through the Scriptures in substantive ways and practicing attentiveness to each other created powerful and enduring bonds among the youth and between the youth and the rest of the congregation.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

I originally developed this curriculum for use in my congregation for instruction during the Sunday school hour and in one midweek session per week. However, this program can be customized and adapted for use in a variety of settings:

- In a Christian home during family devotion time
- At a Christian school, it can be the foundation for the religious curriculum
- At a homeschool co-op, it can be the basis for community devotion
- In a congregation, for instruction from age 4 through high school

USER TIPS

Throughout this curriculum, you'll find many links to available resources. For those who are using a paper copy of these materials and can't easily access the links, you'll find a parenthetical note directly after the link to direct you to the correct online resource.