

Here We Stand

Ideas to Celebrate the Reformation with Youth

Celebrating our Reformed heritage as Presbyterians is an opportunity to open the stories of our ancestors in the faith and honor their legacy by continuing the work of reformation in the church of today. It allows us to discover the theological conversations they were having, to explore the ideas they cared about, and to engage in dialogue with our ecumenical friends in Christ. As our Presbyterian motto states, “*Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda*”: we are the church reformed and always reforming – or being reformed by the Holy Spirit. Celebrating the Reformation is one way we can affirm the words of this motto by looking with curiosity and gratitude to the work of the reformers in the past and, at the same time, look ahead to the future with courage and creativity as we seek the Spirit’s guidance on the work of reforming yet to come.

Working with youth is already an exercise in bridging the world of the past into the present moment with an eye to the future. Youth are primed to be reformers and bring tremendous energy toward seeking new ways of living their faith, being the church, and working for peace, justice, and wholeness in the world. This QuickSheet contains some ready to use ideas to explore and some innovative approaches to consider that will work in a multitude of congregational and community contexts.

Celebrate Reformation Day in Worship

- Reformation Sunday is observed annually on the Sunday closest or prior to October 31 as a commemoration of when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany over 500 years ago on October 31, 1517.
- The liturgical color for Reformation Day is red, and the youth can help prepare for this celebration in worship by creating a table covering or other paraments out of red fabric. The youth could also create simple craft paper Bible or fabric strip bookmarks with the words “*Sola Scriptura*” printed or written on them as a reminder of this important doctrinal pillar of the Protestant Reformation. These bookmarks could be handed out by the youth as people enter the Sanctuary for worship.
- Suggest an affirmation of faith from one of the German or Scottish sources in the Presbyterian Book of Confessions like The Heidelberg Catechism (4.001) or The Westminster Confession of Faith (6.043). It can also be helpful to include margin or end notes in the bulletin helping to unpack any antiquated words or to address an awareness of the historically limited use of expansive and inclusive language for God and humankind. For an approach to celebrating Reformation Day in worship that has an eye toward a more modern spirit of reformation in the life of the church, select an affirmation of faith from The Confession of 1967 or The Confession of Belhar.
- Invite youth to look at the historical and cultural contexts in which these confessions were written, the issues they were speaking to, and how these confessions are relevant in the church and world of today.

A Reformation Era Who’s Who

- The Reformation era is full of larger-than-life historical characters like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Johannes Tetzel, Pope Leo X, Johannes Gutenberg, Frederick the Wise, Jan Hus, and Philip

Melanchthon. They all played important roles during the period and influenced many of the major movements that helped shape the church of today.

- Don't forget that women also played a major part in the Reformation and should be celebrated alongside their male counterparts. Women reformers like Katharina von Bora, Marguerite de Navarre, Olympia Morata, Joan III of Navarre, Argula von Grumbach, and Marie Dentière are just a few of the many women who made significant scholarly, religious, and political contributions to work of Reformation in 16th century Europe.
- Depending on the size of the youth group, consider assigning a different Reformation era character to each of youth or choose a few to study as a smaller group. Ask the youth to do a bit of Wikipedia research on who their character was and what they contributed to the Reformation story. See if they can find an artist's portrait of their character as well. After a few minutes on their own, ask the youth to introduce their character to the rest of the group and show their portrait if one exists. This is an activity that can easily be done virtually as well.
- Check out the 2003 film [Luther](#) for movie clips to use in youth group discussions to help bring the characters, events, ideas, culture, and conflict to life, or secure viewing rights and host a screening of the film. The movie is rated PG-13 for brief language and violence, so look to this option for older youth.

Big Ideas

- What were the issues that sparked the Protestant Reformation in the first place? What was at stake for people on both sides of the Reformation? What ideas about God, the Bible, salvation, and the church were developed during the Reformation? There are a number of resources available that explore the big ideas of the Reformation and the impact these continue to have on our lives today. A good resource to start with is the book *Reformation Questions, Reformation Answers* by Donald K. McKim. Create a three or four Sunday youth group mini-series that explores one of these big Reformation questions each Sunday leading up to Reformation Day.
- Set up a time to host a conversation with your youth on the various faith perspectives of the Reformation by inviting local Lutheran, Anglican, and/or Roman Catholic faith leaders to share their beliefs about God, worship, and what it means to the Church. In addition to dialogue around differences, look for opportunities to affirm shared beliefs and missional commitments to caring for those in need.

Pop-Up Reformation Booths

- Each Sunday during the month of October, have the youth group host a pop-up Reformation Booth as people are gathering or departing from worship. Choose a different theme from the Reformation to feature each Sunday and ask different groups of youth to choose a theme to research, design and plan the booth, help you set it up, and interact with members using the information they learned during their research. Here are some ideas to get you started:
 - ❖ **A Reformation Resource Library:** purchase a selection of books for adults, children, and teens and set them up in your booth along with printed reading lists of other Reformation resources that people can take for further study. To give it a bit more flair, have a youth dress up as Gutenberg to talk about the importance of the printed word and have printed examples of pages from the Gutenberg Bible available for people to see. Moveable type printing press letter blocks can be found on Ebay and you can have folks use an inkpad to try their hand at Gutenberg's trade. [Here](#) is a sample Reformation book list to get you started.
 - ❖ **A Reformation Meet & Greet:** Ask for youth volunteers to research a character from the Reformation and help them assemble a 16th century period costume (most of which can be made easily from basic materials) and gather around your booth to interact with members of the church. Serve individual bags of pretzels and root beer for refreshments. [Here](#) are some character research and costume cards to get you started.

- ❖ **“Your Thesis”:** Hang a door-size sheet of brown butcher paper in the youth room and pass out sticky notes or notecards with the words, “I believe the church...” printed at the top. Ask the youth to write out how they would complete the sentence and stick their own “Thesis” to the Reformation door. You or someone in your church could build a gothic-looking wooden door or purchase a simple wooden door and create a simple frame to allow it to stand securely on its own. Provide a hammer and nails along with the “Thesis” notecards for a more immersive experience. Share this with the congregation as a “booth”.

Host a Reformation Fair

As an alternative to weekly pop-up booths and if resources and volunteers make it possible, consider hosting an intergenerational Reformation Fair event with youth working the booths in their costumes. It’s a great alternative to a fall carnival or a Halloween party and gets youth involved in sharing the story and ideas of the reformation in an engaging way. [Here](#) are some ideas to help get your Reformation Fair going.

A Footnote to Discussing the Reformation with Youth

Despite the tremendous theological advancements during the Reformation era, there remain troubling aspects that are important to acknowledge in our conversations with youth. Intentionally addressing areas in which the reformers and their work fell short helps us approach our heritage with humility and gives us hope for the ways the church has continued to reform over the centuries. The turbulence of the Reformation era in European history gave rise to lengthy periods of violence and bloodshed. Beneficial and beautiful traditions of prayer, art, and liturgy were lost to iconoclasm or stigmatized as being “too Catholic”. Anti-Semitism and patriarchal views of women in leadership and ministry can be found in many of the written works of the Reformers. Centering the contributions of church reformation on white, Western, male voices also misses the powerful influence that persons of color and women from cultures throughout global Christianity offer to the church of today.

- Be honest with youth about the shortcomings of our Reformed heritage, not to make them feel bad or ashamed, but to show how our understanding and theology has grown in the time since the Reformation. Such honesty will provide opportunities for conversation around current events and issues and empower them to continue the work of reforming the church toward a more just, equitable, and inclusive future.
- Talk with your youth about how Martin Luther’s 95 Theses was his way of taking a stand against the abuses of the church and how he thought the church could change for the better. Invite them to reflect on areas they think the church of today could experience reformation. Your job during that conversation is to create safe space for sharing, to listen with openness to their ideas and contributions, and not attempt to hastily correct or fix the issues they bring up.

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