

# Handouts

## Walk and talk

The goal is for each person to have uninterrupted time to reflect on and talk about the influence and/or impact of the Bible in your life:

- when you use it
- how you use it
- where you use it
- what you use it for
- why you use it

It could be that you respond to the question:

**to what extent does the Bible influence your life?**

### The procedure:

1. Find a partner.
2. You have ten minutes of dedicated time for this activity. You can walk any place so long as you are back with the whole group at the end of ten minutes.
3. As you walk for the first five minutes, only one person speaks. The accompanying partner is an attentive listener (no questions, no comments).
4. At the end of the five minutes, swap roles so that the second person talks and reflects on the way back. Again, the accompanying partner is an attentive listener (no questions, no comments).

It is fine for periods of thinking and silence to take place within the dedicated time for each speaker.

### Participant theological notes

#### Focus questions

- What is the Bible?
- Does the Bible have any relevance or authority in informing the thinking, decision making and activities within the community of the Lutheran school and how is this shown in practice?
- Is the Bible a 'living' book?
- What are the 'Lutheran Confessions' and how do they relate to the Bible?

#### A real life scenario

##### Scenario 1

Danielle and Courtney were preparing units of work for the next term and were asked by their coordinator to have another look at 'A Framework for Lutheran Schools' to see how their planning was reflecting the beliefs and values in that Framework. Danielle said to Courtney that she was a bit puzzled by the emphasis on the Bible in the Framework. 'What does it mean that we believe that 'the Bible is the supreme authority for Christian faith and life' and that we value as core 'the Bible as the authority informing what we do and teach'? Does the Bible really have anything to say about what we do and teach in our unit? I can understand it if we were preparing a unit in Christian Studies, but what does this have to do with our units in English or Maths?'

##### Scenario 2

Mark's mother had asked to speak with his teacher after school. When she arrived, Mark's teacher saw immediately that she was rather agitated. It didn't take long for the issue to surface. 'We are very happy with most of what is happening in Mark's classes,' said his mother, 'but there is far too much talk about the Bible in the school. Is it really necessary that children have to have their minds filled with so much 'Bible stuff'? We're very happy with teaching about morals and values, but why all the rest of this Bible emphasis? Isn't the Bible really a bit outdated anyway?'

##### Scenario 3

Planning was underway for the end of year service for the school. One of the teachers who had been at the school for some time asked the staff planning group to think again about the long established practice of presenting a Bible to each of the graduating students. 'I find the whole thing a bit pointless', he said. 'I know that a number of the students find the presentation a bit of a joke. Why should they be given a book which they won't ever look at again? Those students who will read a Bible will no doubt already have one. Shouldn't we think of some other gift for our graduates?'

##### Scenario 4

The school pastor was briefing the new teachers on the rite of installation for new teachers which was going to be part of the Lutheran school opening service. After he had been through the rite, Julie and Tim asked to speak with him. 'What is meant in the rite by the 'Lutheran Confessions' and why do we have to promise to teach according to them? We're very happy to support the ethos of the Lutheran school, but what are we agreeing to do in this rite of installation? We want to be clear what all of this means for us.'

### Participant theological notes

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#### A biblical insight

##### Preamble

There are many different approaches to the Bible and its authority. A variety of these will be found in a Lutheran school and these can easily lead to a number of misunderstandings. For example, to say that the Bible is 'the authority informing what we do and teach' may be understood by some as implying that somehow the Bible provides the final authority to determine everything that is taught and done in the Lutheran school. The Bible is seen as a textbook on educational theory and practice or as a textbook of science or psychology. On the other hand there may be some who find it difficult to see how the Bible has much relevance at all to the life and work of the Lutheran school.

The story of Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary can provide an important beginning point in considering how we understand the Bible and its place in the Lutheran school.

##### **Narrative: Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary** [Luke 10:38-42]

Jesus had a special relationship with Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus [John 11:1 – 12:11]. It seems that Jesus may have been a guest in their house on a number of occasions as he passed through Bethany. In this particular story in Luke's gospel, we see Jesus dealing with the responses of the two sisters to his visit in their home.

Martha is a great example of conscientious service. She wanted to ensure that Jesus received the best welcome possible into her home as she attended to all of the requirements of hospitality as it was practiced in her culture and religion. This was the way in which she wanted to show how highly she valued Jesus' visit to her home and how much she respected her guest. And she was naturally a little peeved that her sister Mary simply sat down to listen to Jesus and didn't help with the appropriate preparations.

Jesus didn't devalue Martha's service. He appreciated her care and concern for him and his welfare. But he wanted to point out something 'better'. Mary was allowing Jesus to serve her. Mary recognised that what Jesus had to say was so important for her that she was prepared to fail to carry through with the hospitality which she should have been providing for her guest as her social and religious duty. She chose instead to focus on what she could learn from Jesus. She wanted to listen to him and learn all she could from him.

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Listening to Jesus speak. That's the central focus when Christians consider the authority of the Bible. God wants to reveal things which are crucial for understanding God and ourselves and our relationship to creation and also for the life and work of the Lutheran school.

### Participant theological notes

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#### Aspects of theology and the word of God

##### Introduction

Before beginning to focus specifically on the Bible, it is vital to consider the broader context of 'word of God' because the Bible is only one way in which God speaks to people. However, the Bible is an essential means through which God communicates this self-revelation.

##### Word of God – God's revelation

While it may be possible using our God-given reason to speculate about God and come to some conclusions for ourselves about God [the process of forming a 'religion'], God has not left individuals to work out for themselves who God is, how God feels about them, what God has done for them and what God wants from them. God has spoken, and continues to speak to them revealing himself to them.

The term 'word of God' can be understood in distinct but complementary ways.

- 'Word of God' can be a person, Jesus Christ, who is the living word in human form, 'the Word made flesh' [John 1:14]. Although God had spoken 'in many and various ways' [Hebrews 1:1] through the history of God with God's people, God's final and definitive revelation is in Jesus Christ [Hebrews 1:2-3]. In Jesus Christ we see God as God really is for us.
- 'Word of God' also refers to the written word [the Bible] of the Old and New Testaments. [Note that sometimes 'word of God' is used more narrowly to refer specifically to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of forgiveness through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ within the Old and New Testaments.]
- 'Word of God' also includes the proclaimed word [preaching], the spoken word [eg the word of law and gospel as used in the Lutheran school], the word together with the elements in the sacraments, spoken Christian witness, the word of absolution [forgiveness], the word of comfort and care in the name of Jesus.

##### Jesus Christ is the centre of God's revelation

Jesus is the living 'word of God' who most clearly reveals God to human beings. Jesus reveals God's will for people [the 'law'] which shows them their sin and their need for a Saviour. However, critically, Jesus also reveals God's grace and mercy for all people through his death and resurrection for them [the 'gospel'] through which they have forgiveness of sins and are brought back into a right relationship with God ['justification'].

##### The Bible is the living 'word of God'

So that we have a record of all that God has revealed through his history with his people, through the prophets of the Old Testament and the writers of the New Testament, and particularly through Jesus Christ as God's clearest revelation of his love and grace, God has provided his written word in the Bible [also called 'the Scriptures']. The Bible is a collection of literary documents, poetry, hymns, historical documents, letters, etc which are the written word of God, written in human words by human beings. However, at the centre of the Bible is Jesus Christ, the living 'word of God' [the Bible is '*christocentric*']. Jesus challenged his detractors to recognise that the Old Testament writings spoke about him [John 5:39], an insight which, after his resurrection, Jesus also explained to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus [Luke 24:25-27].

### Participant theological notes

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#### **The Bible is both fully divine and fully human**

Christians believe that just as Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine, so the Bible is also both fully human and fully divine. As a human writing, the personality and style of the writer is apparent [for example, the language, literary methods, knowledge of nature, history, science and philosophy, etc]. This means that in reading the Bible, readers need to be conscious of this human context.

However, Christians believe that the Bible is also fully divine as God is its author and the various writers were 'inspired' by the Holy Spirit [2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21]. This is why the Bible is seen as a dynamic, living book through which God continues to address those who read it. It is regarded as God's living and creative word in the same way in which God's word brought creation into being. It is the means through which the Holy Spirit creates faith and helps faith to grow.

#### **The authority of the Bible**

Christians accept the authority of the Bible, but they may understand this in very different ways.

Some Christians believe that the Bible is 'true' in all details because God is the author. They believe that the words themselves are divine [some would even say they are 'dictated' by God] and that therefore the Bible is true in every detail – also scientifically, historically, geologically, etc. In an extreme form, this view of the Bible can obscure the message of the Bible through its concern for the fundamental accuracy of every word of the text.

Some Christians believe that the Bible simply 'contains' the word of God and that there are parts of the Bible which are not really God's word for them and can therefore be ignored.

Lutherans hold to the view that the authority of the Bible relates to Jesus Christ as the centre of God's revelation. The Bible, therefore, is God's word 'as a whole and in all its parts' through which God speaks particularly through Jesus Christ. The ultimate authority of the Bible is in its gospel content. Martin Luther continually stressed that if the Bible is not seen in the light of Christ, then the Bible becomes just an ordinary book and its teachings will be misinterpreted. This view of the Bible also stresses the dynamic nature of the word of God through which God can bring people to faith and addresses the individual believer in terms of law and gospel.

[Note: there is often a debate in Christian circles about the use of the adjectives 'infallible' or 'inerrant' when speaking about the Bible. Lutherans would see this as indicating that in all matters relating to salvation the Bible is completely trustworthy. It does not mislead the believer in respect to their relationship with God. The Holy Spirit who creates faith also gives confidence in the Bible as the word of God. Lutherans, therefore, can accept that there may be inconsistencies in matters such as history and science which do not undermine in any way the total reliability of the Bible in matters of salvation.]

#### **Interpreting the Bible**

The interpretation of the Bible [called '*hermeneutics*'] is the process of trying to determine not only what the text *says* within its original historical and cultural context, but also what the text *means* for our current context and situation. Christians undertake this process with prayer for the help of the Holy Spirit who first inspired the text and who can help to open up its truth for the reader. This is a process of careful listening to the text and trying to exclude any personal agendas.

### Participant theological notes

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In interpreting the Bible, Lutherans work with a number of assumptions: that the Bible is *clear* in its message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ even though there may be passages which are difficult to interpret; that the Bible is *sufficient* in that it tells us all we need to know for our salvation [John 20:30-31] even though there may be additional things we wish the Bible would tell us; that the Bible has a *unity* which means that 'Scripture interprets Scripture' so that any passage which seems obscure should be understood in relation to clear passages of the Bible. Above all, Lutherans believe that in interpreting the Bible nothing should in any way conflict with the central message of the Bible of justification by grace through faith on account of Christ – the '*christocentric principal*'.

#### **The Bible and the 'Lutheran Confessions'**

Although God reveals himself to individuals through the Bible as the Holy Spirit challenges each person to respond to that living word of God, there is also a long history of the interpretation of the Bible within the Christian church. Many churches have 'confessional statements' which confess or acknowledge or declare what the particular church believes on the basis of God's revelation [for example 'The Thirty Nine Articles' or 'The Westminster Confession']. Many of these confessional statements have arisen as a result of particular historical situations. The Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed [the ecumenical creeds], have arisen in this way and are shared by Christian churches as summaries of the key teachings of the Bible.

While confessional statements are useful summaries of the main teachings of the Bible, they are not on the same level as the Bible. The Bible is God's word: the confessional statements summarise what a particular group of Christian believes about God's word. They must be continually tested against the teaching of the Bible.

The Lutheran Church has a number of confessional statements which arose at the time of the Reformation in order to clearly state the essential teachings of the Bible which were under debate at that time [especially the teaching of 'justification by grace through faith on account of Christ']. They were collected in 1580 into what is called 'The Book of Concord'. These statements are still regarded as defining what the Lutheran Church teaches today on the basis of the Bible. For this reason, pastors in the Lutheran Church vow to teach publicly according to the 'Lutheran Confessions' and teachers in Lutheran schools also make this promise when they are installed as teachers.

### Participant theological notes

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#### Responding to issues relating to the Bible in Lutheran schools

##### 1. The Bible as authority in the Lutheran school

*A Framework for Lutheran Schools* states that Lutheran schools believe that 'the Bible is the supreme authority for Christian faith and life' and that Lutheran schools value as core 'the Bible as the authority informing what we do and teach'.

It is important, however, to recognise that this authority relates in the first instance to God's revelation of grace in the plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. This authority guides Christian faith and life through the work of the Holy Spirit. As will be considered further below, while the Bible will also be a crucial guide for what we do and teach in Lutheran schools, it cannot be seen as the final authority in many aspects of educational decision making and planning. That is not the purpose for which God has given his word to us.

##### 2. Speaking God's word in the school context

Because of the importance of the Bible, every opportunity needs to be taken to promote its message within the school as it is a message that all need to hear. It is a message that brings hope and comfort and promises that are truly enduring. Wherever God's word is read and studied, there the Holy Spirit will be at work to create, strengthen and nurture the faith of the members of the Lutheran school community.

Within the Lutheran school, the word of God will be spoken in many different ways. An obvious one is the use of the Bible in worship, devotional activities, Christian Studies lessons and public functions such as beginning of school year celebrations and valedictory services. It is important that students are introduced to the actual text of the Bible so that they become familiar with it and do not simply learn *about* it.

Biblical material will also be important in pastoral care and counselling, restorative justice practices, confession and absolution, and other issues in the school relating to interpersonal relationships. However, sensitivity to the faith of individuals will be important here. Christian staff and students will also 'speak' through their actions based on their Christian faith. Actions can sometimes speak much louder than words! However, as Peter writes to Christians in the early Church, Christians also need to be ready to give an account of the hope which they have with gentleness and reverence [1Peter 3:15-16].

In speaking God's word in the school context, care needs to be taken so that God's Word is heard clearly as both law [God's will for people and what he demands of them] and gospel [what God has done for all people through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ]. The main purpose of God's revelation in the Bible, the gospel message of justification by grace through faith on account of Jesus Christ, must never be obscured.

##### 3. Biblical insights for educational decision making

There are many areas in the life and work of the Lutheran school where Biblical insights are important and relevant for educational decision making. These include decisions about student behaviour, service projects, curriculum content, school promotion, management processes, teaching methodology, awards and prizes, pastoral care of students and staff, restorative justice, etc, some of which are considered in other encounters.

However, as will be considered in the next encounter, these insights from the Bible need to be considered in connection with the best insights from educational theory and practice. A dialogue between insights from revelation and insights from reason and research is critical for decision making in the Lutheran school.



### Participant theological notes

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#### 4. The Bible and the school curriculum

Since the Bible is central to the life and work of the Lutheran school, it is also important for staff and students to see how it relates to all aspects of the school curriculum. If the claim of the Bible to reveal God's truth is accepted, and if Jesus' claim to 'be the truth' is recognised [John 14:6] then a Lutheran school will be concerned to help students experience an integrated world view in which the insights from God's revelation in the Bible are foundational. Critical here is the way in which the teaching of Christian Studies will help to provide integration for the whole curriculum.

It is important, however, to guard against attempts to draw unrealistic, unhelpful and artificial connections between the Bible and different areas of the curriculum. It must be remembered that the Bible is not a textbook of history, anthropology, science or biology. Teachers will also need to be aware of the process of 'owning and grounding' their own particular personal beliefs when dealing with sensitive curriculum issues.

While the writings in the Bible have to be seen in relation to their historical context, the relevance of the Bible for today's situation needs to be highlighted. For example, in the areas of ecology, racism, the basic human condition, global challenges, etc, insights from the Bible can be seen to be very relevant for current discussions.

#### 5. The 'Lutheran Confessions' and the Lutheran school

Since what is 'Lutheran' is defined by the 'Lutheran Confessions', and since teachers are asked to promise to teach according to those confessions when they are installed as teachers in Lutheran schools, what are the implications of this for the induction of teachers new to Lutheran schools? Should teachers be asked to become familiar with at least the two catechisms of Martin Luther? Should the popular book by Dr F Hebart, *One in the Gospel* which is an explanation of the 'Formula of Concord', be a study text for staff? Or should teachers no longer be required to refer to the Lutheran Confession in their installation as teachers?

The main concern of the 'Lutheran Confessions' is to ensure that the teaching of justification by grace through faith on account of Christ remains central in the life and work of the Lutheran school. This teaching is seen as the core of biblical teaching. In order to focus on this, Lutheran schools have often been designated as 'gospel-centred' or 'Christ-centred'.

## **Discussion questions**

1. How would you assess the use of the Bible in your school?
2. How much do we speak 'about the Bible' rather than use it in our schools?
3. How much is the Bible used in the formal rites and rituals of the school [eg, school assemblies, presentations, sports day, valedictories]? What does this say about the centrality of the Bible in the day-to-day life of the school?
4. What questions do you have about the Bible and its use in the Lutheran school?
5. How do different views of the Bible as 'word of God' impact on the life and work of the Lutheran school?
6. How does the teaching of Christian Studies provide an opportunity for integrating insights from the Bible into all areas of the school curriculum?
7. How is the biblical concept of 'wisdom' helpful in thinking about Lutheran education?
8. The rite of installation for teachers in Lutheran schools asks them to agree to teach in accordance with the 'Lutheran Confessions'. How realistic is this?

## References and further reading

Bartsch, M (2001). *Why a Lutheran School?* (pp. 95-97, 102-110) Adelaide: Board for Lutheran Schools.

BLS (2001). Session 3 The Word of God for Staff and Students, *Theological Orientation Program for Staff (TOPS)* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (pp. 4-7) Adelaide: BLS.

LEA (2005). Key idea 1 Christians believe the Bible is God's word, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework Theological Notes* (pp. 18-23). Adelaide: LEA.

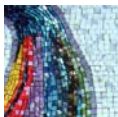
### **CTICR Statements on Scripture**

*The gospel and the interpretation of scripture.* Available online  
<http://www.lca.org.au/resources/cticr/cticr03gospelninterpretation.pdf>

*The interpretation of scripture.* Available online  
<http://www.lca.org.au/resources/cticr/cticr03interpretationscripture.pdf>

### Short Trails available online at [www.lutheran.edu.au](http://www.lutheran.edu.au)

Login to the member area and select *Resources/publications* then *Pathways* then *TRIAL MATERIAL ONLY Pathways: theological focus*



**Art Short Trail:** In this *Short Trail* you can compare both the Lukan and Johannine accounts of the story of Martha and Mary, note the emphases in each, study the literary and cultural contexts, and make some suggestions as to the artists' choices in selecting their respective passage to illustrate. A range of illustrated children's Bible story books could also be explored. Use a *T Chart* or *Venn Diagram* to summarise and record your work and bring it to the discussion group.



**Music Short Trail:** For this *Short Trail* you will need access to a CD player and the CD for Robin Mann's *All together for good* songbook. You will consider some lyrics from one of his songs in conjunction with nominated Youtube links, then make connections in light of the guided questions. Another option is to analyse the message of a video and create a musical response. Bring your work to the discussion group.



**Reading Short Trail:** In the time available you can access a number of additional readings, from a range of sources, to expand, extend and challenge your thinking about God's living word. Record and highlight any significant statements that expand your thinking and add weight to the material you have already studied. These can be brought to and shared in the discussion group together with any questions that arise.



**Puzzle Short Trail:** This *Short Trail* provides an opportunity to explore the distinctives of the story of Jesus from the perspective of each of the gospel writers. Why do the accounts appear to be so different? What are the authors' (gospel writers') viewpoints? Who were their audiences? You will be able to note the emphases, apply and interpret the teachings of Jesus, and make links to the main points of the *Participant theological notes* in this encounter.



**SMS Short Trail:** Summarise, More views, Synthesise

Work with any or several of the three options

- significant statements
- questions
- responses and quotes

and engage with the tasks set out for each. Take your recorded thinking to your discussion group.



**Active Short Trail:** This *Short Trail* takes you on one of three explorations: scriptural texts that are linked to the mission of the school, or the items comprising the 'Lutheran Confessions', or Bible usage in the school. You will need to locate or access the specific items for each of the explorations and, for scriptural texts, use the internet as well. Record your work as directed and take it to your discussion group.

**Reflect and respond**

Write about or visually represent one new idea you encountered today

List or note some concepts, ideas and information you might think more about

# PowerPoint Slides

*Pathways*: theological focus

## God's living word encounter



God's living word encounter

1

## Purposes

The purposes of this encounter are for participants to:

- explore the question: *does the word of God have a role to play in a Lutheran school?*
- consider what exactly the Bible is, and whether it can be described as a 'living' book
- examine the relationship between the Bible and *The Lutheran Confessions*



God's living word encounter

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## Plan

- welcome and introductions
- orientation to the encounter (*setting out*)
- exploring information, developing understandings (*gathering pace*)
- sharing perspectives, discussing questions, developing understandings (*multiple views*)
- reflecting on learning (*in a quiet place*)
- close



Pathways: theological focus

God's living word encounter

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## Setting out

### Option 1: Walk and talk

In pairs, take turns to talk about the Bible in your life.

### Option 2: Interviews

View/observe sharing of reflections on 'word of God' in the school context.

### Option 3: Pair and share

Read *A real life scenario* in *Participant theological notes*, then pair up and talk about similarities and differences with your own experiences.



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God's living word encounter

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## Gathering pace

**Part 1:** Select one of the options to respond to your reading:

- Individually, use coloured highlighters to **mark critical statements**. Then pair up and compare statements highlighted, justifying your choices.
- **Bundling and bunching:** individually, list key words, one per strip of paper. Combine with three other people and bunch similar words. Label each bunch. Take a walk to see how other groups of four have labeled their bunches.
- Retrieval chart: **Told us ... Made us wonder ...**  
Label a sheet of chart paper with the heading: God's living word. Then label two columns underneath the heading: *Told us ... Made us wonder ...* Work in groups to complete the chart, listing main points from the reading under *Told us ...* and the things that are generating thinking and questions under *Made us wonder ...* Share with the whole group.



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God's living word encounter

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## Gathering pace

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### Part 2: Short Trails

Explore God's living word individually through any one of the Short Trails available online at [www.lutheran.edu.au](http://www.lutheran.edu.au) login to the member area and select *Resources/publications* then *Pathways* then **TRIAL MATERIALS ONLY Pathways: theological focus**.

Art

Music

Puzzle

Active

SMS

Reading

Bring your responses and/or recorded work back to the discussion group.



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God's living word encounter

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## Multiple views

### Whole group approach

Agree by consensus on a list of questions you wish to discuss, including questions that have arisen as a result of your reading and engagement with *Short Trails*.

Use *Carousel Brainstorming* discussion strategy – write each question on a large piece of chart paper. Place chart papers strategically around the room. In small teams move from chart to chart and spend a set amount of time brainstorming possible responses to each question.

Regroup and review each chart.

Refer to *Responding to issues relating to the Bible in Lutheran schools in Participant theological notes* as necessary.



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God's living word encounter

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## Multiple views

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### Small group approach

Form groups of four to eight people. Each group chooses a question on which to focus. This could also be a question that has arisen as a result of your reading and engagement with *Short Trails*.

Use *Snowballing* discussion strategy – record as many ideas as possible around that focus question as follows:

- individuals start by reflecting briefly and writing three or four responses
- pairs are formed and ideas combined
- pairs join into fours with all discrete ideas being recorded, then,
- groups of eight share their responses and write these on chart paper.

Each group of eight shares their thoughts with the whole group.

Refer to *Responding to issues relating to the Bible in Lutheran schools in Participant theological notes* as necessary.



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God's living word encounter

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## In a quiet place



Find a quiet spot where you can be comfortable  
while you respond to the prompts on the  
*Handout: Reflect and respond*



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