

EVEN  
MORE

BOUNDLESS

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Supplemental  
Resources for  
the 2022 ELCA  
Youth Gathering

## Unit 1

We recommend that you set up additional time to take on this project rather than fitting it into the normal curriculum. Use this as a follow up, or however you like!

# Service Learning: Using Person-First Language

Person-first Language strives to make clear that a person is not defined by their diagnosis or disability and not identified by a diagnosis or disability in a negative way. The ELCA Disability Ministries Advisory Team and Coordinator for Disability Ministries, Carol A. Johnson of the



Domestic Mission unit of the ELCA Churchwide Office has prepared an **excellent introduction** to Person-first Language and its use in the church. There is also a nice **blog post** to help get you started.



### What does Person-first Language have to do with **Boundless Love**?

When Paul proclaims in Ephesians 3 that he wants us to know all about Christ's love, we could also swap in the word "feel" for "know." People feel and know that they are loved in a lot of different ways. A church communicates to people how much they are loved in a lot of different ways. Using preferred pronouns is essential for helping people know and feel God's love, but they aren't the only words we identify people with. A church refers to and identifies people in prayers, newsletters, emails, and much more and can sometimes fall into a habit of using language that does not help people feel or know that they are loved. Person-first language is all about sharing God's boundless love.

### Here are some potential steps for this service learning project:

- 1) Inform your church leadership that the youth will be learning about Person-first Language and how it might be used at church, and invite the leaders to join in.
- 2) Dedicate time to reading about, learning about, and practicing Person-first Language.
- 3) Empower your youth to brainstorm church language that should be Person-first Language:
  - a. Consider all the prayers used at worship services.
  - b. Consider language used for a "Prayer Chain."

- c. Consider language used for newsletters.
- d. Consider language used in emails and text messages.
- 4) Craft new Person-first Language wherever needed (see examples below).
- 5) Present the new Person-first Language to your worship planners, staff members, or anyone else who should see what your youth have come up with.
- 6) In any communications to the whole congregation about an integration of Person-first Language, stress the work that the youth have done and even use testimony from the youth about what the new language and the process of writing it has meant to them.

### **Who should be helping to lead this project?**

Your youth are your best leaders! Apart from youth, you should consider inviting someone at your church who is representative of people who live with a disability or illness, a pastor, your worship planning committee chair, and the person who prepares your church bulletins.

### **How to get church leaders to say "Yes!" to the youth and to this project?**

Ask your leadership if it is worthwhile for your church to be a place where ALL people are welcome. Talk about whether the time spent on this project is worth even just one person feeling that the church has seen them and appreciates them. Ask the leadership if it is worthwhile for the youth to feel like they have been seen, heard, and can make a difference. It might be helpful to imagine how you would say yes to this project; something like, "Yes, but it will take some time and effort and we may have to convince some people so I'll need your help to get this project going, but it will all be worth it to ensure that everyone in our church is treated like they are a person first."

### **Here are some Person-first Language transition examples:**

**Before:** "Today we pray for the sick and homebound."

**After:** "Today we pray for people who live with an illness and people who worship from home."

**Before:** "This week we are adding Jerome who is going blind and Nancy who is going deaf to our prayer chain."

**After:** "This week our prayer chain will also include Jerome as he adjust to life with blindness and Nancy as she adjusts to life with deafness."

**Before:** "On November 22<sup>nd</sup> our church will be creating 'thinking of you' cards for all our shut-ins."

**After:** "On November 22<sup>nd</sup> our church will be creating 'thinking of you' cards for members who worship and serve God from home."

**Before:** "Christ Lutheran Church offers a handicap ramp for all the disabled."

**After:** "Christ Lutheran Church offers a ramp entrance to everyone, including those who live with a disability."