

Reformation Day (Years A, B, C)

On Reformation Day the church honours Martin Luther and other reformers of the sixteenth century, and reformers of every age. Luther's teachings focused on the promises of scripture, emphasizing that the Spirit works in our hearts to speak God's word to us and that we receive God's grace through our faith in Christ. This is the truth that makes us free. Our life in the Body of Christ is shaped by this gift of freedom.

Focus Scripture: John 8:31–36

Most scholars believe that the gospel of John was written around 85–90 CE. Jesus' identity and teachings are the priorities in this gospel. John draws us into the new life and understanding of God's purpose that Jesus makes possible.

Reflected in the focus reading today is the struggle within the early church between Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah and those who did not. This division was probably not as sharp in Jesus' time as the words in John might lead us to believe. When the gospel of John refers to "Jews," it usually is speaking of Jewish religious leaders. It may be helpful to think of the dialogue in John between Jesus and the Jews as a challenging discussion among "family members" who are experiencing a strained relationship.

Verse 30 is a springboard into the focus verses. Jesus has been teaching, and verse 30 reports: "As he was saying these things, many believed in him." Jesus' words to these new believers begin in verse 31.

Living in Jesus' way leads to truth, which in turn leads to freedom. The Jews are puzzled by Jesus' teaching and claim that because they are descendants of Abraham, they are already free. They claim they have never been slaves, neglecting to recall the time of slavery in Egypt or the Babylonian exile.

In John, the writer uses the phrase "very truly I tell you" (v. 34) to signal that a new teaching is to follow. In verses 34–36, Jesus addresses the group's misunderstanding of freedom with the new teaching that everyone who sins is not free and is a slave to sin. Jesus teaches that slavery is not limited to an economic reality, but also is an inward state of being. Even those who claim freedom through Abraham are not as free as they think.

Through Jesus, the Son, we are given a permanent place in the house of God. True freedom comes through Jesus the Christ, not any human ancestor. True freedom comes not from one's heritage, but as a gift from God. Truth for the Jews involved their identity in Abraham; Jesus' truth involves identity in God.

The leaders of the Reformation emphasized the gospel teaching that true freedom is not related to ethnic distinctions or social class. Only Jesus the Christ can free us from slavery to sin, and does so through the truth of the gospel.

Martin Luther felt that the heart of gospel truth is summed up in **Romans 3:19–28**. All people fall short in their relationship with God, but God offers forgiveness of sins through Christ. We are justified – put right with God – by the gift of God's grace, through faith in Christ.

The Hebrew exiles in Babylon blamed the slavery of exile on their ancestors who had disregarded God's law. In **Jeremiah 31:31–34**, the prophet envisions a future time when the ability to know God and God's truth will be a gift from God, written on each heart.

Psalm 46 is the inspiration behind Luther's classic Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The words of the psalmist, and the words of Luther, call disciples to place their hope in God alone.

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Scripture calls us to live with God's law on our hearts, to let our faith determine how we act. Jesus invites us to open our hearts to receive God's gifts of grace and salvation – to claim our freedom in Christ. What in the church today needs to be reformed by God's grace? What might you and your church do differently through the reforming, restoring power of the Holy Spirit?



Focus Scripture
John 8:31–36

Additional Scriptures
Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19–28

**Gracious God,
write your law on
our hearts and
let your word of
grace dwell in us
so that no matter
where we are, we
may know we are
forgiven and free.
Amen.**

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Just like Christmas and Easter, Reformation Day comes around year after year. And like all good stories, the story of Martin Luther's faithfulness stands the test of time. The story of this faith hero is an important story to tell each year. And with each hearing, children can find something different that grabs their attention. Several of the Respond zone activities focus on Martin Luther's crest. Older children can come to an understanding of the symbolism in it. Younger children will not find this information as compelling, but can enjoy creating it in various ways.

The session materials will use the focus scripture, John 8:31–36, with the theme of the

search for truth and finding freedom, as an entry point into the story of Martin Luther. Luther believed strongly that people needed to read and study the Bible for themselves. The children in your group may find it hard to imagine a time when people did not own their own Bibles or read them whenever they wanted. They will have an opportunity to learn how Martin Luther, through his desire to know as much about God as he could discover through reading and studying the Bible, made such a difference to the Christian way. Pray that the children will find a role model in this important figure in church history and be inspired to continue to study the Bible as Luther did.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on the focus scripture, John 8:31–36, and biblical background material (p. 1).
- ❑ Prepare a worship table with *red fabric*, *white pillar candle*, and *Bible* with a bookmark placed at John 8.
- ❑ Bring *candlesnuffer* and *matches*.
- ❑ Bring *CD player*, if needed.
- ❑ Decorate the room with *red items* (such as streamers, paper hearts, balloons).

Gather

- ❑ Bring song "Circle Song" (#11 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) or "We Thank You, God" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 9*); both recordings also available as *Seasons mp3 downloads*.

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell story from *resource sheet "Meet Martin Luther"* (p. 6) or invite a guest to tell the story.
- ❑ For puppet group, bring *lunch-sized paper bags*, *white and brown construction paper*, *yarn*, *glue sticks*, and *felt markers*.
- ❑ For Bible study group, bring *directions* (see session).

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and gather or make the materials for the zones selected.

- ❑ **Art zone:** *mural paper*, *coloured pencils or markers*, *copies of resource sheet "A Mural about Martin Luther"*
- ❑ **Cooperation zone:** *poster board*, *white or tan felt or paper*; *blue, black, red, white, and gold felt or paper*, *scissors*, *glue sticks*; use photocopier to make a *large copy of the seal* on resource sheet "Martin Luther's Crest."
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *paper*; *coloured pencils, crayons, or felt markers*; *make a copy of directions* (see session)
- ❑ **Music zone:** song "Don't Be Afraid" (#2 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) and/or "Stand, O Stand Firm" (#18 on the *Seasons Music CD, volume 8*); both recordings also available as *Seasons mp3 downloads*; *rhythm instruments* (optional)
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *white paper*, *coloured pencils or markers*, *scissors*, *glue sticks*, *copies of resource sheet "Martin Luther's Crest"*

Bless

- ❑ Bring song "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) or "Following Where Jesus Leads" (#14 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 8*). All recordings also available as *Seasons mp3 downloads*.



Reformation Day (Years A, B, C)

Scripture

John 8:31–36

FOCUS To find a model of faithfulness in Martin Luther.

Gather

Welcome the children and invite them to notice the red decorations. Explain that red is a colour that is used for special days in the church year and today we are celebrating Reformation Day. It is a day when we remember Martin Luther, who brought the good news of the Bible to many people.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Invite a volunteer to light the Christ candle.

Sing or listen to the song “Circle Song” (*volume 7*) or “We Thank You God” (*volume 9*).

Pray the following prayer, inviting children to repeat each line after you.

God of life,
God of wisdom,
God of friendship,
thank you for your love. Amen.

Connect with the focus

Children today find their heroes and role models in many arenas from popular music to sports to adults in their lives. Find out about the people the children in the group admire by asking the following questions:

- **What people do you admire or look up to?**
- **What do you admire about these people?**

Explain that the story today is about a person who has been admired by church people for many years.

Engage

Prepare for the story

On Reformation Day we celebrate changes that took place in the Christian church about 500 years ago and we remember people like Martin Luther who helped make those changes possible. Jesus taught about God’s way and about a world built on truth and freedom. Read the words of Jesus in **John 8:31–32**, part of today’s reading from the Bible. Christians have always searched for God’s truth. Martin Luther’s search for God’s truth brought him into many conflicts and difficulties.

The story of Martin Luther

Tell the story of Martin Luther using the resource sheet “Meet Martin Luther.” Following the story, ask:

- **What about the life of Martin Luther is most interesting to you?**
- **What does Martin Luther’s life teach you about being faithful to God?**

Explore the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain

the two options and have each child select one.

Puppet group To aid in telling the story of Martin Luther, this group will make puppets. The body of the puppet is a lunch-sized paper bag. Cut circles of white paper (12 cm/5 in) for the head and draw in faces and add a fringe of yarn hair. Glue faces to the paper bags, as shown in the illustration. Cut a robe shape from brown paper and glue to the paper bag, winding a length of yarn around the middle to make a belt. Invite the children to use their puppets to introduce Martin Luther, saying something about what he did and said.



Bible study group This group will explore **John 8:31–32** as Luther might have done, working individually or in pairs or groups. Provide Bibles and these directions, adapting the questions to fit the translations used:

1 Find John 8 in the Bible. This is in the gospel of John, near the beginning of the New Testament.

2 When Martin Luther studied the Bible, he read one or two verses and thought about them a long time. Read John 8:31–32.

3 Think about or talk together about these questions:

■ **Who do you think were the Jews who had believed in Jesus?**

■ **How can we be disciples of Jesus?**

■ **What is the truth that Jesus taught?**

■ **How will Jesus' truth make us free?**

There are many ways to think about these questions. Luther never stopped asking questions of the Bible.

The Bible story and us

Invite children to gather together as a whole group again. Jesus' message about God's love was important for Martin Luther and is important for us today too.

■ **What do you think Martin Luther might say to us to help us to live in God's way?**

Respond

Invite the children to choose a zone and work with the materials there.

□ **Art zone: Mural panels** Invite children to create a mural illustrating the story of Martin Luther. Read the information about Martin Luther on the resource sheet, "A Mural about Martin Luther," review instructions for making the mural, and distribute supplies. If there isn't time to make all four panels, the children could work together to make panel C.



□ **Cooperation zone: Poster** To keep the spirit of Reformation Day alive for the group, have them make a poster of Martin Luther's crest to display in the learning area. Review information about the crest on the resource sheet "Martin Luther's Crest" with the whole group, explaining the significance of each part and colour. Display the pattern of the crest and invite children to work in groups to make each section, using the materials provided. Glue the pieces on a sheet of poster board to make the crest. Display it where the children will see it each week.

□ **Quiet zone: Prayers** Jesus' words and the story of Martin Luther remind us of all that we have to be thankful for. Jesus and Martin spent time with God in prayer, seeking God's will and praising God. Provide supplies and review directions for this activity:

1 Recall Jesus' words about God's truth and being free. Think about the story of Martin Luther.

2 Read this prayer. Copy it on a sheet of paper.

Thank you, God, for the food.
Thank you, God, for our family.
Thank you, God, for our church.
Thank you, God, for _____.
Amen.

3 Add more sentences of thanks to God.

4 Decorate the page.

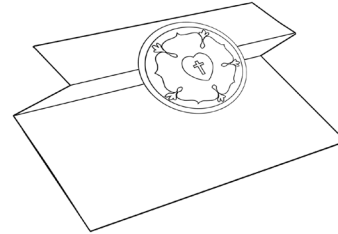
5 Quietly pray the prayer you have written.

6 Take your prayer home to pray during the week.

□ **Music zone: Sing for freedom** The songs "Don't Be Afraid" (#2 on the *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) and "Stand, O Stand Firm" (#18 on the *Seasons Music CD, volume 8*) echo the message of Jesus' words in John 8 and other important words that Martin Luther read in the Bible. Choose one of these songs to teach to the children, phrase by phrase. Sing it several times and they will have it within them. Provide rhythm instruments, if desired, for the children to accompany their singing.

- ❑ **Outreach zone: Reformation Day cards** Special days are often noted by sending greetings to friends. Provide paper and copies of the resource sheet "Martin Luther's Crest." Show children how to fold their papers in half cross-wise; then, with the fold at the top, fold the top half of the paper in half (half of the top page and half of the bottom page should be showing). Have each person cut out a crest, colour it, and glue the crest to the middle of the top page so half of the crest is glued to the top page and the rest covers part of the bottom page, being

careful that the glue does not get on the bottom page. Invite the children to add a Reformation Day greeting to the inside of the card and give the card to a family member or friend.



Bless

Gather Bring the group together around the worship table and invite a volunteer to light the Christ candle again.

Sing or listen to the song "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD, volume 7*) or "Following Where Jesus Leads" (#14 on the *Seasons Music CD, volume 8*).

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

Thank you, God, for the people who teach us about the Bible
and about Jesus' stories and teachings,
and for all the people who show us how to
live in your way.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Blessing Say to each child, "(Child's name), go and share God's love with others."

Reflect

Which children knew or remembered something about Martin Luther? What did the children seem to take from the story of this faith hero? How has

the story of Luther encouraged you to discover more about him, about the Reformation, or about the Bible?



Meet Martin Luther

Read
the story
several times
so you can
tell it in your
own words as
though you
were telling
a family
story.

A long, long time ago in a little town in Germany lived a boy – Martin Luther. When he was 17, his father sent Martin to the university to study law. But Martin was not interested in law, Martin wanted to know more about God. So Martin left the law school and entered a monastery to become a priest. At the monastery with many other men who wanted to know more about God, Martin Luther was able to read a Bible for the first time. Bibles were rare and so valuable that many churches chained them to the pulpit.

At the monastery, Martin studied the Bible and prayed to God. The more he read the Bible, the more Martin realized that lots of people loved God, but they did not know all the wonderful and good things God wanted for them. Martin dreamed of a time when all the people could read the Bible like he did so they would know about God's gift of Jesus for everyone. What a dream! Most people could not read, and the Bibles were written in languages that those who could read couldn't understand.

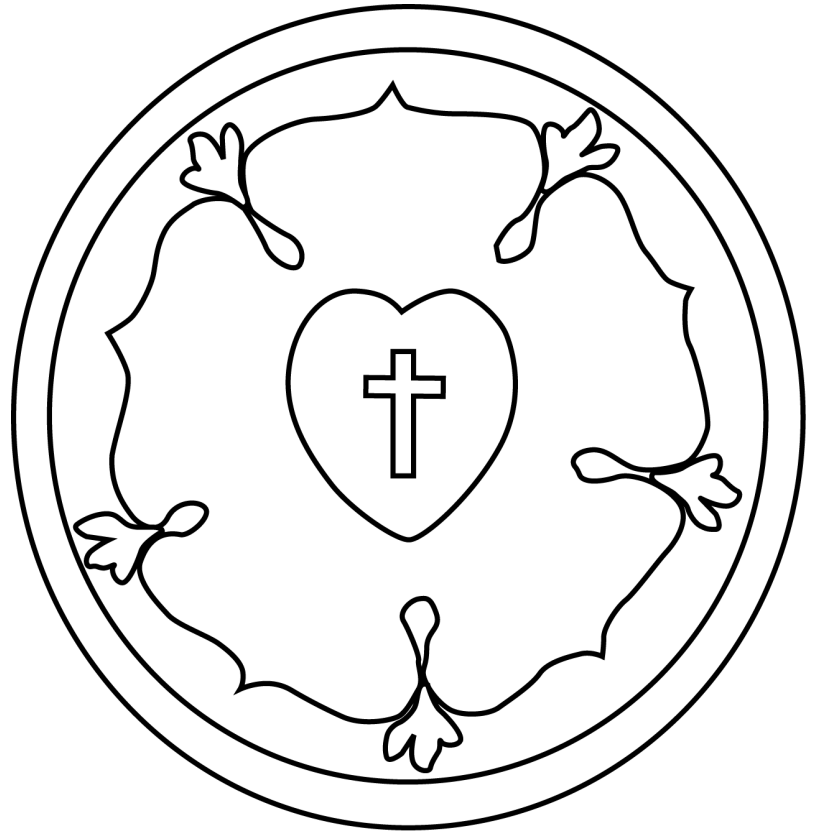
Martin had another idea. He would translate the Bible into German so the people in his country could read about God's love for themselves. He wrote other books too, books to help people understand the Bible and books to help parents teach their children about God's love.

The more Martin studied and prayed, the more he realized that some things were happening in the church that didn't fit with what he was learning about God's love. Martin made a list of those things. One day in October, about 500 years ago, Martin nailed this list of 95 things to the church door, where public notices were placed.

Some people tried to talk him out of what he said, but Martin said, "No." Martin Luther wanted everyone to know the truth about God's love and forgiveness. He was serious; because he could not change his mind, the church said Martin was no longer welcome to be part of it. That didn't stop Martin either. He kept right on writing books and hymns, teaching, and learning more about Jesus and God's love for us. Some people agreed with Martin and wanted to change some of what was taught in the church. They started new Christian churches. One of these is the Lutheran church, even though Martin Luther did not want it named after him.



Martin Luther's Crest



Black cross:

Jesus died on the cross, but came back to the disciples on Easter.

Red heart:

God loves us.

White rose:

We can trust in Jesus to show us God's way.

Green leaves:

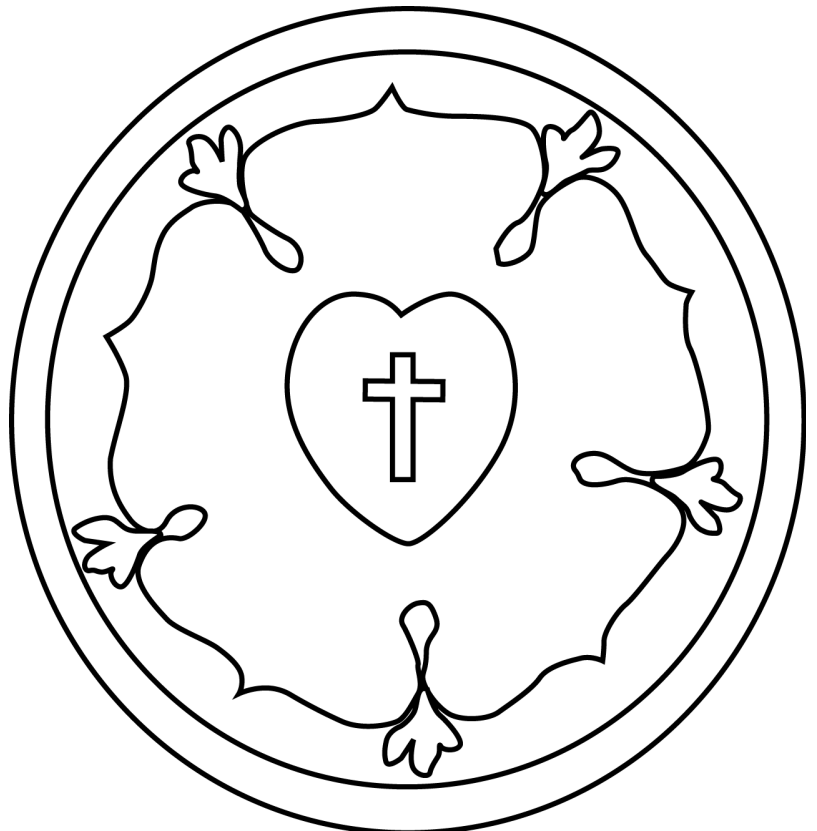
God is always with us.

Blue background:

The blue reminds us of heavenly joy.

Gold ring:

God's love for us will never end.





A Mural about Martin Luther

Directions

- 1 Read the four blocks of text about Martin Luther to the children.
- 2 Form four teams, which can be one or more children. Assign a block of text to each team.
- 3 Give each team its block of text, a large sheet of mural paper, pencils, and markers.
- 4 Help teams who are unsure how to proceed. Often they need help in determining the scene to illustrate.

A Martin Luther lived in Germany over 500 years ago. Martin loved God and loved the church. Even as a child, Martin tried to follow God's way. Martin worried because he felt that he was not following God.

B In those days, some people believed that if you did something wrong, you could pay money to the church and you would be forgiven. When Martin Luther was a young man, he spent many hours studying the Bible. Martin read about God's forgiveness in the gospel of John. The gospel said that forgiveness was free if you believed in God. What a wonderful gift!

C The more Martin Luther thought about what he read in the Bible, the more upset he became with the church. Finally, he wrote down 95 things he thought were wrong about the church. He nailed this list to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, so others could read it. Church leaders argued with Martin, but they could not convince Martin to change his mind. Martin Luther wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible and know the truth of God's love and forgiveness.

D As time went on, other people agreed with Martin Luther. New churches began that encouraged people to read and study the Bible to learn about God's love and forgiveness. Whenever we hear or read God's word from the Bible, we can remember that Martin Luther discovered that we cannot buy God's love and forgiveness. It is ours because of Jesus.