



Those of you who called into our daily phone devotion Warmline this week, heard entries from various leaders of ELCA Schools and Learning Centers, part of our wider church's ministry from pre-school through high school youth around the country, including over 1,300 such locations serving nearly 150,000 students. Every year, the national organization puts together their own devotion to share with their staff especially, but is also made available for the general public on their website; and so various teachers and administrators and pastors and other leaders

will focus on a text for one of the Sundays for the upcoming school year. So, of course, today, the attention turns to the Gospel we just heard. And this particular devotion is written by Pastor Amy Oehlschlager, who serves Hope Lutheran Church and Preschool in St. Charles, Missouri.

*Peter is quick to act. Peter is brave. Peter steps out of the boat even though he is afraid. One of my mantras in life is "feel the fear and do it anyway." I'm afraid to drive in very large cities, but I want to go on adventures—so I feel the fear and do it anyway.*

*I remind myself when I set out to drive somewhere new: "I did this before. I have confidence in myself and in God. I can do it again." "Take heart, have no fear," Jesus says. Take heart. Be encouraged by Jesus' presence, because Jesus loves us and wants us to feel empowered by God's presence next to us and in us. Jesus is all-powerful and Jesus will help us through our fears. Jesus calms my fears. I know God and know I can trust in God. We can trust in the Lord.*

All well and good from Pastor Amy Oelschager, but the problem with these devotions, or if you use our *Christ in Our Home* booklet, or whatever the case may be, you only have so much space to dive into rather holy matters. You've got to be quick and to the point, leaving next to no room whatsoever for writers to venture into the "yes...but," scenarios, and if the learning environments can teach us anything from preschool through even college and graduate school and doctoral programs, the "yes...but's" are absolutely endless for the infinite array of children's personalities and cognitive styles and home environments and all-around life stories and even so much about the child that they are still figuring out about themselves.

So, there is certainly some validity to "face the fear and do it anyway," but that is not always going to work for the youngest and even most experienced of life. And sometimes the more experienced of us will reel on the spoiled-ness of youth nowadays with technology and access to much more worldly goods than for the generations past, and sometimes we will not quite allow the possibility of the fears youth still face; some fears they may not always be comfortable sharing with us. And not just with preparing for quizzes and tests or turning well-thought-out homework assignments in on time. Fears about their friends, and whether some will be lost if they do this or that that will not be deemed popular by the rest, and no longer is the subtle or outward treatment reserved for the hallways or the classrooms, but the digital sphere remains a needed, and not going away, and still can be rather scary place. Fears about home that most outside don't know about. Fears put on by family over whether the child can do well enough on fields and courts or other extra-curricular activities, appearing from supposedly more mature adult figures on the sidelines as if the fate of their entire future depends on how well their young dependent does. Fears they are, sometimes, expected to just "feel it and do it anyway," because they're gonna have to do exactly that for the supposedly more mature adult years of life.

"Yes, but," I like to think the same Jesus, who said "Take heart, it is I," will be the same one to tell the youngest and oftentimes most vulnerable of life, to tell them, "It is okay to be scared." And I hope the church can rise on their respective living playing fields and insist that they are more than

welcomed to have their fears, and their own life stories impacting their reaction and how they wish to best traverse sometimes rather choppy growing-up waters, to say the least; but what's not okay is for them to have to face that terrain alone. I like to think Jesus by no means insists fear be wiped out completely. Jesus knows us too well to consider that, but that our Lord hopes fear will not overpower the rest of our being: that it will not limit the gifts and talents of the youngest of life from being magnified not just inside classrooms and on courts or in music halls, but brought to further life for a friend who's facing their own uphill to climb, or for a family member who needs a dose of contagious hope. To not allow fear to overtake the absolutely precious children of God in the vast, vast array for which they come into our midst.

Oddly enough, part of The Rev. Amy Oelschlager's ministry experience was serving as the campus pastor at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, a time when her office would open for students who just needed to come by and have a safe space to openly share their fears: everything from roommate complications to tragic deaths of loved ones from back home. Each time in that sacred space was a reminder of the Risen Christ who rose to not wipe out our fear entirely from our earthly journey, but to insist that he would not stay in the grave to allow us to face any of it on our own, because Jesus cherishes us all far too much to leave us alone, including the youngest, precious children of God. May the God who adores them, be with them this year and all their days with the same love that took on sin and death and rose victorious for them and for us all. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

*To view the 2026-2027 "Imagine More" devotion from the ELCA Schools and Learning Centers, please visit:*

<https://elcaschools.org/2026-27-imagine-more/>