



We are Church Together. . .
the Nebraska Synod ELCA

Resource Materials for Lent 2019



INTRODUCTION

We are Church Together

Introduction

We have the Spirit, yes we do! We have the Spirit, how about you?

This play on words with the popular cheer reminds us of our 2019 Lenten Theme, **We are Church Together**. The Holy Spirit uses us all in ways we haven't dreamed or imagined to be the **Church Together**.

Since one of the goals of the Nebraska Strategic Mission and Vision plan was to unite congregations across the Nebraska Synod in common conversation during Lent 2019, you are receiving this resource, **We are Church Together**.

A group of volunteer curriculum writers have written this five-week Lenten resource, along with a daily Lenten devotional. It is our hope that you find these resources helpful in your Lenten journey as **We are Church Together**.

Week 1	Gathered By the Holy Spirit
Week 2	Shaped By Word and Sacrament
Week 3	Diversity and Challenges
Week 4	Joys and Burdens
Week 5	We Are Connected

Here are some ways you may choose to use this resource:

- Use the five themes for a preaching series during Lenten worship
- Use the hymns and scripture suggestions each week
- Use the "Questions" to help guide your discussion for education and preaching
- Use the skits in worship or any way helpful for your particular setting

In the Spirit,

We are Church Together Curriculum Team

Pastor Martha Atkins, Niobrara Lutheran, Niobrara

Melvin Blair, First Lutheran, Omaha

Miriam Blair, First Lutheran, Omaha

Pastor Baron Cole, Zion Lutheran, Franklin

Pastor Nancy Cole, Zion Lutheran, Franklin

Pastor James Fruehling, Mosaic

Pastor Peggy Hall, Immanuel

Pastor Sheryl Kester Beyer, Calvary Lutheran, Scottsbluff

Pastor Kathryn Montira, St. Peter's Lutheran, Pender

Pastor Robert Schlismann, St. Luke Lutheran, Stanton

Pastor Kristen Van Stee, Nebraska Synod & Our Saviors, Wayne

Pastor Heidi Wallace, Bethany Lutheran, Lyons



GATHERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Week 1

Week 1

Gathered by the Holy Spirit

Big Questions:

The Church celebrates the Festival of Pentecost as the fulfillment and conclusion of the Easter season. The name *Pentecost*, means “the fiftieth day,” originally referred to the Jewish Festival of Weeks, the time of thanksgiving for first-fruits and reaping of the harvest. The Christian Church retained the name to mark the completion of the 50-day period after Easter—and the first in-gathering of believers into the Church. On Pentecost, Christians commemorate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Through the Gospel and the Sacraments, the Spirit nourishes, preserves, and increases the Church and its members. In his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, Martin Luther details the Spirit’s work:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

Q: How might you re-write the Third Article of the Creed using your own words?

Q: How might that change the meaning of the creed for you?

Q: How do you relate to Martin Luther’s explanation?

Hymn Suggestions:

LBW #475 / ELW #404 Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove

LBW #486 / ELW #800 Spirit of God Descend Upon My Heart

LBW #257 / ELW #398 Holy Spirit, Truth Divine

Opening Prayer:

O Gracious Spirit, come into our hearts. Your kindness and love cause the light of the gospel to shine within us. We know all thoughts of peace and truth come from you and that your generous goodness comes new to us each day. Help us to grow in faith, so we may share your love and truth and peace with all others. Amen.



GATHERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Week 1

Scripture:

Acts 2:1-4

Q: What is your first impression of this reading?

Q: How would you feel if you were suddenly able to speak a new language?

John 14:16-17, 25-26

Q: How do you know the Advocate is with you?

Q: What does it mean to have the Advocate with you at all times?

Background Information:

COMMUNITY - The Holy Spirit is in our midst whenever and wherever we choose to gather, whether it be in a House of Worship or at a dining room table. Any place we bring people together for the purposes of Christ-centered community the Holy Spirit is there. Were you to survey congregants and ask the question, "why do you attend worship service?" the answers would vary. Some might say, "to catch up with old friends", others "for support by surrounding myself with like-minded people", truth be told, these reasons and the hundreds of others you might hear can be done at the local park or while volunteering with any number of civic organizations. What makes Christians different is simply the person of Jesus Christ. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20 RSV) That's what distinguishes the church from other gatherings or clubs. When people are gathered in the name of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit is present. It is the Holy Spirit that draws us together.

The Holy Spirit is active in the work of the church. It is the Holy Spirit who makes Christ present when partaking in the Lord's Supper. When we fully understand that the Church and local congregation are assembled by the Holy Spirit, pastors and lay people alike would understand that everyone has a "calling." The Holy Spirit active in the apostles on Pentecost is the same Spirit who works in believers today.

NATION - The Church is where people go to learn how to treat their neighbors. God's plan for salvation is a never ending action. Those devoted to the faith will respond to the needs of those around them with joy and generosity. As evidenced in the book of Acts, "and the Lord added to their number day by day." The appeal of Christian community attracted people. Salvation is not a destination, it is a journey, and we are continually being saved.

The Spirit works among people of every nation, culture and language. The Holy Spirit's activity is creative and powerful! After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned His disciples, sending them out to "... make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)



GATHERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Week 1

WORLD - The Holy Spirit was present at the creation of the world and is active in the world today. The Holy Spirit was sent by God the Father, introduced by His Son, Jesus Christ, and continues the Father's work on earth. Christ didn't expect the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit and keep it to themselves like a well-kept secret. They were to use this gift to empower them to be "... witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8 RSV) Under the Spirit's guidance, grace and mercy are bestowed upon all.

When we struggle with fear and doubt, the Holy Spirit provides comfort and hope. The Holy Spirit works in the world through means of grace and the forgiveness of sins. The Spirit gives us joy when there is grief and peace when there is fear.

Discussion Questions:

Q: How is the Holy Spirit at work in your community?

Q: What do you feel "called" to do?

Q: What attracts people to your church?

Q: When have you witnessed the Holy Spirit's creativity or power?

Q: How do you struggle with fear and doubt?

Q: What gifts do you possess that enable you to be a witness to others?

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we pray that the Holy Spirit moves more boldly in our lives. Breathe new life into us, our community and our church. Help us to share this new life in what we do and say. Help us to be renewed and refreshed when we are torn down and tired. You have called us by your Spirit and entrusted us to spread the Good News. Guide and strengthen us through the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For Further Reading:

<https://oca.org/the-hub/gathered-in-community/gathered-in-community>

<https://confessingevangelical.wordpress.com/2008/05/02/the-spirit-and-the-confessions/>

<https://blogs.lcms.org/2008/the-gift-of-the-holy-spirit-5-2008>



SHAPED BY WORD & SACRAMENT

Week 2

Week 2

Shaped by Word & Sacrament

Big Questions to Consider:

A. Have the following ever been discussed/disagreed upon in your congregation concerning Communion:

1. How often should we have Communion?
2. How old should a person be to receive Communion?
3. Should a person be confirmed before receiving Communion?
4. Is there a preferred way to receive Communion: intinction (dipping the bread into a common cup/chalice), use individual cups, or drink from a common cup?
5. Should a person believe as we do in order to receive Communion?
 - a. What is it that we believe about Communion?
6. Should someone ever not receive (or be turned away from) Communion?

B. Have the following ever been discussed/disagreed upon in your congregation concerning Baptism?

1. When should someone be baptized: as a baby, child, youth, adult? Why?
2. How much water should be used: sprinkling, pouring, immersion?
3. What about baptism from another denomination, and/or a non-trinitarian church?
4. What if a person wants to be re-baptized? (e.g., as a sign of 'recommitment' to God?)
5. Is water baptism required for salvation?
6. If a baby should die without being baptized, what then?

Hymn Suggestions:

I Am the Bread of Life

ELW #485

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

ELW #815

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, you gave your Son to the world to live and die for us, so that our lives will not be in vain and our deaths will not be eternal. We thank you for Jesus' sacrifice for us; and may we walk with Christ together in this Lenten season, as empowered by your Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Scriptures:

Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20 – these are parallel accounts of the Lord's Supper. (Matthew's Gospel is the only apostolic witness; Mark and Luke were not apostles.) See also 1 Corinthians 11:23-29



SHAPED BY WORD & SACRAMENT

Week 2

Background Information:

The sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion/the Eucharist were as fundamental for Martin Luther as they are for Christians today. One reason for this ‘together’ aspect that includes these sacraments is the recovered and renewed emphasis that Luther put upon them.

Luther linked two qualities that had been dislodged and separated over previous centuries: Word and Sacrament together. This involved two things:

1. the action/ceremonial of baptism (water) and communion (bread and wine), which are
2. united with clearly understood, direct language/words from holy scripture, the Bible.

Baptism and Communion were not just ceremonial mumbo-jumbo in a language that few understood (Latin), with the pastor/priest as a shaman/sorcerer mysteriously conjuring up a link, a portal or passage to God’s grace through prescribed incantations and rituals. Instead, the sacraments used the very words of Christ with the appropriate physical elements – water, bread, wine – to communicate, convey and authenticate the grace and blessing of God through the power and instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.

This was for the benefit and application to those present in the assembly/congregation. Through Word (in the ‘vernacular,’ a language clearly understood by the worshipping people) and Sacrament together we collectively become the joyful recipients of God’s mercy and grace through the nurturing power and presence of the Holy Spirit. This is a way of seeing and being the ‘Church (united) Together,’ in our ‘sacrifice of praise’ as we are ‘shaped by the Word and Sacrament.’

Luther did not invent the understanding of Word and Sacrament being linked together but he restored the unity of Word and Sacrament when observing Baptism and Communion. The unity and bond of Word with Sacrament is one of the elements of the Lutheran Reformation that contributes to a richer understanding for the Church as a whole.

A Lenten Devotion:

1 Corinthians 11:23-28

The following passage is one that Christians should be familiar with since it is used on occasions when we celebrate Holy Communion:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way he took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26



SHAPED BY WORD & SACRAMENT

Week 2

These are the “Words of Institution,” instructions the Apostle Paul received directly from the Resurrected/Ascended Christ concerning Holy Communion. This synopsis of the Last Supper relates to the Gospel accounts. (Matt.26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20)

The Church for almost 2,000 years has followed this pattern in 1 Corinthians 11 in celebrating Communion. In this account of Communion in 1 Corinthians 11, God directly showed Paul the “right” way to observe and administer Communion, rather than following the practice of the Corinthian Church of a social feast where the inequality between the “haves” and “have-nots” were plainly evident. Less well-known are the following verses:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:27-28)

With more churches recovering and following the ancient Christian practice of weekly Communion, a concern is that observing Communion this often might reduce it to an unthinking, automatic ritual. Yet a Sunday service normally has other regular elements: a sermon, readings, confession, prayers, affirmations, hymns/songs. The observance of Holy Communion should be the culmination of Sunday worship services.

Paul’s admonition in verses 27-29 exhorts people to prayerfully examine themselves before receiving the Sacrament. Certainly no one (by God’s standard) is objectively “worthy” to partake of Communion on their own merit. No one deserves to. It is all a matter of God’s grace. In our preparation through reflection and repentance, with God’s love, favor, mercy and forgiveness, conveyed to us through Communion (and Baptism), we live in God’s embrace.

Further Questions for Discussion:

1. As twenty-first Century Christians in a balkanized, fragmented world and society, what can unite us?
2. As a denomination, can a diverse church with many ministries and perspectives be ‘together’ in meaningful ways that reach beyond the theoretical and ideal?
3. How does this affect us as a local congregation?
4. What simple but essential acts can contribute to uniting us as a ‘church together’?

A Lenten Prayer:

Holy God, we are grateful for our walk with you this Lenten season. Help us to recover and retain a sense of mystery and wonder in the sacred occasions of the Church, chief of which is Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, which we remember in Baptism and Holy Communion. We pray with faith and love in Christ. AMEN.

Helpful background reading: John 6:35-60, *I am the bread of life.*



DIVERSITY AND CHALLENGES

Week 3

Week 3

Diversity and Challenges

Big Questions:

Have you or anyone else in your congregation disagreed about something? Maybe folks argued over the color of the carpet that was being installed in the fellowship hall. Perhaps a group of people loved contemporary Christian songs, but others lobbied for traditional hymns. Or perhaps the disagreements were larger than that, like what language the congregation uses in worship, if the congregation was ready to call a gay pastor, or how to welcome those of different cultures and ethnicities into the life of the church. The family of God is a diverse one. And while that diversity is a beautiful gift from God, enriching our lives, and making us stronger together, it also inevitably results in disagreements.

1. Have you ever disagreed with someone else in your congregation? What was the disagreement about? Was the issue ever resolved and how?
2. Does your congregation go out of its way to avoid an argument? If so, is this a healthy practice or an unhealthy practice? How can your congregation strive to embrace different points of view?

Hymn Suggestions:

ELW #641 All Are Welcome

ELW #650 / LBW #359 In Christ There is No East or West

ELW #651 Oh, Praise the Gracious Power

Opening Prayer:

Ever-loving Father, your care extends beyond the boundaries of every race and nation, to the hearts of all who live. May the walls that prejudice raises crumble under the shadow of your outstretched arm. We ask that the Holy Spirit bind us together in love, so that our differences enrich our life together rather than push us apart. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. AMEN.

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 1: 10-17

1 Corinthians 11: 17-22; 33

Questions:

1. Why does Paul, the author of this letter, sound so angry at the congregation in Corinth?
2. How does Paul suggest the Corinthians resolve their differences?
3. How do you think the Corinthians responded to Paul's criticisms?
4. Do the differences the Corinthians are wrestling with bear any resemblance to disagreements or differences you have struggled with in your congregation?



DIVERSITY AND CHALLENGES

Week 3

Background Information:

The very first Christians, Jesus' disciples and other early followers, were all Palestinian Jews, of a similar culture and language, but the good news of Jesus Christ's resurrection soon spread to other countries. Paul, in particular, was a passionate preacher to Gentile audiences. Those churches that Paul planted in cities like Corinth were cultural melting pots, including those of Jewish descent but also members who were from all sorts of different ethnicities and backgrounds. Where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, the church believes that Jesus will be present. But we the church also know from experience, that where at least two or three are gathered, diversity can become a challenge.

However, even though diversity can lead to arguments, the church also testifies to the truth that our diversity is a blessing from God. Indeed, as David Rhoades writes in his book, "Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels"

"The earliest Christian movements proclaimed the idea that "community" was not to be based on uniformity but would cut across different social and cultural locations and embrace people very different from each other. Jesus proclaimed a vision of life in the future kingdom in which people would come from east and west, north and south, to sit at the banquet table together. In different ways, the New Testament writers believed that the one creator was now providing the reconciliation that enabled early followers of Jesus eagerly to reach the diverse humanity of all creation. Early Christian communities challenged and empowered people to live by the values that would make such universalism possible—the love of enemy, the commitment to reconciliation, the refusal to dominate, the willingness to forgive, the eagerness to value the gifts of others, the offer of unconditional love, and so on. Such values fostered great variety in the shape and composition of early communities."¹

The Holy Spirit challenges the church in all times and places to recognize that our unity does not come from common cultural ties, familial ties, social status, or anything else, but comes only from Christ. "What if, like the early Christians, we assumed that there is no common ground for unity within human beings themselves and that God alone is the reality who unites us?"²

All people, all nations, all cultures, all abilities, all...coming together to live and proclaim one Gospel, Jesus Christ, crucified, died and risen to make us His own and to make us one. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The waters of baptism through which we enter into a life-long relationship of faith in God also unite us into one household of faith with an amazing variety of people from many different places, backgrounds, abilities, and approaches to life. We don't look alike, act alike, or think alike. Yet we are all one—becoming one through our "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6).

¹ Rhoades, David. *Challenge and Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels*. Fortress Press, 1996.

² Rhoades, David. *Challenge and Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels*. Fortress Press, 1996.



DIVERSITY AND CHALLENGES

Week 3

Our wondrous and rich variety is cause for rejoicing, We all come to the table with so many gifts to offer. When there is a question or problem to work through, we bring numerous perspectives and approaches from our many backgrounds and cultures to help us see in different ways, through the eyes of others. There is so much to learn from one another when we interact and share with open minds and hearts! Our music, our worship, and our ways to pray can all be greatly enriched when we receive the offerings of our international sisters and brothers. Fresh sounds and colors excite the senses and open up new avenues for us to experience God. The possibilities for growth and new ways of thinking excite and challenge us as the people of God!

Because we come from so many different places and points of view, there is always potential for conflict. This is one of the great challenges we face as a diverse people. We might inadvertently and unintentionally hurt others with our words or actions. Without sufficient thought, we may say or do something hurtful or insensitive. When that happens, we need to ask for forgiveness and seek greater understanding so that we can do better in the future. Perhaps we avoid opportunities to interact with people unlike ourselves or close our minds to differing outlooks, missing out on opportunities to learn and grow. Listening more and talking less are wonderful strategies for discovering more about the beautiful and varied Body of Christ! In The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, Lesslie Newbigin notes:

“If this biblical interpretation of the human story, with its center in the double event of Jesus’ death and resurrection, is our clue, then it will follow that we are called neither to a simple affirmation of human culture nor to a simple rejection of it. We are to cherish human culture as an area in which we live under God’s grace and are given daily new tokens of that grace. But we are called also to remember that we are part of that whole seamless texture of human culture which was shown on the day we call Good Friday to be in murderous rebellion against the grace of God. We have to say both “God accepts human culture” and also “God judges human culture.”³

Because we are a sinful people in need of Christ’s redeeming, there is no perfect culture—all are both good and flawed at the same time. We continually need to look at the ways our culture is inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and, as the people of God, be the salt and light in our world to bring about change. When we find such inconsistencies in another culture, we need to be sensitive and gentle in our listening, probing and questioning. Newbigin also notes that the only way we can overcome our culturally conditioned ways of interpreting the Gospel is to study with others whose minds have been shaped by other cultures.⁴ Coming together in this way enables us to come to grips with the radical change that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and apply it to every aspect of our individual and collective lives. Coming together as God’s great variety of people is a tremendous opportunity and challenge. May the Holy Spirit guide us into an ever greater appreciation of one another and of the many gifts God has given His Church.

³ Page 195 Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.

⁴ Pages 196-197 Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.



DIVERSITY AND CHALLENGES

Week 3

Discussion Questions:

1. The members of the original church in Corinth were most likely from different cultural backgrounds (Corinth was a port city in the Roman Empire). What is the ethnic and cultural history of your congregation? How has that heritage been a strength and how has it been a hindrance?
2. Have you ever attended worship in a congregation whose language or culture was different from your own? What was that experience like? What unique gifts do they bring to the universal church body?
3. Is there economic diversity in your congregation? How does that affect your worldview and how you view faith? How might you reach out to people in different economic circumstances?
4. How receptive is your congregation to those who are differently abled either physically or cognitively? Would your congregation welcome someone who is open about his or her struggles with mental illness? How would the norms and customs of your congregation have to change in order to welcome members of these different communities?
5. How can your congregation celebrate its unity in Christ with other Christians nearby or far away?
6. How will you react the next time you experience a disagreement with someone else in church?

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, we celebrate your presence with us in our gathering. Thank you for our fellowship in your church, the Body of Christ. You bring us together in all our variety from many different places. We celebrate our unity with one another and with you. Unite us in our love for you and our service in your world. As you have made a difference in our lives, help us to make a difference in the lives of others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





JOYS AND BURDENS

Week 4

Week 4

Joys and Burdens

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God, we live in a society that pulls people apart from one another. Yet, you have called us to live as one body, working, growing, struggling and rejoicing together. Show us how to do this. Empower us with your spirit to be living examples of the love into which you have called us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

As the Body of Christ, we are given the privilege to share in one another's burdens and joys. We are called to not just listen to each other, we are to be active in response to the burdens and joys that are shared. Many times, our response will be sharing a prayer for what has been said and at other times physical labor may be needed. It might be that a burden shared results in the need for a ramp to be added to someone's home or in the sharing of a joy, a crib may need to be put together to welcome a new life into our world. Martin Luther wrote about responding with physical labor, and how in responding, we can find joy and grow in our own faith.

"It is the part of a Christian to take care of his own body for the very purpose that, by its soundness and well-being, he may be enabled to labour, and to acquire and preserve property, for the aid of those who are in want, that thus the stronger member may serve the weaker member, and we may be children of God, thoughtful and busy one for another, bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ. Here is the truly Christian life, here is faith really working by love, when a man applies himself with joy and love to the works of that freest servitude in which he serves others voluntarily and for nought, himself abundantly satisfied in the fullness and riches of his own faith." — **Martin Luther, On Christian Liberty**

Being 'Church Together' is being together for all that life gives us, the easy and the hard, the joyous and the sorrowful. A beautiful proverb found in our Swedish heritage says it so lovely; 'A joy shared is a double joy. A sorrow shared is half a sorrow.'

Questions to consider:

What does it mean to share burdens and joys in practice?

1. What burdens do we take up for one another as an expression of our life together in Christ?
2. How do we as church, as brothers and sisters in Christ, celebrate the joys that accompany us on our faith journey?



JOYS AND BURDENS

Week 4

Hymns to consider:

Light Dawns on a Weary World	ELW #726
In the Cross of Christ I Glory	ELW #324 / LBW #104
Blest Be the Tie That Binds	ELW #656 / LBW #370

Background Discussion:

Galatians 6:2 ²*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

Accountability: We take up the burden of holding each other accountable in the conduct of our daily lives. This can include personal relationships, our devotional life, our visible conduct in the context of vocation, or any other area of life in which we might stumble or see others do so.

Do we have the courage to hold each other accountable, to speak boldly in love?

Hebrews 10:24-25 *And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Encouragement: We are responsible to encourage each other in faith, and in love and service. This can include praise for things done well, and spurring others on to develop skills and personal resources so that they might serve more effectively. We may need to seek balance between encouragement and accountability, so that neither is undercut by the other.

Are we willing to spend the time and energy needed to be aware of another's need for encouragement?

James 2:15-17 ¹⁵*Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

Material Needs: Sharing these burdens is quite challenging for us as people in today's society. In New Testament times, there was nothing like the modern welfare state, or social safety net. If believers did not help each other, there was often nothing else. Today, there are tax supported forms of assistance. These programs have many gaps, and often fall short of real need. They are also detached and impersonal, lacking in the direct, personal expression of love and shared struggle which should characterize the church. We are often reluctant to either voice our needs or extend help because of disparaging attitudes toward those with material needs. Yet, James makes it clear that without concrete action, our sympathy for those who struggle means very little.

Do we care enough about our fellow believers to share the material things to which we often fearfully cling?



JOYS AND BURDENS

Week 4

Psalm 30:11-12 ¹¹You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, ¹²that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will praise you forever.



Released from burdens: How great is it, that we get to offer praise and thanksgiving to a God who loves us, who takes away our sin and who carries our burdens for us. As we begin our Lenten journey and ponder all that is ahead for our Lord, all that He will take on, on our behalf, let's not forget the cost of that freedom from sin we enjoy. We have forty days and nights to reflect on the past year. Forty days and nights to remember all the burdens we carried, all the burdens we shared. Forty days and nights of retelling how it felt when we realized God carried those burdens away not only for ourselves, but also for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Forty days and nights to expound the glory and joy of being set free from those burdens. How much more glorious will Easter morning be when we sing 'Alleluias and Hallelujahs' because for forty days and forty nights we remembered what it was like to be released from our burdens.

Are we able to rejoice when others are blessed, even if we wish for those same blessings ourselves?

Let's pray: *God our Father, Christ our Brother, we offer you our thanks and praise for the blessed gift of sharing. Sharing our burdens and sharing our joys. All this you have made possible by the gift of your Son, who will offer His everything for us, your sons and daughters. Thanks be to God, and all God's children say...Amen.*

Helpful background reading:

On Christian Liberty, Martin Luther

Word Pictures in the New Testament, A. T. Robertson (An old resource, but an accessible way to explore words and meaning without knowing Greek)



WE ARE CONNECTED

Week 5

Week 5

We Are Connected

Big Questions:

1. In what ways do you see our congregation connecting with our community, including our ecumenical partners?
2. Share your dreams of what connecting with each other looks like (a) in worship, (b) in fellowship, (c) in education, and/or (d) in mission.

Hymn Suggestions:

<i>We All Are One in Mission</i>	ELW #576, WOV #755
<i>In Christ There Is No East or West</i>	ELW #650, LBW #359
<i>Where Charity and Love Prevail</i>	ELW #359, LBW #126

Opening Prayer:

Call to Worship

L: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

C: And also with you.

L: Every time I remember you, I give thanks to God.

C: In all our prayers, we give thanks with joy for our partnerships in the gospel.

L: This is my prayer that our love may abound more and more

C: So that all we say and do would be to the glory and praise of God.

Scripture:

John 15:1-17

Philippians 1:3-11

How do these scriptures speak to how we are connected to God and to each other?

How might they inspire us as we seek to deepen our connections with God and each other and our partners in ministry?

Background Information:

One week does not seem enough to focus on this theme. After all, we are connected in numerous ways: we are connected to Christ, connected to each other, connected to community congregations through ministerial associations, connected to sister congregations through clusters, connected to our serving arms through the Synod, connected as a Synod, and connected to our ecumenical partners through our full communion agreements.

Instead of this being an overwhelming task, in which a worship planner tries to cover it all, it should be a freeing task in which a planner can choose among all these connections to cover one which best reflects the context of his or her congregation(s).



WE ARE CONNECTED

Week 5

This is an ideal week to plan for something that demonstrates our similarities. Doing so will require some advanced planning, but here are some suggestions:

Connected to Each Other

- Whether or not your congregation(s) took part in God's Work Our Hands Sunday in September, consider (re)visiting this. Where are our hands needed in this season?
- If your congregation(s) already do cross-generational ministry, now is a time to celebrate it. If not, consider a cross-generational event. Vibrant Faith Ministries out of Bloomington, Minnesota (www.vibrantfaith.org) offers a step-by-step formula for planning such an event. Or simply break into small groups with each group having a representation of different generations and make use of conversation starters such as Vibrant Faith's *FaithTalk* cards or Nebraska Synod's "Generation: Together" videos.

Discussion Questions:

1. Name one person with whom you have connected throughout your time in this congregation. How did you first connect? How do you connect with each other outside of church?
2. How easy is it for you to connect with people in this congregation? Is that because of your effort or the effort of another person?

Connected to Community Congregations/Connected to Our Ecumenical Partners

- A clergy exchange between or among community congregations would be appropriate. Or, if it can be arranged, one worship service together with as many congregations participating as possible. Incorporate elements from each denomination, not only in the worship service, but also in the worship space. Gather purple paraments from each congregation.
- What community effort can benefit from either your congregation's time, money, or other donations?

Discussion Questions:

1. For what occasions have you been to other congregations? What, if anything, made you comfortable worshipping there?
2. How do you personally become aware of needs within the community? How do you then keep those needs in mind?

Connected to Sister Congregations

- Some clusters are closer geographically and more easily able to do clergy exchanges. Others may consider using technology and recording a message, music, or an entire service to share with one another.
- If your cluster does meet on a regular basis, consider putting together one order of service or even just a prayer that all the congregations within your cluster will incorporate this week.



WE ARE CONNECTED

Week 5

Discussion Questions:

1. Are you able to name any of the congregations within our cluster? If not, what can we be doing to know we are connected?
2. How do you feel knowing that other congregations are singing the same hymns, reading the same scriptures, and praying the same prayers?

Connected to Our Serving Arms

- Invite a representative of one of our serving arms to speak one week this season.
- If you cannot host a representative, consider requesting materials from any or all the serving arms and making that/those serving arm(s) the focus of this week and the recipient(s) of a special offering.

Discussion Questions:

1. Our serving arms remind us that the Body of Christ consists of many members: arms, hands, feet, eyes... What do you see our congregation being?
2. How do you understand our serving arms furthering our connection?

Connected as a Synod

- Adopt another congregation or ministry site in the Synod as one you will pray for and learn more about the context of this season.
- Map out the congregations and ministries throughout the Synod and have members mark which ones they have visited.

Discussion Questions:

1. What, if anything, have you experienced in another congregation or ministry site that you have wondered if it would work here?
2. What could our congregation collect from other congregations in the next season or year?

These are of course just suggestions and/or starting points of what could be done to highlight any of the ways We Are Connected.

Closing Prayer:

Prayer for the Unity of the Church from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, p. 818:

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



WE ARE CONNECTED

Week 5

Prayer for the Unity of the Church from the Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Common Worship, p. 811:

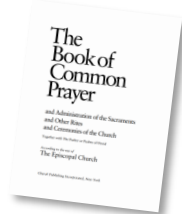
A Prayer from Zaire

O God, you are the giver of life. We pray for the church in the whole world. Sanctify her life, renew her worship, give power to her witnessing, restore her unity. Give strength to those who are searching together for that kind of obedience which creates unity. Heal the divisions separating your children one from another, so that they will make fast, with bonds of peace, the unity which the Spirit gives. Amen.

For Further Reading:



Blue Valley Lutheran Homes
www.bvlh.org



The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer available as a PDF at
https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/book_of_common_prayer.pdf



ELCA Full Communion Partners
<http://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion>



Good Shepherd Lutheran Community
www.goodshepherdblair.com



Immanuel
<https://www.immanuel.com>



Lutheran Family Services (LFS)
<https://www.lfsneb.org>



Lutheran Planned Giving Services
www.lpgsgift.org



Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC)
<https://www.lstc.edu>



WE ARE CONNECTED

Week 5



Midland University
<https://www.midlandu.edu>



Mosaic
<https://www.mosaicinfo.org>



Nebraska Lutheran Campus Ministry (NeLCM)
www.nelcm.com



Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (NLOM)
www.nlom.org



Nebraska Synod "Generation: Together"
<http://nebraskasynod.org/learn/generation-together.html>



Oaks Indian Mission
oaksindianmission.org



Tabitha
www.tabitha.org



Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Common Worship available as a PDF at bookoforder.info/Book-of-Common-Worship.pdf



Vibrant Faith
<https://vibrantfaith.org>



Wartburg Theological Seminary
<https://www.wartburgseminary.edu>



SKITS

Skits

Gathered by the Holy Spirit

DRAMA #1: Chaotic Congregations – Confusion and Disruption

(After several days away, Luther arrives home exhausted, late in the day)

KATIE LUTHER: Martin! It's so good to have you home again. How were your visits?

MARTIN LUTHER: Mumble, grumble...

KATIE: What was that? You look so tired.

MARTIN: Oh, I am, my dear, I am, but not so much from the journey. My spirit is heavy...there's so much that needs to be done.

KATIE: Oh, I know, dear. All of your studying, writing, preaching, leading; dealing with disputes, the opposition...

MARTIN: But it's more than that, Katie. On our pastoral visits from parish to parish, they know nothing. Nothing! And they do even less.

KATIE: It must be so hard for the poor priests and pastors.

MARTIN: Antinomians (*claiming salvation while living like they are damned*) if I ever saw any, carrying on the way they do. And what they teach! My God, the people are ignorant; but the pastors are the worst. They are supposed to know the Scriptures but they don't. (Matt.22:29) No wonder their liturgy is lifeless. The clergy don't understand what it means, and are buried in superstition about relics and indulgences and supposed miracles...It just goes on and on. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

KATIE: But your Catechism you have been working so hard on...

MARTIN: Yes, the Catechism. That's why I have been putting it together. They don't know the Ten Commandments, the Creeds, the Sacraments—not even the Our Father, not what it all *means*. How can parents be expected to teach their children if pastors don't know what and how to teach *them*?

KATIE: Martin, you knew this would not be easy, and no one person can do this work alone. It will take years to undo all the damage that has built up over such a long time. You are not alone; God is with you. And you have other able-bodied and keen-minded people to help you. As you are so fond of saying, 'This is most certainly true!'

MARTIN: You are right, dear. It's not my work but God's. And that is most certainly true. (*winks at the audience*) How about some dinner? I could eat a horse and drink a keg!



SKITS

Joys and Burdens

DRAMA #2: Chaotic Congregations – Disruption and Forgiveness

(Luther arrives home after a two-day visit with the leaders and people of a church in turmoil)

KATIE LUTHER: Welcome home, Martin! How was your visit at St. Anne's?

MARTIN LUTHER: *(shaking his head and dropping into a chair)*

You know, Katie, it's amazing what people will find to squabble about. The blacksmith is upset with the butcher, who is angry at the barber, whose wife quarrels with the burgermeister's wife . . . Once a hurt or slight spreads, it gets worse and worse through gossip and rumor until you have groups in the church taking sides with one party or another.

KATIE: I know, Martin. Believe it or not we had some of the same conflicts in the convent, a place of prayer, where there should be no time or room for those things.

MARTIN: Oh, I believe it, dear. You would think that where God's people are gathered to worship and pray that such things would be farthest from our minds but, well, sin is always at the door of the heart and mind of the most dedicated and sincere believer. That tug-of-war never seems to end and all too often we give in to the lesser part of our nature. (Romans 7:15-25)

KATIE: The devil never seems to miss a trick or an opportunity to hurt and divide.

MARTIN: He is a crafty adversary indeed, but still our Lord has given us a way out, a fighting chance, if only we would use it.

KATIE: Against such odds?

MARTIN: Exactly so, because of the odds against us. You know, words can be used to heal or hurt. Our blessed Lord said that if there is misunderstanding or outright disagreement in the church, that the injured parties should approach each other first, rather than to spread their discontent around where it festers and becomes even more exaggerated and factionalized.

KATIE: But what if they are unable to come to an agreement?

MARTIN: Then our Lord said to entrust the matter to a few good friends who are known and respected by each party and ask them to intercede.

KATIE: And if that does not work?

MARTIN: Then bring the matter to the leadership of the church. Yes, I know, and if even that does not bring about reconciliation, let them make a difficult decision and remove the one who seems the most guilty or corrosive, so the damage does not spread even further. (Matthew 18:15-20)



SKITS

KATIE: That seems so drastic!

MARTIN: It is, but it's not meant to be permanent. The one(s) so treated are not to be shunned or blacklisted, you know how that can be, but are prayed for and worked with to bring them back into fellowship.

KATIE: But can that really work?

MARTIN: I used to wonder that myself, but look at St. Paul's example with the Corinthian church. A man there had committed adultery, would not change or repent, and after all else was tried, he was removed from the church. No fellowship and no Holy Communion. (1 Corinthians 5)

KATIE: That's terrible!

MARTIN: Yes it was, dear, but it 'worked' because the church as a whole was committed and continued to pray for him. And not only that! Our Lord said to treat such an individual as a tax collector or pagan. And how did Christ treat them? Not by ostracizing or persecution but he associated, talked and ate with these 'sinners.' Eventually the Spirit convicted this adulterer of his acts and his eyes were opened. Then he repented and ceased his sinful relationship, and in due time was welcomed back into the church's fellowship and sacramental life. (2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

KATIE: But that's wonderful!

MARTIN: Wonderful, indeed, but it was also hard work. It required the commitment of many people and an act of corporate forgiveness. Fortunately it was the Holy Spirit who led in this all the way or reconciliation and restoration never could have happened.

KATIE: God is truly great and good. We need that so much today where the devil attacks us on every front and from all sides.

MARTIN: Yes we do, that is most certainly true! (*smiles and winks at the audience*) Now may I 'attack' some dinner? All this forgiveness has worked up quite an appetite!



SKITS

Shaped by Word and Sacrament

DRAMA #3: Word and Sacrament – what’s the connection?

(Luther comes home after a day of teaching about the Sacraments of the Church to Wittenberg students.)

KATIE LUTHER: How did things go with your new students today, Martin?

MARTIN LUTHER: It wasn’t too bad, Kate. They are all enthusiastic, wanting to learn, but l’m learning that it’s easy for me to assume too much.

KATIE: How do you mean? Are they dull?

MARTIN: Oh, no, not that. They are bright and have a real aptitude for studying the holy scriptures and their attitude is refreshing. It’s very unlike those who, because of their families’ social standing, are expected to go into the service of the Church, but they really don’t want to. It becomes an entitlement in which they expect preferment and advancement over others because it’s their ‘right.’ No, our young people at university truly want to be where they are, to learn God’s Word and its relationship with the sacraments.

KATIE: They sound like ideal students to me. They are there because they want to be and because they feel called by God to serve as pastors and teachers?

MARTIN: Yes, that’s exactly right. But there is a long way to go.

KATIE: How so, Martin?

MARTIN: It’s what we come up against in so many places in our pastoral visitations. The people are woefully unprepared and their pastors are little better. Many people don’t know their letters, none of them know the languages of Scripture, or even know what the Scriptures say. And some of the wild theories and superstitions!

KATIE: You mean about the holy sacraments?

MARTIN: Yes. Especially the Sacrament of the Altar. On the one hand the papalists (supporters of the pope) adore the host and enshrine it in golden vessels (monstrances). The prayers of the Mass and the consecration itself are mumbled by the priest, which the people cannot hear; and, of course, the Mass is uttered in Latin, which the people don’t understand. So the Word of God is entirely divorced from the Sacrament with which it needs to be connected.

KATIE: But at least the congregation is notified when the moment of consecration arrives.



SKITS

MARTIN: Oh, you mean the ringing of the sanctus bells? True, but in a way that makes it worse. It's as if nothing else in the Mass matters and you get the attention of the congregation by ringing bells as if something magical is about to happen. The Word is separated from the Sacrament because you can't hear it and would not be able to understand it if you could!

KATIE: And that is why it is so important that the Word of Scripture be translated into the language of the people, and why the words of the mass should also be understandable.

MARTIN: Yes. It was vital that I translate the Scriptures from Hebrew and Greek into German, so Christians can begin to learn and understand it. Scripture, worship texts, and prayers should be available in whatever the language is that people normally speak. What could be more natural and necessary?

KATIE: Martin, you earlier said, 'On the one hand...' regarding the papalists. Is there an 'On the other hand...' as well?

MARTIN: Yes, I almost forgot. (*raising his voice*) You know the Anabaptists, those execrable *Schwärmer* ('fanatics'), radicals and rascals, trouble-makers and anarchists, false prophets and frauds, those, those...

KATIE: Now, Martin, don't upset yourself!

MARTIN: I'm sorry, dear. (*takes a deep breath*) Those...people, along with Zwingli, do the opposite of the papalists with their magical intonations; instead they diminish the Sacrament of the Altar until there's hardly anything left to it. The radicals say the bread and wine remain bread and wine only; there is nothing sacred, transformative about it. They say our Blessed Lord is not actually present within the consecrated elements, but that His Body remains in heaven. Of course, Jesus, as God and Man together, can be anywhere at the same time – a million sacraments at once; it doesn't matter.

People go from one extreme to another, from idolatry to denial. How discouraging! Can't we take Jesus' words at face value, 'This is My Body...this is My Blood'? That He means what He says? (1 Corinthians 11:23-30)

KATIE: I know, Martin. But what is clear to you is not obvious to everyone. I believe this is a reason why God called you for such a time as this, when there is such conflict, anger and misunderstanding. Remember, you are not alone. You have Phillip (Melanchthon), and all your friends, colleagues and supporters. You have the Elector. (Frederick III the Wise, then John the Steadfast)

MARTIN: (*mumbles*) Yes, and the emperor, the pope, and their lapdogs all want my head, or worse.



KATIE: I know Martin. But even the great prophet Elijah felt deserted and isolated, alone against his adversaries and persecutors until the Lord showed him otherwise. (1 Kings 19:14-18, Romans 11:2-5)

MARTIN: Yes but, as you say, Elijah was a great prophet, sent by God to save Israel from the idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel and their false priests and prophets. I am just a teacher, priest, and ex-monk.

KATIE: Well, in your own way, Martin, God has called you at this time to protect Germany and indeed Christendom from tyrants such as the emperor (Charles V), the pope (Leo X), his bishops and false prophets. (the 'fanatics') God was with Elijah and is with you, too!

MARTIN: (*quietly and gratefully, taking Katie's hand*)

Bless you, Katie, bless you and thank you. What would I do without you?

SKITS



SKITS

Gathered by Word and Sacrament

DRAMA #4: Word and Sacrament – together as one.

(Luther has an informal conversation with some of his students, one of whom is the default spokesperson.)

STUDENT: Doctor Luther, have you a moment? I am having trouble putting some things together in my mind from your last lecture.

LUTHER: Certainly, Gerhard, what is it?

STUDENT: Well, we talk about how the ‘Word’ of God and the Sacraments – Baptism and Holy Communion – must work together for them to be efficacious. (effective) But I am embarrassed; I’m not sure what you mean by ‘Word.’ It seems to me that the word ‘Word’ can be applied in different ways in Scripture. I don’t understand.

LUTHER: An excellent point, Gerhard, and one I was going to bring out in my next lecture. But since you mention it now...

STUDENT: Yes, please, Doctor Luther, it would help us to prepare for what is to come.

LUTHER: I think that has broader implications than what you expect. My studies, prayers and conversations with others have persuaded me that ‘Word,’ as found in Holy Scripture, can be understood and applied in more than a single way. The foundation and source from which all else comes is the ‘Word’ as read in the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel. Do you know it?

STUDENT: Yes, sir. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.* (John 1:1)

LUTHER: The Word is not an ‘it.’ This Word is personal, not an abstraction. Very good. And that Word is?

STUDENT: Further along in that same chapter (1:14), *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

LUTHER: The Word appears to be a person, then. Who was it, John the Baptist, mentioned in the chapter?

STUDENT: No, sir. It says earlier (1:8) that St. John was not that One, but he came as a witness of the One.

LUTHER: Indeed. And?

STUDENT: And, *We have seen his glory, the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14) Therefore, our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the Word of God.



SKITS

LUTHER: Yes, every illiterate priest should know that, but not necessarily. What is the Greek for 'Word'?

STUDENT: Mmm. *Logos*. But that Greek word normally would not refer to a person but a principle.

LUTHER: Quite so. Why is it a Person in this case? Because Jesus is the very embodiment of the Word or Truth of God! Remember, our Lord said, *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.* (John 14:6) But do you see? We have just demonstrated the truth behind your question, that 'Word' as found in Scripture, can be understood as either a concept, *logos*, or as a Person, Christ, or as both at once, Christ as God. There is still another way we see 'Word' in scripture and that is the Word as scripture.

STUDENT: I'm afraid I'm getting a little lost. My head is buzzing.

LUTHER: (*laughs*) Don't worry; we are speaking of the deep things of God. If you did not feel this way, you either would be too stupid or too ignorant to realize that you should be overwhelmed when speaking of the holy. As I was going to say, 'Word' also can mean the revelation from God that is scripture. St. Paul wrote that all scripture is *God-breathed* or derives its inspiration by the Holy Spirit from God. (2 Timothy 3:16) In Greek and Hebrew, Spirit means 'wind' or 'breath.' Most importantly for our discussion, its source is God.

STUDENT: I had no idea of the vastness, the scope and breadth of this Word, its meanings, applications...

LUTHER: Nor did I, Gerhard, not until after years of searching and study, with many detours thrown in. In fact, I suspect that you students are grasping this rather more quickly than I did.

At any rate, the 'Word' in Scripture is both specific and comprehensive. It means Christ Himself, the very truth which he conveys, and also is the revelation of God that is preserved for us in Scripture. Now, as applied to the Sacraments, we actually can see all three senses of Word at work. When one is ordained to the gospel ministry, one is a minister of both Word and Sacrament. The two are intrinsically bound together. Without the efficacy of God's Word, the Sacrament is only empty ceremony, mumbo-jumbo. But without the Sacrament, as properly applied with water in Baptism and the use of bread and wine in the Holy Communion, you have mere abstractions of no use to anyone. So the pronouncement of the Word gives power from the Holy Spirit to the physical act being taken as a part of the Sacrament.



SKITS

Permit me to offer an example of what can happen when the Word and Sacrament are separated. Once a woman came to me wanting, I guess you can say, to store up God's grace. She brought me a jar full of wafers and asked me to bless them, using the Words of Institution, so that she could take them home, and at her leisure consume these consecrated hosts whenever she wanted. (Note: this actually happened to me!) Can you see the utter misunderstanding of Word and Sacrament, with both reduced and distorted from their divine intent: the Sacrament becoming a mere talisman and the Word a magical formula? In principle this is similar to the Israelites' wandering in the desert, before they reached the Promised Land, attempting to save the Manna which God had provided on a daily basis, warning them not to hoard it. It spoiled if they did so. (Exodus 16)

You may have heard of some who try to take an extra share of Communion Bread so they can smuggle it out from the church to use whenever they want without having to attend Mass! We do have pastors go out and serve Communion from the Reserved (left over, consecrated and blessed) Sacrament to those who are ill or homebound, but the emphasis is not one of hoarding. That is why the Word and Sacrament must be united together in their application, with each serving in their proper distinct role.

STUDENT: Amazing! Trickery on the one hand and superstition on the other.

LUTHER: That is why we are working so hard to teach and train you, to familiarize you with the Word of God in every sense, your relationship with our Lord, his preserved Word in the scriptures, and the truth behind them. Long after I and my generation are gone you will continue to educate and nurture God's people in what it means to worship and live in Spirit and in Truth. (John 4:24)

STUDENTS TOGETHER (*enthusiastically*): This is most certainly true!
(*Luther smiles*)



SKITS

Diversity and Challenges

LUTHER DRAMA #5: Peasants and Pitchforks – civil unrest, the Church and State)
(*Luther arrives home, bursts through the door, breathless and agitated*)

LUTHER: Can you believe it, can you believe it? The world has gone mad!

KATIE: Martin, what's wrong! Are you all right?

LUTHER: No! Yes! I'm fine, but people are crazy!

KATIE: Who is 'crazy'?

LUTHER: Who's crazy? Who isn't?

KATIE (*firmly*): Now calm down Martin. Take a breath, sit down, have a drink and tell me.

LUTHER (*sits, breathes deeply, more composed*) Thank you, my dear. (*sighs*) It seems that everyone thinks they are a prophet or angel, and get the people all stirred up.

KATIE: Hmm. 'Everyone?'

LUTHER: Well, no not everyone. Thank you for keeping me grounded. What I mean is I have heard of these crazed men from Zwickau, who say they are prophets with words, instructions from God that only they claim to know, and they are coming here to stir things up! As if the pot needs to be stirred more than it already has.

KATIE: Why would they come here?

LUTHER: Well, they want to meet me and see if I would say some kind words on their behalf.

KATIE: Oh, they want you to endorse them.

LUTHER: Yes, but I can't, I won't! They claim revelation from God over and beyond his holy Word. (Deuteronomy 18:21-22, Ezekiel 13:1-7)

They say the Spirit speaks to them directly, as if they were prophets like Samuel, Jeremiah or Elijah.

They say crazy things: the world is ending and they want to overthrow the rightful rule of the princes.

(*conspiratorially*) I think they are in sympathy with those mad Anabaptists! Me endorse *them*?

They must be stopped! I would go to the Pope himself if necessary.



SKITS

KATIE: Oh, Martin, I don't believe you mean that.

LUTHER: Well maybe I would not go quite that far. But really, Katie, these extreme parties have to be stopped, not encouraged. And what about the peasants? Look at them! They keep mumbling and grumbling about being oppressed and abused by their landlords. Some want to rise up, turn everything upside-down, and join with these 'prophets' and the Anabaptists.

KATIE: And the peasants are not abused?

LUTHER: Oh I know, I know. Don't forget, these are my people, too. I know where we come from. My father well remembers working in the mines. But he knew his place, worked hard, and God blessed him for it. Yes, I know; they are worked like dogs, treated as slaves, and are appreciated no better.

KATIE: So can you blame them when they hear someone who offers them hope and relief, a better life?

LUTHER: No, but rebellion and violence are not what God intends. God wants peace and order; that's why God established the state and rulers over us. That order is maintained by the landlords and princes. (Romans 13:1-5)

KATIE: Even granting that, look at who is helping to turn their world upside-down. It's you, Martin. With their discontent you have given them hope for a church that really cares and meets their needs, which sides with the poor and downtrodden instead of supporting those who keep them down. Naturally, they raise their eyes from the plow and their hearts from the pit. They really are more than beasts of burden to be abused by those born into a better position.

LUTHER: But these 'prophets' are dangerous; they offer a tyranny just as bad as those they want to overthrow. Woe to any who disagree with them!

KATIE: Martin, your great work is to overthrow tyranny over the mind, spirit and heart. They just want to do something similar for the body, security, protection and provision for their families and loved ones.

LUTHER (*shaking his head*): We are in a precarious balance in these troubled times . . . Yes, I know, I have contributed greatly to stirring things up, and it's gotten away from me. This is going far beyond reforming the Church, and God knows where it will end. But this threatens the whole social order – the security and stability of the State. And what have we then if that falls? Anarchy!

KATIE: Yes, and you can show them the way forward without falling into that precipice with them. You, Martin. It is God Who is using you. Tell them, lead them, teach them, show them the way.

LUTHER: By our holy God, Katie, I will. They Prophet Elijah thought he was all alone among idolaters, yet God showed him 7,000 others of the faithful in Israel who would not give themselves over to the devil. (1 Kings 19:14,18; see also Romans 11:2-4) That is most certainly the truth if I have ever heard it! Our Lord will preserve us, too!



SKITS

Diversity and Challenges

Drama #6: Luther and the Iconoclasts

(Martin Luther arrives home after having been out of town for several weeks: teaching, preaching, settling disputes, offering pastoral care through his parish visits.)

KATIE: Martin! I am so glad you are home! You have heard what has been stirred up?

MARTIN: Yes, Katie, that is why I am back a little earlier than I had planned. What new madness is this?

KATIE: Well, some people are listening to these opinions of the 'prophets' and the Anabaptists of how we should worship according to what God intends in his Word; but they have gone overboard. They think we have not gone far enough. They are doing violence against the churches, the very precincts of God!

LUTHER (*groans*): What have they done?

KATIE: They are removing crosses and candlesticks, statuary and icons, even the holy altars, and smashing the stained glass windows.

LUTHER: Why on earth are they doing that?

KATIE: They say that to retain them is idolatry and breaks the First and Second Commandments (Exodus 20:3-6), prohibiting the creation of idols and worshiping them . . .

LUTHER: But that's not what we do. We worship God Whom these things represent, the reality behind the symbol, not the objects themselves! That would be idolatry. The symbols themselves are 'teachers'; they convey object lessons. They are not to be worshiped. (Numbers 21:4-9, 2 Kings 18:4, John 3:14-15)

KATIE: They say we have not gone far enough, that we are still too 'popish' in our sympathies and that we are not 'reformed' enough.

LUTHER (*becoming angry*): Aren't we now? Who was it that stood up to that blowhard Tetzal about indulgences and their corruption, yes, the idolatry that those detestable things are? Who spoke before the Emperor at Worms and would not recant what I have said or written, even when faced with excommunication and outlawry? Where were they then?

KATIE: People can have short memories when it suites them.

LUTHER (*sarcastically*): Well, that most certainly is true.

Katie, listen. These overreactions are nothing new. Solomon knew this when he said, 'There is nothing new under the sun.' What decorates a church is not in itself to be worshiped, but points to that which it represents. For example, a Christian altar is not where a bloody sacrifice is made. Our blessed Lord is not re-sacrificed over and over again with each Holy Communion, but we look back to his once-for-all-time sacrifice for sins. Stained glass windows are called 'windows into heaven' and are designed to teach people the Word of God, since so many are illiterate. Going into a church should not only be a foretaste of heaven, but also is a classroom where people are instructed in godly things and how to live. These beautiful objects are there to teach lessons.



SKITS

KATIE: They say they are purifying God's holy House by ridding it of pagan idolatry.

LUTHER: More like they are remaking a holy place into their own impoverished image and likeness. Look, Kate, the Church has experienced this before. 800 years ago there was the Iconoclastic Controversy. An Eastern Roman emperor, Leo the Isaurian, felt like our friends do today and wanted to rid churches of any hint of 'superstition' and idolatry. But he was influenced by Mohammedan (Muslim/Islamic) belief which does not accept any pictorial representation of the divine. So he enlisted a corps of volunteers to do remove the icons. (holy portraiture) These 'Iconoclasts' or image-breakers ('smashers') invaded churches and removed/destroyed anything they thought was idolatrous.

But many of the faithful resisted, even fought against the Iconoclasts. ('Iconodules') Eventually an Ecumenical Council (7th) declared the proper place for these sacred objects in Christian churches, and the Iconoclasts lost the battle.

KATIE: So where, then, do we stand?

LUTHER: Sanity. We neither throw the baby out with the bathwater, nor drown her in malice and spite. After all we retain the Mass, just rid it of sacrificial overtones and an obscure language (Latin) which now only a few churchmen can read, speak and understand. We retain vestments, but are greatly simplified. We have kept the Christian liturgical observances so that holy Feast days like Easter and Christmas don't sneak up on us unawares without the preparatory periods of Lent and Advent. We honor the sacraments and elevate preaching, study and prayer. In so doing, I pray that we glorify God.

KATIE: That seems very reasonable.

LUTHER: I certainly think so. It is practical, pastoral and worshipful all at once! What we are doing is nothing new. We retain/use the best of the past, while shedding ourselves of that which is disruptive, detracting or confusing to genuine Christian practice, worship and piety. And that most certainly is true!

Postcript: The first generation Continental Reformation in the 1500's was not the last time Iconoclasm arose in the Church. The excesses of Iconoclasm were prominent in the English Reformation and Civil War that followed it. It was fought between the Roundheads [Iconoclasts] and Cavaliers. [Monarchists] The former, led by Oliver Cromwell, by then were known as the Puritans, which briefly had the upper hand before being defeated by Monarchist forces. Today, in the 21st century, modern Iconoclasts hold sway over much of Protestant Evangelical, Fundamentalist and Pentecostal Christianity.



We are Connected

DRAMA #7: Luther and Family

(Luther enjoying a rare evening at home with his family)

LUTHER *(emitting a small belch of satisfaction with a smile)*: As usual, a fine supper, Kate. And so much of it, too! Ah!

KATIE *(smiles and with only a slight tone of disapproval)*: Now, Martin. Please don't burp in front of the children. It's bad manners.

LUTHER *(with a shake of the head and a feeble protesting defense)*: That depends, my dear. I understand that among some peoples it is a sign of appreciation and respect for the cook.

KATIE: Well, this is not 'some peoples'; this is modern Germany of the 16th Century, and in our home a simple word of thanks or a kiss on the cheek is quite sufficient.

LUTHER: Then consider it done! *(smack)* But you know I cherish this time at home with you and the children. It's all too rare. This business of being – what do they call me, a 'Reformer'? – is pretty demanding on both of us. Look at us: a former nun and a renegade monk now married to each other, blessed with children and trying to live a normal married life! So scandalous! *(with a wink and smile)* It certainly beats celibacy or concubinage! But because we are simply engaged in what St. Paul says is natural (marriage), we are scorned/hated by churchmen who do essentially the same thing, but in secrecy and deceit while they live in a publicly unmarried state. (1 Corinthians 11:11, 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Hebrews 13:4)

KATIE: So true, Martin, but think of the compensations. You have accomplished so much.

LUTHER *(laughs)*: Me? You manage and run the household, and take of the children. *(now serious)* But there is so much more I must do. When we visit the parishes, we see the overwhelming ignorance of not only the people but also the pastors. I have talked about putting together just some basic instruction – a *Catechism*. (Greek: *katekizem*, 'to orally teach') It simply teaches basic Christian belief through a question/answer approach. One need not even be an ordained pastor or scholar to do this. And perhaps best of all, it can be taught at home by parents to not only the children but to anyone who may reside there. (Deuteronomy 6:5-9, Psalm 78:2-4)

KATIE: It sounds like a wonderful thing, and it can be taught by anyone who can read to even those who are not literate. That should really help teaching holy scripture as the Word of God that so anyone can understand it.



LUTHER: I do hope so, really. But I wonder, in 100 or even 500 years from now what the world will be like, if the struggle would have been worth it, and if they will remember . . .

KATIE (*smiles*): Why, they even may be called ‘Lutherans.’

LUTHER (*somewhat outraged*): Never! Perish the thought! Actually sometimes you hear that even now. Named after me, a poor miserable sinner? (*reflectively*) Although it has a certain ring to it . . . But no, we are part of the one holy Catholic Church – ‘Evangelical,’ if you wish. St. Paul warned about factions of the Church being named after mere mortals. (1 Corinthians 1:12-13) But whatever it is called, I hope our work endures.

KATIE: Isn’t that what much of your work has been for – translating the Scriptures into German, your treatises on theology, the holy sacraments, justification by faith, your reforms of church practice, your meeting with other pastors and theologians, teaching students and serving in the parishes, not to mention the sacrifices and risks for your own life you have taken – for the sake and benefit of posterity and not just here and now?

LUTHER: You certainly are perceptive. Yes, truly, I labor for those yet to be born but also for us, our own family and others like us, that we can offer them a better world and a glorious Church within it. May God speed the day!

Remember. . .We are Church Together!