PRESIDING BISHOP EATON’S
FOUR EMPHASES BIBLE STUDY
Participant’s Guide

We are CHURCH.
We are LUTHERAN.
We are CHURCH TOGETHER.
We are CHURCH FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God’s work. Our hands.
Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In our baptismal covenant, we promise to hear the word of God. We hear the word of God in various ways. For example, we hear the word of God in the sermon. The word of God is heard as the Scriptures are read during worship. Being a follower of Christ means we not only hear the word, we proclaim the word, and we take time to study it so that we can deepen our faith as individuals. In addition, we also gather as a community of believers and seekers to study the Scriptures together so that we can reflect on how the Bible teaches and inspires us to live our faith in daily life. We are a Book of Faith church that encourages not only private study of the Scriptures but also intentional time where those interested in learning more about the Bible can come, open Scripture and have a conversation about what is being read. It is in these settings that we can talk about the inspiration we are receiving from what we have read and also reflect on how the life experiences of others influence how they interpret Scripture.

In my work and travel, I have focused on four guiding emphases: We are church. We are Lutheran. We are church together. We are church for the sake of the world.

I give thanks for those who have taken these emphases and their biblical grounding to offer this study to you. Written with the Book of Faith lens, we invite you to explore, question, discuss and learn. It is our hope this learning will “ripple like the waters of baptism” within you, your congregation and your community.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The intent of this Bible study is to encourage exploration and discussion of ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton’s four emphases by delving more deeply into Bible texts related to each emphasis using the four lenses of the Book of Faith methods of Bible study. Each session also offers additional questions for reflection and a variety of ways to engage each emphasis. There are also links and resources related to the session emphasis.

Be aware that the educational theory of multiple intelligences was a foundation for developing this study. For example, the use of hymns draws out those with music intelligence. The use of smartphones and surfing the web for additional information draws out those who are bodily-kinesthetic learners. You can learn more about multiple intelligences at multipleintelligencesoasis.org/about/ or type it into your favorite search engine for a complete list.

The study opens with a conversation about baptism and an introduction and background on Bishop Eaton’s four emphases. This session gives an overview of the emphases and shares information on her hope for the outcome of the study.
INTRODUCTION:

Ripples from the font

It all begins with baptism, which heals our broken relationship with God and joins us together as the body of Christ—the church on earth and the church triumphant. Water is the earthly element that, along with the power and promise of God’s word, transforms each of us to be a child of God for all time. So whenever we look at who we, as the church, are in the world, baptism is the natural place to start.

This session will explore baptism and its ripple effect throughout the church and the world. The four emphases are part of that ripple effect. We’ll explore the origin of the emphases and take a general look at them before digging in more deeply in subsequent sessions. We’ll also review what our presiding bishop hopes we will gain from this study.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Romans 6:3-11

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

God, who is rich in mercy and love, gives us a new birth into a living hope through the sacrament of baptism. By water and the Word God delivers us from sin and death and raises us to new life in Jesus Christ. We are united with all the baptized in one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and joined in God’s mission for the life of the world.

— ELW, p. 227
Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Hymn: ELW 449 We Know That Christ Is Raised

("A new creation comes to life and grows as Christ’s new body takes on flesh and blood. The universe restored and whole will sing: Hallelujah!")

Sing hymn ELW 449 We Know That Christ Is Raised.

How does baptism create a new body?
BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW ON BISHOP EATON’S FOUR EMPHASES

When she served as a synodical bishop, Bishop Eaton was concerned that the church was edging toward seeing itself more as a nongovernmental organization or nonprofit similar to organizations like the American Cancer Society. She knew that we are much more than that. We are church. We are Christ’s living, breathing body here on earth. Through our baptismal call and commission, we are to go out into the world and share the love of Christ with all people as a witness to his presence in our lives. We do so empowered by the Holy Spirit activated in us at our baptism.

After becoming presiding bishop and the ELCA began work on an operating plan, she encouraged conversation around the emphases that define us as a church. They serve as the foundation for the five goals named in Called Forward in Christ: ELCA Future Directions 2025.

The four emphases are:

- We are church.
- We are Lutheran.
- We are church together.
- We are church for the sake of the world.

Bishop Eaton sees these as cyclical, with church for the sake of the world doubling back to our identity as the children of God. They are also rooted in our baptism, and we move out from this transforming event as ripples from the font. We start with being created to be the church and go outward, reclaiming our evangelical spirit and serving the world.

This session introduces the four emphases, which will be explored individually in subsequent sessions.
Some thoughts from the 2016 Churchwide Report of the Presiding Bishop are shared below:

**We are church.**
1. Our lives are formed by word and sacrament and then we are sent out.
2. The gospel Word forms faith.
3. We need to talk about Jesus and speak his name.

**We are Lutheran.**
1. We can’t form relationships with other denominations if we aren’t clear about who we are.
2. We need to be careful not to define ourselves by culture or cuisine.
3. Lutherans tell the Jesus story in a particular way.

**We are church together.**
1. This is not just a slogan. It’s Scripture.
2. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian.
3. We are one expression of the Lord’s vineyard.
4. There are many expressions of religious belief, and we need to work together.

**We are church for the sake of the world.**
1. Some of the most important words spoken in the liturgy are: “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”
2. We are called to love the neighbor, and we need to be intentional about this.
3. In baptism we are all called to run to the dark and deadly places to bring the light of Christ.
Bishop Eaton hopes those engaging in this Bible study will:

1. understand and explore how our relationship with God through Christ makes us different;
2. understand and live into what we believe as Lutherans;
3. understand that the Lutheran identity is not ethnic-specific;
4. understand that we are all in this together and that ecumenism is important in the ELCA;
5. realize that “Go in peace. Serve the Lord” means just that. Go forth and serve in Christ’s name;
6. form study groups and read the Small Catechism together in your congregation;
7. see worship as a joyful duty and be welcoming when people come into your congregation;
8. get on your synod website and see the connected church and what is happening beyond your four walls;
9. go to faith events outside your congregation; and
10. contribute to the work of the wider church through efforts like ELCA World Hunger.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What part does your baptism play in your daily walk of faith? What part does baptism play in your congregation’s daily walk of faith?
2. Read and discuss the Holy Baptism section of the Small Catechism. What questions do you have after reading Luther’s questions and explanations? How might your review of the catechism change the way you live and act?
3. How are Bishop Eaton’s four emphases rooted in baptism?
4. Which of the four emphases most intrigues you? How might you explore it more deeply?
5. How does your congregation currently represent itself as the church for the sake of the world?
OTHER LEARNING OPTIONS
1. Watch Bishop Eaton’s 2016 *Report of the Presiding Bishop* on YouTube together. (Estimated start point, 4:30, to end point, 34:00) What thoughts would you add to those listed above?
2. Brainstorm other metaphors (like ripples from the font) that express the relationship of Bishop Eaton’s four emphases.
3. Draw a picture of the relationship between the four emphases.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE
- Colossians 2:6-12
- Galatians 3:23-28
- Acts 19:1-6

LINKS AND RESOURCES
- [Called Forward Together in Christ: ELCA Strategic Directions 2025](#)
- [Bishop Eaton’s Churchwide Assembly 2016 report](#)
- [Baptism4Life](#) website by Thomas K. Johnson
We are church

We are what God has made us – people whom God has created by grace to live in union with Jesus Christ and whom God has prepared to live faithful, fruitful lives by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10). In Jesus Christ, God has reconciled us to God and to each other. As we gather around word and sacraments, this life in Christ is what defines, shapes and guides us as a community of faith, the church.

By God’s grace we can and do live confidently and generously in this community of faith and in service of others, amid the mysteries and paradoxes of this life in Christ – including our human limitations and failings, and the ambiguities, uncertainties and suffering that we experience.

SCRIPTURE READINGS
Ephesians 2:4-10

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
**CONTEXT**

Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession

[VII. Concerning the Church]
It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:4-5: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph. 4:5,6]: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all …”


How is the church the assembly of saints? What are signs that the gospel is purely taught?

We use the word “church” to describe several related but different things. Sometimes we mean organizations or institutions of varying size and scope that have a constitution and bylaws, plus property, procedures and payrolls. Sometimes we mean a building or a public activity that takes place in that building—that is, worship—and maybe we mean both when we ask, “Are you going to church on Sunday?” All these uses are related to what is closer to the heart of what the word “church” means—namely, a people.
But which people and what kind of people are they? Sometimes we talk as if it were our religious commonalities—shared convictions, a common tradition or history, similar spiritual experiences—that make a church what it is. We talk as if church were the people we choose—the people who are like us, who share our beliefs and passions, our commitments ... and maybe our musical and artistic tastes in worship.

Is that it? Is that church? The New Testament writers used a word for church—ekklesia—whose root meaning was “called out.” Yes, “church” names a people who have been called out or chosen, but the one doing the choosing makes all the difference. According to the New Testament, the church is the people God has chosen for God’s own purposes.

Human choices about church can be foolish, fickle, self-serving, even exclusionary and divisive. Too often the groups we choose are something far less than the people God has chosen for a life together in Jesus Christ. We still make all kinds of choices, but what makes us church is God’s gracious, reconciling, liberating choosing.

Much is given to us in God’s choosing us. Perhaps most important of all is a reconciled relationship with God in Jesus Christ that is the foundation for everything else that we are in all of life. Who we are and what we do—it comes to us freely in Jesus Christ.

Considering the above insights, reread the Bible passages. What do you notice now?
ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In Ephesians 2:8 “grace” and “gift” are often taken to mean the same thing. Martin Luther, however, made a distinction. Grace is the favor that God has for us, the love out of which God chooses us in love. Gift is what comes from God as a result of that favor—the abundance of life in Christ. How does this distinction create insights or questions for you about our relationship with God?

2. Ephesians 2:9 tells us we are “created in Christ Jesus.” What difference does it make to see yourself in this way? What difference does it make to see others who are the church this way? How does it affect the way you live?

3. Some modern translations lose the concrete physical image in Ephesians 2:10. Literally, the expression is “that God prepared so that we would walk in them.” Think of a prepared path—in a park, at a museum or elsewhere—that was carefully created for you to see, hear and experience sight, sounds, beauty and wonder. Now consider a life of “good works” as the path God has created for you, a dynamic life in the Spirit. What does this path look and sound like? What has been your experience on this path? What particular sights, sounds, beauty and wonder can you share with others?

4. 1 Peter 2:10 tells us we are recipients of God’s mercy. How does receiving mercy define the character of being God’s people, the church? What has been your experience among God’s people?

5. 1 Peter 2:9 identifies us as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” How are these aspirations for which to strive? What would living as these identifiers look like? What kinds of words or expressions would you use to describe the kind of people we are in Christ?

6. Many Lutherans in the United States express some reluctance to be vocal about their faith. But we belong to a church body whose name includes the word “evangelical,” which refers to proclaiming a message of good news. What are your thoughts about belonging to a people who “proclaim the mighty acts” of God in Jesus Christ? What are ways you can proclaim the good news in your life?
SESSION 1: WE ARE CHURCH

OTHER LEARNING OPTIONS
1. Sing or read “Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 779). How does this hymn help unlock further insights about the Bible texts and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton’s first emphasis? Brainstorm other hymns that can help open up the meaning of the texts and the first emphasis.

2. Draw or Mind Map what the path of Ephesians 2:8-10 would look like in your life. What would it look like in your communal life as church?

3. Draw a picture of Bishop Eaton’s statement: “In Jesus Christ, God has reconciled us to God and to each other. As we gather around word and sacraments, this life in Christ is what defines, shapes and guides us as a community of faith, the church.” What does this look like to you?

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
1 Corinthians 12:4-27
Ephesians 2:11-22

LINKS AND RESOURCES
• ELCA Life of Faith Initiative is rooted in baptism to equip all the saints for ministry.
• Life of Faith Initiative Facebook Group
We are Lutheran

We are a church that walks by faith, trusting God’s promise in the gospel and knowing that we exist by and for the proclamation of this gospel word. We proclaim Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead for the life of the world. As the apostle Paul wrote (Romans 1:16-17), and we echo in the ELCA Constitution (2.02), we are not ashamed of this gospel ministry because it is God’s power for saving all people who trust the God who makes these promises.

God’s word, specifically God’s promise in Jesus Christ, creates this liberated, confident and generous faith. God gives the Holy Spirit who uses gospel proclamation—in preaching and sacraments, in forgiveness and in healing conversations—to create and sustain this faith. As a Lutheran church, we give central place to this gospel message in our ministry.

We understand to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical—committed to the oneness to which God calls the world in the saving gift of Jesus Christ, recognizing the brokenness of the church in history and the call of God to heal this disunity.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”
1 Corinthians 1:18-21

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

Now do a Lutheran theological reading of one or both the texts.

- How do these passages lead us to Christ?
- What message of demand do you hear?
- What message of promise do you hear?
- What other Scripture passages help you understand these?

Hymn: ELW 513 Listen, God Is Calling
(“Listen, listen, God is calling, through the Word inviting, offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy.”)

Sing hymn “Listen, God Is Calling” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 513).

How does God’s Word create and define us as Lutheran Christians?

CONTEXT

Late in his life Martin Luther wrote about his earlier struggle to understand God’s righteousness named in Romans 1:16-17 and elsewhere in Scripture. He came to a new, liberated understanding of his relationship with God when he recognized that God brings human beings into a right relationship through trusting the promise of mercy in Christ. Nothing more is needed, only the trust or faith that Luther described as “a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.” He described the experience like heaven’s gates opening wide. And when he reread or reviewed in his memory the Scripture passages that were so familiar to him, he discovered to his comfort and joy that this
same message of God’s mercy—the gospel—was everywhere. Luther’s understanding that there is nothing we can do to obtain God’s favor is a foundational Lutheran belief.

Today many Lutherans in the United States have grown accustomed to Lutherans being identified by certain cultures and cuisines that privilege some but marginalize or exclude others.

In the global Lutheran communion there is great diversity of ethnicity, language, culture, history and tradition, and much of that diversity is present among the Lutheran community in the United States. In addition, there are differences of convictions and theology among Lutherans in the United States and around the world.

In the midst of this real diversity, one of the challenges of our time is to discern what Lutherans in the United States and abroad have in common. The questions for reflection in this study invite you into conversation with others and Scripture.

Considering the above insights, reread the Bible passages. What do you notice now?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. The freedom of faith in God’s gospel promise is that a reconciled relationship with God is not dependent on religious works or cultural experiences that are possible for only some. Faith in the gospel trusts God’s mercy that is for all and finds joy and confidence in that.

   What are some religious or cultural requirements you are aware of that have excluded others? Tell of a time when the gospel has opened the door to a more confident life.

2. Reread Romans 1:16-17. How is the gospel the power of God? How do you experience that power in your life? How do you experience that power in your faith community and beyond?

3. Because the gospel message that engenders faith is so liberating, the Augsburg Confession locates its proclamation at the center of the church’s life and mission. (See articles 5-7 below.)
Augsburg Confession

[V. Concerning the Office of Preaching]
To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.

Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.

[V. Concerning Ministry in the Church]
So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, that is to say, in those who hear that God, not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace on account of Christ. Galatians 3[:14b]: "So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to human beings without the external Word through their own preparations and works.

[VII. Concerning the Church]
It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. As Paul says in Ephesians 4[:4-5]: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."
Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere.

As Paul says [Eph. 4:5,6]: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all …”


The apostle Paul wrote, “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

Where did you hear the message that brought you to faith? Where do you hear the message that sustains your faith today? Who are the messengers that bring it most effectively for you?

4. Reread 1 Corinthians 1:18-21. When asked to elaborate on what is at the heart of the gospel message, Luther consistently referred to what the apostle Paul called the “message of the cross.” It is a message that thwarts any attempt to limit the community of faith to those who are considered powerful and wise. Rather, God’s mercy and love in Jesus evident in his crucifixion, a place of weakness and shame, is the sole foundation of a common life in Christ. Hidden in what seems foolish weakness is God’s power and wisdom.

What place does the “foolishness of the cross” have in the life of your community? Where does it show up in your congregation’s preaching and public witness?
OTHER LEARNING OPTIONS

1. Draw a picture of the centrality of the gospel and how you live it out in your life.

2. Sing or read “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 505—an alternate translation). How does this hymn open up for you the meaning of Bishop Eaton’s second emphasis? Brainstorm other hymns that can open up the meaning of the texts and Bishop Eaton’s second emphasis.

3. Create a list of words or thoughts that grab your attention in the texts in this lesson and the additional Scripture listed below. How might these words or thoughts inform your faith and daily living?

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

- Ephesians 2:1-10
- Romans 3:21-28
- Romans 10:11-17
- 1 Corinthians 1:22-31

LINKS AND RESOURCES

- ELCA Book of Faith Initiative
- Together by Grace: Introducing the Lutherans edited by Katherine A. Kleinhans (Augsburg Fortress, 2016)
- Together by Grace Study Guide
- Story Matters invitation for congregations to engage the Bible as they listen for their own identity in the context of the gospel message.
We are church together

Just as God has joined us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in baptism, we are also joined to others, not only in the ELCA and The Lutheran World Federation, but in all communities of Christian faith around the world. In Christ none of us lives in isolation from others. Jesus is our peace and has broken down the walls that divide us—walls of judgment, hatred, condemnation and violence—and has made us into one, new human community (Ephesians 2:14-15). This spiritual communion depends only on God’s mercy that comes to us in the word and sacraments. That alone is enough for unity, and so we yearn for this communion with all Christians at the Lord’s table.

Because God gives us our unity in Christ, we are able to see and respect the diversity within Christ’s body. We receive it as a gift and embrace it, rather than treating it as a threat or a problem to be solved (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). We respect and honor the diversity of histories, traditions, cultures, languages and experiences among us in the ELCA and in the larger Christian community of faith. We seek full participation of all in the life and work of this church and will strenuously avoid the culture of any one group becoming the norm for all in the ELCA. And we strive to address the ways that racism, sexism, classism and other forms of injustice limit participation and harm people, communities and the whole body of Christ.

In all these relationships the ELCA serves reconciliation and healing with other Christians, while repentantly acknowledging its failings and wrongs, trusting in God’s forgiving mercy.
**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

**Ephesians 2:14-22**

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

**1 Corinthians 12:4-13**

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allotts to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Now do a **Lutheran theological reading** of one or both of the texts.

- How do these passages lead us to Christ?
- What message of demand do you hear?
- What message of promise do you hear?
- What other Scripture passages help you understand these?
Hymn: ELW 650 In Christ There Is No East or West
(“In Christ shall true hearts ev’rywhere their high communion find; his service is the golden cord close binding humankind.”)

Sing “In Christ There Is No East or West” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 650).

How are Christians everywhere united by our service in Christ?

CONTEXT
Through our baptism we are not only united with Christ for all time but also with other Christians. Likewise when we gather around Christ’s table for communion, even if they are not physically present, we are united with the communion of all the saints, past and present. We truly are church together. Those drops in the font are part of the ripple effect that connect us with Christians in the ELCA, The Lutheran World Federation and all who are united with Christ. That makes us one diverse human community in which one can never truly be isolated from the others. We yearn for the day when all will share in Christ’s holy supper together, yet baptism unites us even if we do not yet share table fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations.

Over the years, the ELCA has formally recognized our connection with six other Christian bodies through full communion partnerships in which we can worship together and exchange clergy. Additional information about these partnerships can be found in the links and resources section. We celebrate the diversity of our human community of faith, recognizing that although we we may not look or worship alike, we are truly members of the body of Christ who are connected through him. Recognizing our inherent human sinfulness, we work together to address those things that might block our Christian unity.

Considering the above insights, reread the Bible passages. What do you notice now?
ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Reread Ephesians 2:14-22. Jesus is our peace. The obstacle to peace is hostility rooted in “the law with its commandments and ordinance,” all the judgments and self-justifications, accusations and self-righteousness that feed hostility. In the cross of Jesus that scapegoating dynamic reached its conclusion in a savage storm directed at Jesus. The judgmental power that feeds hostility has been exhausted and found wanting. Jesus does not offer “peace” as a kind of superior mental attitude; rather, he is peace, reconciliation in relationships embodied and experienced by all in whom he lives.
   
a. What dividing walls have you experienced in your personal life? In your life among Christians?

b. What kinds of hostility have divided you from others? What role have moral judgments and self-justifications played in the divisions you have experienced?

c. What has reconciliation looked and felt like in your life? Where have you experienced it among Christians?

d. How is “peace” commonly understood in what you hear and read? In your conversation with family, friends and co-workers?

2. “He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances” (Ephesians 2:15). Many Christians have stumbled over this passage and have attempted to blunt its radical implication by explaining it away as only the abolishment of ceremonial religious requirements. But the meaning is clear: Jesus has ended the basis for any division that comes from any judgment or hostility based on any law.

a. How would you explain this passage? What makes you uneasy about this passage?

b. In Romans, the apostle Paul says, “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4). What possibilities do you see for relationships in the place where legalism and judgment have come to an end?
3. Reread 1 Corinthians 12:4-13. In Christ, being church together means that the diversity of abilities, insights, experiences and traditions enriches our life together. Rather than treat our individual uniqueness as problems to be erased or communal traditions as threats to our common life, in Christ they are gifts to the whole community.

   a. How do you experience diversity in the body of Christ? What opportunities do you have to collaborate “for the common good” with others whose insights, gifts and passions are different from yours?

   b. Christ’s body is already diverse, but some communities of faith are disconnected from that diversity. Where do you see opportunities for your congregation to participate more fully in the diversity that already exists in Christ’s body? Where do you see opportunities for the ELCA to embrace diversity?

   c. What gifts from God do you bring that contribute to the diversity of Christ’s body? What gifts does your community of faith bring? Who recognizes and rejoices in them?

OTHER LEARNING OPTIONS

1. Draw a picture of, or Mind Map, what diversity in Christ looks like for you. What might it look like for your congregation? Brainstorm steps you would take to bring this type of diversity to fruition in your congregation.

2. Read the additional Scripture passages. List themes in the passages. How do these connect to the chapter focus passages?

3. Mind Map or list some of your gifts that you use to serve Christ’s church and the world. Compare your list with the lists of others in your group. How are they similar? How are they different?
SESSION 3: WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE
Ephesians 4:1-6
Acts 2:43-47
Acts 4:32-37
Acts 10:34-38

LINKS AND RESOURCES
• Information on the full communion partners of the ELCA
• Information on bilateral conversations between Lutherans and other denominations
• Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist (Augsburg Fortress, 2015) is a book detailing the recent bilateral conversations between The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.
• Declaration on the Way Study Guide
We are church for the sake of the world

Christ has freed us from sin and death, even from ourselves, so that we can live as ministers of reconciliation in loving and generous service of our neighbors (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). In Jesus Christ, all of life—every act of service, in every daily calling, in every corner of life—flows freely from a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.

Freed by the transformative life of Christ, we support ELCA members as they give themselves freely in transforming service with the neighbor. Through a wide range of daily vocations and ministries, we nurture faith, build alliances and gather resources for a healed, reconciled and just world. As church together, we faithfully strive to participate in God’s reconciling work, which prioritizes disenfranchised, vulnerable and displaced people in our communities and the world. We discover and explore our vocations in relation to God through education and moral deliberation. We bear witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ through dialogue and collaboration with ecumenical partners and with other faiths. In all these ministries God’s generosity flows through us into the life of the world.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 42:5-7

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
2 Corinthians 5:14-19

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Now do a Lutheran theological reading of one or both the texts. How do these passages lead us to Christ? What message of demand do you hear? What message of promise do you hear? What other Scripture passages help you understand these?

Hymn: ELW 708 Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love

(“Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.”)

Sing “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 708).

Who are your neighbors in your community and abroad? How will you serve them?
CONTEXT
The message that humankind is reconciled to God through faith alone has always encountered questions and concerns about whether such a faith undermines good works, service to others and justice in the world. In fact, the opposite is true. Faith in Christ flows into a generous engagement with the life of the world.

When Martin Luther wrote that “faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace so sure and certain that believers would stake their life on it a thousand times,” he continued, “Because of it, without compulsion, people are ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown them this grace.” Faith, he wrote, “is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them” (Luther’s “Preface to the Romans,” Volume 35 of Luther’s Works, pp. 370-371).

ELCA members and congregations participate daily in acts of good works that serve the neighbor both at home and abroad. Members serve their neighbors in various ways through their daily vocations. Domestic ministries are shared through service at food banks and kitchens, clothing collections and distributions and participation in service projects such as Appalachian Service Project or Habitat for Humanity. Through ministries such as ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran World Relief, we serve our brothers and sisters around the world. All of these are concrete ways to witness to the love of Christ beyond the doors of our church buildings.

Considering the above insights, reread the Bible passages. What do you notice now?
ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Reread Isaiah 42:6-7. The calling to serve others flowed from the right relationship that God established with Israel. When have you experienced your faith relationship with God flowing through you to others? When it happens, what liberation have you observed in yourself and in others?

2. Reread 2 Corinthians 5:14-19. Life in Christ is a new creation where every daily activity—daily employment, family life, life as a neighbor in the community and a citizen in the global community of nations—serves the well-being of others. Make a list of the network of relationships in all the daily activities in which you participate—not only in your employment but also at home and in the community, online and in face-to-face encounters? How is your neighbor being served by what you do or by who you are? Who are the people to whom your life in Christ flows most freely? Where else can that life flow in the activities of your life—other people, other priorities?

3. What does it mean for you to be reconciled with God? What does it mean for you that through Christ you are reconciled with the world? How does your community demonstrate reconciliation with God and with the world? What is your contribution to that work?

OTHER LEARNING OPTIONS

1. Mind Map all your vocations in life (e.g., daughter, sibling, spouse, parent, job, neighbor, etc.). Now include all the ways you serve others in these vocations. Compare your map with others. You could also draw these as ripples in a font to demonstrate how your relationship with God ripples out into the world.

2. Explore the links in the links and resources section. What possibilities do you see for your personal participation or that of your congregation in one of the service projects listed? Are there others you can think of to include on this list? How can you get started?
3. Read or sing “Let Streams of Living Justice” (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 710). How is this hymn an example of ripples from the font? What does this hymn stir up in you? You can also listen to two verses of the hymn at soundcloud.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE
Acts 11:19-30
Acts 16:6-10
Romans 15:25-28
1 Corinthians 16:1-3

LINKS AND RESOURCES
• Appalachian Service Project
• Lutheran Disaster Response
• Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
• Lutheran World Relief
  • Ways to get involved
• Habitat for Humanity
  • Donate or shop at a Habitat Restore
• ELCA World Hunger
• Church World Service
Book of Faith Resources
Increasing biblical literacy and fluency for the sake of the world. Many new studies for Lutherans with beginner to advanced biblical knowledge.

LEARN ABOUT THE 4 LENSES FOR READING SCRIPTURE AT:
bookoffaith.org

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.
THE 4 LENSES FOR READING SCRIPTURE:

The Devotional Lens
* What scares, confuses, or challenges me in this passage?
* What delights me in this passage?
* What stories or memories does this passage stir in me?
* What is God up to in this passage?
Join the conversation #whereareyoutoday

The Historical Lens
* Who wrote this passage?
* Why was this passage written?
* Where and when was this passage written, what do we know about this part of the ancient world?
* Where would I want more background information?
Join the conversation #yesterdaysstory

The Literary Lens
* What do I notice about the language, repetition, dialogue, and descriptions?
* What is the plot?
* Who are the characters?
* What are the settings and themes of this passage?
Join the conversation #alwaysopen

The Theological Lens
* What are my God questions?
* How does this passage lead me to Christ?
* What demands and promises do we hear?
* How might people from cultures and generations hear this passage?
Join the conversation #godquestions

THE 4 LENSES FOR READING SCRIPTURE:

The Devotional Lens
* What scares, confuses, or challenges me in this passage?
* What delights me in this passage?
* What stories or memories does this passage stir in me?
* What is God up to in this passage?
Join the conversation #whereareyoutoday

The Historical Lens
* Who wrote this passage?
* Why was this passage written?
* Where and when was this passage written, what do we know about this part of the ancient world?
* Where would I want more background information?
Join the conversation #yesterdaysstory

The Literary Lens
* What do I notice about the language, repetition, dialogue, and descriptions?
* What is the plot?
* Who are the characters?
* What are the settings and themes of this passage?
Join the conversation #alwaysopen

The Theological Lens
* What are my God questions?
* How does this passage lead me to Christ?
* What demands and promises do we hear?
* How might people from cultures and generations hear this passage?
Join the conversation #godquestions