



FACES OF CHRIST



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

*"And a voice came from heaven,
'You are my Son, the Beloved,
with you I am well pleased.'"*

(Mark 1:11)

Faces of Christ



THEME

Who do you say that I am?



OBJECTIVES

In this session, participants will discuss who Jesus Christ is, and what it means to be Christ for others AND to see Christ in others.

WELCOME

Welcome the participants to this first session of Lenten study. Over the next five weeks, we will dive more deeply into who/how Jesus is for us, with us and among us today. In this first session, we will hear from each other about how we see Jesus Christ in our lives.



OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, you bring your people together in worship, prayer and study to learn more about you, one another and ourselves. Bless our time together, that by your grace, our community may be strengthened for service to you and our neighbors. May we be signs of your love for our world, and may our eyes remain open to your presence therein. In your holy and gracious name, Amen.

“NAMES OF JESUS” GAME

Divide the participants into equal groups of about 3-5 participants each. If you have folks of different ages, try to include a variety of ages in each group. Have a small prize available for the “winning” group, and a different “prize” for the rest of the participants, to be sure everyone feels included. (You can use edible prizes, but be aware of people’s Lenten fasts when it comes to chocolate or candy!)

Scripture, liturgy, and songs are filled with different “names” for Jesus – from “Wonderful Counselor” to “Son of God.” The groups will have just a few minutes (5 minutes is ideal) to come up with as many of these “names” of Jesus as they can. This game is “open-book,” so they can have bibles or hymnals handy to help. Ask them to name one person to be the “scribe” for their group, writing down the names the group members come up with. There are no wrong answers here – encourage them to be creative!

After the time is up, ask each group to read their list. As they do, write the names on a piece of posterboard or a large whiteboard at the front of the room. Each group gets

one point per name, including names that are repeated by other groups. At the end, the group with the most points wins the prize.

Chief Cornerstone	Immanuel
Deliverer	Indescribable Gift
Good Shepherd	Judge
Great High Priest	King of Kings
Head of the Church	Lamb of God
I Am	Light of the World

Once everyone has read their names and they have been written on a board in front, ask the participants:

- Which of these names stand out to you? Why?
- Of the few that stood out, what do each of these say about who Jesus is?

MARK AND JOHN: TWO PORTRAITS

This Lent, the lectionary readings come from the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John. The authors of these two Gospels present two very different pictures of the one person, Jesus. In this activity, your group will dive deeper into the way each Gospel author viewed Jesus Christ.

Below are verses from the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John. You can divide the group into smaller groups, with some reading and reflecting on the verses from Mark and others reading and reflecting on the verses from John. Or, you can read and discuss them together as a large group, looking first at Mark and then at John.



The Gospel of Mark

• 1:9-11

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

• 8:31-33

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

• 15:37-39

³⁷Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”



Key Questions for the Gospel of Mark

- 1) How is Jesus referred to in the Gospel?
- 2) What characteristics of Jesus are highlighted in the verses?
- 3) Who announces that Jesus is the Son of God? Interesting fact: The centurion is the first human in the Gospel to call Jesus “God’s Son.” Before this, only two other “characters” called Jesus the Son of God: God (1:11 and 9:7) and the demons (1:24; 3:11; and 5:7).

The Gospel of John

• 1:1-5

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

• 3:16-18

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

• 6:35-39

³⁵Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.”



Key Questions for the Gospel of John

- 1) How does the author of the Gospel describe Jesus?
- 2) What characteristics of Jesus does the author of the Gospel lift up?
- 3) How is John's description different from Mark's?



CONCLUDING LESSONS FROM THE GOSPELS

- The Gospel of Mark points to Jesus as one who suffers. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, points to Jesus as one who has power to end suffering.
- Early Christians saw Jesus both as one who suffers with them and as one who will end their suffering.
- Jesus is revealed in both suffering and in God's work in ending suffering.
- What does this mean for us today?

JESUS CHRIST: A LUTHERAN VIEW

Martin Luther had a complex and profound understanding of Jesus Christ, especially Jesus' relationship to Christians. Luther described two ways Christians relate to Jesus. First, Luther believed that Christians should imitate Jesus in service to their neighbors. In fact, he compared true Christians to "little Christs," acting out of love in service to their neighbors. Second, Luther believed that Christ was revealed in the neighbor, especially the most vulnerable neighbors – those facing poverty, disease or hunger. Christians are called to both "be" like Christ and to look for Christ in others.

For this activity, either display or pass out copies of the following two quotes. You will need two large pieces of posterboard or a large whiteboard divided in half. You will also need red and green markers. (You can use any two colors, but here, we will describe this using red and green.)

Luther on being like Christ:

"We were in need before God and lacked God's mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other..."
(Freedom of a Christian)

Luther on seeing Christ in others:

"God says, 'I do not choose to come to you in my majesty and in the company of angels but in the guise of a poor beggar asking for bread. ... I want you to know that I am the one who is suffering hunger and thirst.'" *(Luther's Commentary on the Gospel of John)*

Divide the participants into small groups and have them discuss the following questions:

- How are we "Christ for others"?
- How does it change our behavior to remember that we are called to "become ... a Christ to the other"?
- How have we seen or experienced Christ through other people?
- How does it change our response to people in need to see them as the presence of God in our midst?

Come back together as a large group and share some of the responses from the small groups.

Bonus Activity: BLESSINGS AND BLOCKERS

This activity can be done to take the discussion further. If you do this activity, be sure to keep the list your group creates. There will be opportunities to use it in later sessions.

On the posterboard or whiteboard, write the following two headings, leaving ample empty space to write other things around them:

- Christ for Others
- Christ in Others



In this activity, we will be looking at things that help us (blessings) and things that inhibit us (blockers.) Explain to the group that the green markers will be used for blessings and the red markers will be used for blockers. Then ask them to think about the following questions. (It may be helpful to have these written out and to ask each group to appoint someone to take notes for them.)

Blessings

- What helps us remember to be Christ for others?
- What helps us remain open to seeing Christ in others?

Blockers

- What makes it difficult to remember to be Christ for others?
- What makes it difficult to see Christ in others?

Give the group about 7-10 minutes, during which they can write their brief responses in either green or red around the respective headings.

As a concluding discussion, you can ask:

- How does our church help provide these blessings?
- How can we support each other in removing these blockers?

Conclusion

- What things stand out to you from this first session?
- What questions did our conversations raise for you?



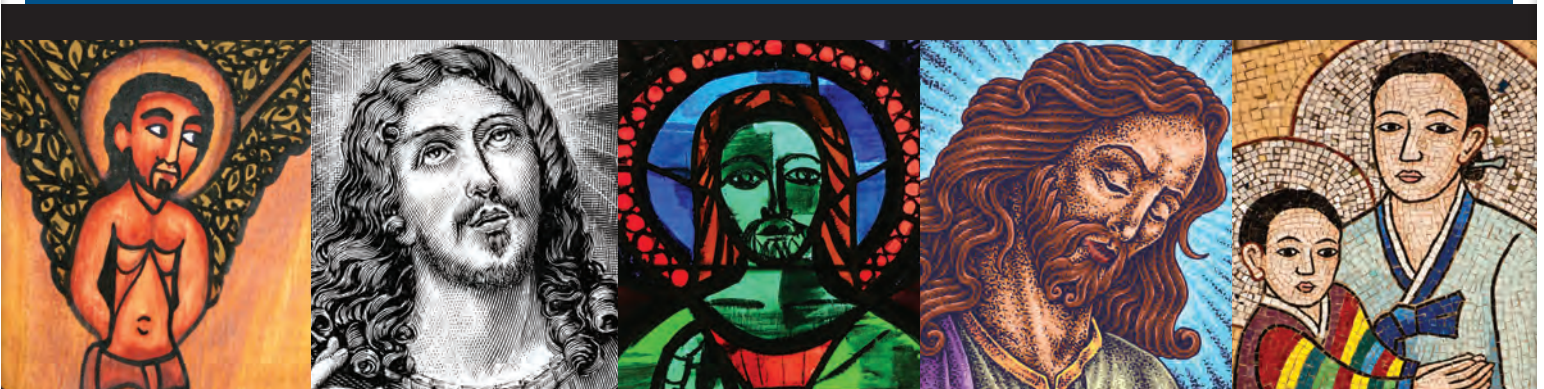
CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, by your grace, you dwell within our world, inviting us to share in your loving work and to bear witness to your presence. As we leave here, guide us this week to see ways we can share your love with those around us and seek your face in our neighbors. Bless us this Lent, as we reflect on the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, and prepare for his death and resurrection. In your holy name, Amen.

“I see Christ’s cry on the face of a woman victim when she shares her pain of oppression by patriarchal systems and structures in Indian church and society.”

– **Ranjita Borgoary**,
United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India

Partners in mission



THEME

What does it mean to be partners in God’s mission?



OBJECTIVES

In this session, participants will reflect on the words of Ranjita Borgoary (RAHN-jee-ta BORE-go-ah-ree), the Women in Church and Society coordinator for the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India. Borgoary invites us to think more deeply about “God at work in and through the church, which is the body of Christ.”

WELCOME

Welcome the participants to this second session of Lenten study. Over the next few weeks, we will dive more deeply into who Jesus is for us, with us and among us today.

In this second session, we will hear from a fellow Lutheran who works with our companion churches about the work God is calling us to support in India.



OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the community you create among people of faith around the world. Especially today we thank you for our companions in the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India. Give them strength and courage to be your hands and feet as they accompany their neighbors. Grant that we may accompany them and learn from them as we live out our faith together. In your name, we pray. Amen.

LINKING BACK

Ask the participants if they remember from Session One the two ways Martin Luther invited us to see Jesus Christ. On a piece of poster board or a large whiteboard, write “Christ for others” on one side and “Christ in others.” (If you still have the posters from the “blessings and blockers” activity from Session One, this would be a great time to share them!)

Offer some guiding questions to recall some of the lessons from Session One:

- 1) What does it mean to say that Christians are to help our neighbors by offering ourselves as “Christ” for others?
- 2) What does it mean for us to see our neighbors as representing Christ to us?

In this session, listen for the ways that Ranjita Borgoary writes about how the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India is “Christ for others” and how Lutherans in India see Christ in their neighbors.

WHAT IS HUNGER?

Borgoary is the Women in Church and Society coordinator for the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India. In this role, she directs the Women’s Emancipation from Atrocities program. This program is supported by ELCA World Hunger, the ELCA’s signature response to hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world.

HUNGER



On a piece of poster board or a large whiteboard, draw a nondescript outline of a person. Above this, write the word “hunger.”

Ask:

What does “hunger” mean to you?
What kinds of things can we hunger for?

As people offer responses, write them near a body part that might symbolize the hunger. For example, write “food” by the stomach or mouth; write “companionship” by the hands; write “love” by the heart and so on.

Hunger is not just an affliction of an empty belly. It is a symptom of our need for the many things that make us whole, including relationships, meaningful work and physical needs. As our church has learned from our congregations, companions and partners, our response to hunger often begins with food, but it needs to go beyond this as we accompany our hungry neighbors.

Read or invite someone to read the following quote from Borgoary:

“[The women in our program] don’t need or don’t seek food, drinks and shelter. Much more than these, they need and they seek identity, dignity and social standing. They are not suffering from mere lack of food and drink, but from social stigma and its consequent manifestations in patriarchal and hierarchical social structures that teach that women are inferior, weak, impure and polluted.”

Read or invite someone to read the quote again, and this time, ask the participants to listen for key words that stand out to them.

HUNGER



After reading it the second time, ask the participants which words stood out to them. Write their responses on the drawing of the nondescript person from earlier. (You

may want to use a different colored pen or marker.) Listen for words such as “identity,” “dignity,” “social standing,” “suffering,” “stigma” and so on.

Ask the participants what each of the words listed means to them. After receiving some responses, read the following quote from Borgoary:

“Our work involves the emancipation of women and girls, the most vulnerable and victimized section of Indian society, when women suffer with abusive words and actions in their home and workplace.”

Ask:

What does it mean to hunger for these things?
How might our lives be influenced if we were denied identity? Dignity? Social standing?

The hunger for dignity, justice and identity has real-life consequences for women in India:

- One-third of Indian women between the ages of 15 and 49 have experienced physical violence. (United Nations, 2016).
- According to a study by the United Nations, nearly 95 percent of women in India believe public spaces are unsafe for them, and 73 percent said they do not feel safe even in their own surroundings. (United Nations, 2016).
- More than 28 percent of women in India have experienced spousal violence. (National Family Health Survey 4).
- Women in India own less than 13 percent of the land, and the land they do own is usually of poorer quality than land owned by men. In regions where farming is the main source of income, this leaves many Indian women dependent on common land and unable to access credit, making them more vulnerable to poverty and hunger. (IFPRI, 2017, goo.gl/Lds6k4)

Gender injustice isn't just a problem in India, though. In the United States*:

- One in six women will be a victim of attempted or completed rape in her lifetime.
- Women one year out of college who were working full-time were paid, on average, just 82 percent of what their male peers were paid.
- National data reveals that women clergy earn 76 cents for each dollar earned by men clergy.
- Working single mothers are twice as likely as men to hold low-wage or part-time jobs with few or no benefits (Bread for the World, 2016).

* (Unless noted, statistics are from "ELCA, Faith, Sexism and Justice: Conversations toward a Social Statement," 2016.)

THE CRY OF RACHEL

Where is God in the midst of this?

Divide the large group into smaller groups or pairs. Distribute the following quotes from Borgoary, one to each group or pair. (If your group is small, you can also read these together without dividing up.) As they read each quote, invite the participants to consider the following questions:

- Where does Borgoary see God in her work and community?
- How is God at work?

“God is the God of the poor and the oppressed. This God sees and hears the suffering and cry of the poor and oppressed under unjust societies and structures.”

“When the real liberation and real joy is taking place in the life of the oppressed and vulnerable, we see our God, hence we are making the oppressed and vulnerable see the God of liberation and the joy-giver.”

“I see Christ’s cry on the face of a woman victim, when she shares her pain of oppression by a patriarchal system and structures in Indian church and society.”

“God became the suffering servant of suffering ones by revealing Himself/Herself as a vulnerable suffering God. We believe that this revelation of God continues till today in and through our neighbors who are in need of God’s loving compassion and action.”

After each group has had a chance to share its responses to the questions based on the quotes, read the following observation together:

“We see Christ, the revelation of God, in each and every participant of our project. In every word, in every expression, and in every action of the

participants, we see the heart cry of God for the suffering people, especially the women and girls as we hear all around in our church and society the cry of Rachel. With this conviction, we do our work not as mere charity work, but fulfilling the commandment of God to love our neighbor as ourselves.”

The “cry of Rachel” refers to Jeremiah 31:

¹⁵Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. ¹⁶Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; ¹⁷there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country.

In Genesis 35, Rachel dies while giving birth to her son, Benjamin. She and Jacob are on their way to Bethlehem. The Gospel of Matthew refers to her shortly after Jesus’ birth and Herod’s slaughter of male children (Matthew 2:18). Rachel’s tears in Jeremiah and Matthew signify sorrow for all the “lost children,” but they also occasion a reminder of God’s promise to God’s people: “... your children shall come back to their own country.” There is both despair and hope, death and life in the cry of Rachel.

Ask:

What do you think “the cry of Rachel” means to Borgoary and the participants in her work in India?

What is the church’s response to “the cry of Rachel” around the world and in our own community?

'PARTNERS IN MISSION'

Where is the church in this work?

Divide the large group into smaller groups or pairs. Distribute the following quotes from Borgooary, one to each group or pair. (If your group is small, you can also read these together without dividing up.) As they read each quote, invite the participants to consider the following questions:

- How does the church respond to the “cry of Rachel”?
- How does Borgooary describe the church’s work?

“We see this God of the oppressed at work in and through the church, which is the body of Christ, the ultimate manifestation of God’s heart for the suffering world.”

“When we do according to the word of Jesus Christ, ‘Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself,’ we are obviously doing the rituals next to God and truly will love and do good things to our neighbor. ... By doing this, we see Christ within us.”

“In our vision, in our mission and in our actions, we are convinced that our work is not ours, but it is the compassionate work of Christ. In and through our work, we try to reveal Christ and God’s compassionate love and action. So, as Christ dwells in us and has called us to be partners in mission of fulfilling the reign of God here on earth, we realize that we represent ‘little Christs’ to those with whom we work.”

“Our approach of addressing the concept and reality of hunger is not mere fulfilling physical needs, but the deeper social, religious, psychological and theological needs ... to free women from all bondages, free from abuse in

the church and society at home and by church leaders.”

As a group, discuss the participants’ responses. Then, to conclude the session, read the following quote and reflect on the question below.

“Every individual Christian and the church as community of faith are called to be the partners in mission of God in building the kingdom of God – equality, justice and peace here and now in our society. Indeed, what faith makes different in our work is that it is not mere social work, but a kingdom demands that we love our neighbors as ourselves. The faith-based humanitarian service is not mere social work, but it is a divine mission of God in action through which the justice and peace of God is revealed. ... God is at work in and through our engagement in this liberative and emancipatory work.”

Ask:

What difference does it make that the church is doing this work, rather than a secular organization?

How does it change our perspective to see this work as God’s work through us, rather than as our own?

Handout for group discussion

THE CRY OF RACHEL

“God is the God of the poor and the oppressed. This God sees and hears the suffering and cry of the poor and oppressed under unjust societies and structures.”

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‘PARTNERS IN MISSION’

“We see this God of the oppressed at work in and through the church, which is the body of Christ, the ultimate manifestation of God’s heart for the suffering world.”

“When we do according to the word of Jesus Christ, ‘Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself,’ we are obviously doing the rituals next to God and truly will love and do good things to our neighbor. ... By doing this, we see Christ within us.”

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and reality of hunger is not mere fulfilling physical needs, but the deeper social, religious, psychological and theological needs ... to free women from all bondages, free from abuse in the church and society at home and by church leaders.”

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Conclusion

- What things stand out to you from this session?
- What questions did our conversations raise for you?



CLOSING PRAYER

Merciful God, you hear the cry of Rachel for her children and offer her and us the promise of a future with life abundant and eternal. Grant that we may be your hands and feet in the world, working toward a better life for ourselves and our neighbors. Be with the women and girls who participate in United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India project and with all those who face violence and oppression. Open our eyes that we may see injustice, and open our hearts that we may act to correct it. In your holy name, Amen.

*“We see that Christ lives within them by how they survive
in day-to-day life when it seems impossible to do so.”*

– **the Rev. Julinda Sipayung,**
the House of Hope crisis center in Indonesia

Faith and thanksgiving



THEME

Where is God?



OBJECTIVES

In this session, the Rev. Julinda Sipayung (JOO-lin-da Sip-ah-YOONG), the director of the Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei (SO-poh-oo DAH-may) (“House of Hope”), reflects on how our understanding of God’s presence can change lives – for worse and for better. The Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei is a ministry of the Simalungun (sim-ah-LUN-gun) Protestant Christian Church (GKPS) in Indonesia.

WELCOME

Welcome the participants to this third session of Lenten study. Over the next few weeks, we will dive more deeply into who Jesus is for us, with us and among us today. In this third session, we will hear from a fellow Lutheran in one of our companion churches about the work God invites us to support in Indonesia.



OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the community you create among people of faith around the world. Especially today we thank you for our companions in the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church in Indonesia. Give them strength and courage to be your hands and feet as they accompany their neighbors. Grant that we may accompany them and learn from them as we live out our faith together. In your name we pray, Amen.

LINKING BACK

Ask the participants if they remember from Session One the two ways Martin Luther invited us to see Jesus Christ. On a piece of poster board or a large whiteboard, write “Christ for others” on one side and “Christ in others.” (If you still have the posters from the “blessings and blockers” activity from Session One, this would be a great time to share them!) Turning to Session Two, ask if they recall some of the ways that Ranjita Borgoary spoke about God, the women and girls involved in the project of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India project, and the church in India. (Some examples: God as God of the oppressed, Christ in the “cry of Rachel,” the church as partners in God’s mission, etc.)

In this session, listen for the ways that the Rev. Julinda Sipayung writes about how the Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei (House of Hope) is “Christ for others” and how Lutherans in Indonesia see Christ in their neighbors.

'VISIBLE GOD'

Pastor Sipayung and the House of Hope crisis center are in Indonesia, which is home to the Batak people. Batak is actually a term used for several ethnic groups in Indonesia, including the Simalungun people of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS). The GKPS has about 200,000 members, mostly on the island of Sumatra.

The House of Hope works with women and children who have been victims of abuse or exploitation. One of the challenges in its work is helping transform popular views of God that make it seem like God desires that people suffer.

Read the following quote from Pastor Sipayung and discuss the questions that follow:

“There is a saying among the Batak people: ‘Parents are visible God.’ This saying confirms that the presence and action of parents and elders in the community are represented as voicing God’s will. Thus, when parents or elders commit malicious and violent acts, a victim often believes things like God does not care for her, God has left her, God is angry with her because she or he has done something bad or wrong, or because she is not doing things expected out of her. There are some who also see abuse as a test from God, and if the victim is patient enough, she will pass the test, and God will release her from the problem.”

Ask:

- 1) How does Pastor Sipayung connect the Batak saying about God to situations of abuse or violence today?
- 2) What risks might a victim face in resisting an abusive parent or elder in Batak society?
- 3) What are some ways you have heard God described as justifying or demanding pain or suffering?

PRESENCE OF GOD

Pastor Sipayung insists that helping victims of abuse means changing where we see the presence of God. Read the following quote:

“God is living within the woman who received sexual abuse from her boyfriend, within a wife who has received physical and psychological abuse from her husband for years. God is present in the life of kids who received sexual abuse from the adult they trust. God also is within the woman who has received sexual abuse from her neighbor after her husband passed away, while she has to support six children. God is present in those who are longing for the empathy, advocacy and care of those around them. **We see that Christ lives within them by how they survive in day-to-day life when it seems impossible to do so.**”

On a whiteboard or two pieces of poster board, write “Parents as visible God” and “God within victims” as headings. Draw a line between the two headings to divide them. Ask participants to name differences between the two and write their responses under the appropriate headings. To get the discussion moving, you might ask:



- 1) How do the two perspectives describe where God is found?
- 2) What is the church’s response to suffering, based on the two perspectives? How are they different?

After the responses, divide the group into pairs. Invite each pair of participants to reflect together on the differences. Ask them to discuss with a partner when they have sought God during a time of suffering or sadness. How did their faith sustain them? How might Pastor Sipayung’s understanding of God shape their response to suffering, both their own and that of others?

After sufficient time for paired conversations, bring the group back together and invite a few folks to share some insights from their conversations.

HUNGER AND THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

Divide the participants into three groups of about equal size. If available, provide each group with a large piece of poster board that can be displayed. Or, you can provide paper and ask someone to be the note-taker for each group.

The Simalungun people, according to Pastor Sipayung, believe that there are three things that people hunger for: **“stomach, pocket or wallet, and faith.”** Give each group one concept: stomach, pocket/wallet or faith. Have the group write their concept as a heading on their poster board, if provided. Ask each group to discuss what hunger means for their concept. What might be the consequences of being hungry for each thing? Once finished, invite them to post their responses at the front of the room. Discuss as a large group some of the responses.

The Women's Crisis Center Sopou Damei is one of many such programs supported in part by gifts to ELCA World Hunger. These include the programs for women in the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India from Session Two, domestic violence shelters in the United States and programs to accompany victims of human trafficking.

Ask:

- 1) How might abuse or exploitation impact a woman's ability to provide for herself or her family? What economic risks might a victim of violence or abuse face?
- 2) Why is it important for ELCA World Hunger to respond to the three dimensions of hunger Pastor Sipayung names?
- 3) How can a broad response to hunger be more effective than a focus on just food?

Conclusion

What things stand out to you from this session?

What questions did our conversations raise for you?

In conclusion, read the following quote from Pastor Sipayung:

“Faith guides and lights every work and service done as a thanksgiving for the salvation through grace gifted by Christ. This in turn must be shared with everyone without looking at the background of people. This salvation is also enjoyed by all creation – humans, animals, plants and the whole universe. And everything rejoices and praises the Lord Creator, Owner and Caretaker of the whole universe. Let glory be to God in heaven and peace on earth.”



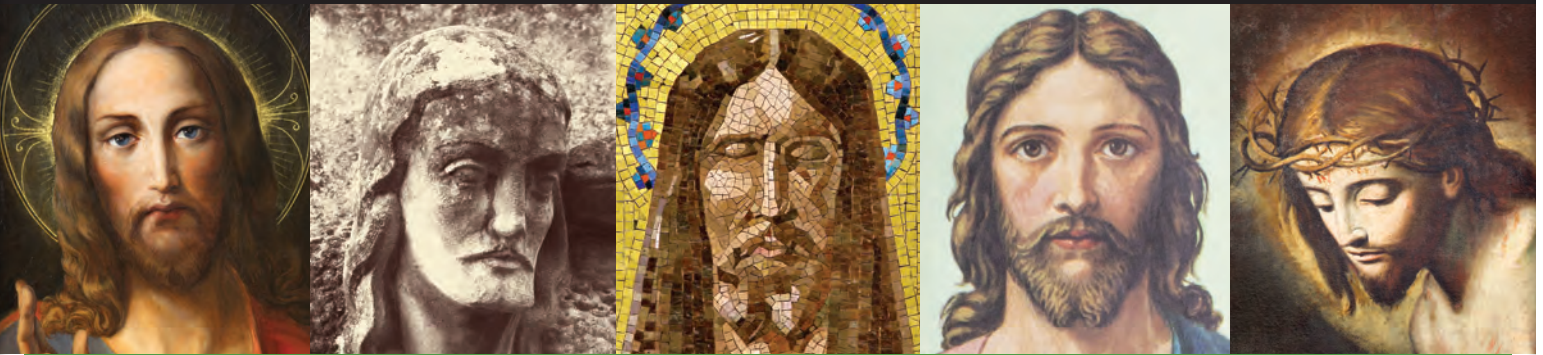
CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious God, you have provided richly for all our needs, especially our need for your grace through your son, Jesus Christ. Help us share the good news of grace with all people, so that they may know themselves as children of a loving God. Bless the work of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church in Indonesia. May their accompaniment of women and children strengthen and inspire justice for the victims of violence and abuse. Bless our own work that we may learn from our companions and be your hands and feet in the world. In your name, Amen.

"We believe that God is working in us and through us (and maybe in spite of us at times!) to bring this vision of Shalom to this beautiful, struggling, dying and rising community."

– **the Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel**,
pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis

God in the neighborhood



THEME

Dios Vive en el Barrio – “God lives in the neighborhood”



OBJECTIVES

In this session, participants will reflect on the words of the Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel, pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. The congregation provides the Young Leaders program for youth ages 11 to 15.

WELCOME

Welcome the participants to this session of Lenten study. In this study, we will dive more deeply into who Jesus is for us, with us, and among us today. In this session, we will hear from the Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel about the presence of Christ among young people in Minneapolis.



OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, you bring your people together in worship, prayer and study to learn more about you, one another and ourselves. Bless our time together, that by your grace, our community may be strengthened for service to you and our neighbors. May we be signs of your love for our world, and may our eyes remain open to your presence therein. In your holy and gracious name, Amen.

LINKING BACK

Remind the participants that in the previous sessions, we have reflected on the presence of Christ within us and within our communities. On a whiteboard (if available) or verbally, point to key lessons from each of the sessions:

- Session One: Martin Luther advised Christians to act as “little Christs” for their neighbors and reminded us to see the face of Christ in those facing hunger and need.
- Session Two: Ranjita Borgoary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India expanded our definition of hunger and told of how the church is called to be a partner in God’s mission of responding to the cry of Rachel.
- Session Three: The Rev. Julinda Sipayung of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church in Indonesia shared her view of God as revealed in women and children who suffer abuse – and in the work of the Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei as it accompanies the victims toward safety and justice.

In this session, Pastor Hansel invites us to look for God at work through the particular neighbors in the community around St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. How does seeing Christ in our neighbors shape the church’s service in the community?

YOUNG LEADERS

Read the story “Young leaders making a difference” from the handout printed at the end of this session. If you are able to, you can print the handout for the participants to read aloud and take home. After reading, ask the following questions:

- What challenges do young people in Minneapolis (and across the United States) face?
- What gifts do young people bring to the community?
- How is St. Paul’s Young Leaders Program helping change the community? How is the program helping change how people see young people?
- How does faith shape the church’s response to young people in need?

FACES OF CHRIST IN THE COMMUNITY

In the midst of our deepest hunger, God is there, says Pastor Hansel. He writes, **“I see God working as a sower, literally working with people who plant vegetable gardens and pollinator-attracting boulevard gardens, and also planting hope through art, through building relationships across cultures and languages, and through acts of kindness toward others.”**

In this activity, we will take a closer look at some of the neighbors in the community around St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. Pastor Hansel has shared four profiles of people in the community (see the handout below.) Again, you can divide the group into smaller groups or do this activity together.

If using small groups, give each group one profile and ask them to consider the following questions together:

- How did the gifts that were shared by the person in your profile benefit their community?
- How is each person a “face of Christ” in their neighborhood?
- What might be a form of hunger the person in your profile experienced?
- How is the church called to respond to this hunger?

Once each group has had sufficient time to discuss their profiles, invite them back together. Ask a member of each group to describe the profile in their own words and to share highlights from their group’s discussion.

Conclusion

To conclude your time together, read the following quote from Pastor Hansel:

“A banner hangs outside our church that says, ‘Dios Vive en el Barrio’ (DEE-ohs VEE-vay en ell BAR-ee-oh) – ‘God lives in the neighborhood.’ That is a statement of faith about how God sees our community and the people who live in it. We believe that God is working in us and through us (and maybe in spite of us at times!) to bring this vision of Shalom* to this beautiful, struggling, dying and rising community. ... We are there because we are called to Shalom by our loving God and because we can see Shalom being sowed by our God in this neighborhood, and we want to stand with our neighbors to be good soil that welcomes the seed.”

**Shalom is a Hebrew word that means peace, but it is also used to refer to wholeness, well-being and harmony.*

- What does it mean for the church to be “good soil”?
- How can our faith help us see God’s presence in communities that are “beautiful, struggling, dying and rising”? (Suggest parallels here between the witness of a city facing economic, environmental and social challenges – “dying,” perhaps – and the witness of Christ approaching the cross. How do we see resurrection even in the midst of death?)



CLOSING PRAYER

Living God, in this season of Lent, we prepare for the walk to the cross and the death of your son, Jesus Christ. Yet, by faith, we prepare also for the resurrection of him and our own rising with you into new life. Grant that we may see the grace of new life in our communities and that we may be good soil in which the seeds of shalom may be planted. Bless St. Paul’s Lutheran Church and their neighbors, that their community may continue to display new life in you. In your name, Amen.

Young leaders making a difference

Minneapolis, Minn.



“A lot of the opportunities that used to exist for developing job skills and leadership skills – working in mom-and-pop shops or having paper routes – are missing now,” says the Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. Recognizing the need for these skills, St. Paul’s started the Young Leaders program.

In the program, youth ages 11 to 15 participate in career tracks that include activities such as painting murals, growing food in community gardens or leading community initiatives. The Young Leaders program is supported in part by a grant from ELCA World Hunger.

“We don’t just take kids who are stars,” Pastor Hansel explains. “We’ve seen kids who are really troubled and watched them become more responsible, more focused and grow as leaders in school and in the community.”

The program has had a huge impact. When Carmen* first came to the Young Leaders, she was quiet and shy. The confidence she gained, though, encouraged her to use her talents to become a leader among her peers. In time, Carmen developed her creative writing skills and became co-editor of *The Phoenix of Phillips*, the program’s literary magazine. Her talents and leadership skills led to a scholarship offer from one of the premier private high schools in the area.

St. Paul’s Young Leaders program is helping change the community by accompanying youth who will – and are – making a difference. “A lot of people have a negative view of youth as troublemakers,” says Pastor Hansel. “But here, the youth get to see a community of Christians that cares about them, and the community can see their leadership and responsibility at work.”

**Name changed for privacy*

Profiles

“Susan”

We have a member who lives in our senior citizen apartments who has mental health concerns. But every day, she goes out to pick up trash on the street. She doesn't get paid for this, and because our church sits on a busy street with a lot of traffic, there is trash anew every morning. But there “Susan” is, every day, walking the byways and making a difference.

An Ecuadoran couple

If you go out early in the morning near the church, you can often see an elderly couple—immigrants from Ecuador—walking through the alleys of our neighborhood with large garbage bags, picking up aluminum cans to recycle. When I've seen them, I've greeted them, but it has dawned on me that maybe their Spanish isn't very good. They speak Quechan, or some other native tongue. My guess is that they are doing what they can to support the family as grandparents, while the parents toil at demanding jobs and the children go to school. I'm sure they feel like strangers in this place at times, but there is a quiet dignity and even joy about them. “For I was a stranger, and you welcomed me ...” (Matthew 25).

These two “strangers” bless the neighborhood with their unheralded grace.

“Maria”

“Maria” was a teen who participated in our Young Leaders program. Even at 11 years old, she was mature, responsible and generous. That probably had to do with her journey. When she was only a year old, her mother left her with her grandmother in Mexico to come to the United States to find work. Maria made the crossing nine years later, walking through the desert at age 10 with her 13 year-old brother. It has been a struggle at times for Maria—adjusting to a stepfather and new sisters; not always being welcomed in society because of her undocumented status. But she continues to smile, work hard and give to others.

She wants to be a math teacher; I hope that one day she will be a pastor.

“Carl”

Last summer, “Carl” was accepted into St. Paul's Young Leaders program. We knew that he had emotional and mental challenges, but we wanted to work with him. It soon became clear that he really could not reach even minimal standards, and this was affecting the whole group. We made a decision that he could not continue. Our summer staff volunteered that they would work one-on-one with Carl outside of program hours so that he could make a little money and grow in skills. Those hours with Carl were a true labor of love for the staff, but I think it was a blessing for Carl, too.

Hunger and hope



THEME

Christ, hunger, lent and hope



OBJECTIVES

In this session, participants will draw together the lessons from the previous sessions and consider what they have learned about hunger, faith and the face of Christ in their communities.

WELCOME

Welcome the participants to this session of Lenten study. In this final session, we will reflect together on what we have heard in the previous sessions and what this means for us as we conclude our Lenten journey.



OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, you bring your people together in worship, prayer and study to learn more about you, one another and ourselves. Bless our time together, that by your grace, our community may be strengthened for service to you and our neighbors. May we be signs of your love for our world, and may our eyes remain open to your presence therein. In your holy and gracious name, Amen.

THE WHOLE PICTURE OF HUNGER

Each of the ministries we have read about in Sessions Two, Three and Four were supported by ELCA World Hunger in 2016. Together, they represent just a few of the nearly 600 programs in more than 60 countries supported by ELCA World Hunger. They also represent the diversity and depth of anti-hunger ministries that Lutherans around the world make possible. In this activity, we will review and reflect on what hunger means for Ranjita Borgoary (Session Two), the Rev. Julinda Sipayung (Session Three) and the Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel (Session Four).

On a large whiteboard or poster board, write the word “hunger” in the center. Divide the participants into groups of three to five members. (For small groups, you can also do this activity together.) Provide each group a copy of Handout #1 – “What Is Hunger?” provided below. Ask each group to name one person as note-taker and provide them with pen and paper, if needed.

Read or invite someone to read to the whole group the three descriptions of hunger from the handout. Then, ask each small group to discuss together the descriptions and to identify words or short phrases that help define what hunger means in each community: India, Indonesia and the United States. The note-taker will be responsible for writing down the words or phrases.

continued...

After the groups have had sufficient time to discuss (5-7 minutes should be enough), invite a member from each group to come to the whiteboard or poster board and write their responses around the word “hunger.” If words or phrases are repeated, ask the participants to place a checkmark next to words already written on the board. (You can also do this as a mildly competitive game by providing a prize of some sort to the group with the most words or phrases.)

After everyone has had a chance to write their words on the board, discuss their responses together.

Some possible questions:

- What words stood out to the most folks?
- What words were unique to groups? Why were these words meaningful to them?
- How do the descriptions provide a more robust understanding of hunger?
- What were some common elements of hunger across the different countries – Indonesia, India and the United States?

CHRIST IN OUR MIDST

In Session One, we reflected on the two ways that Martin Luther understood our relationship to Jesus Christ:

1. Christians are called to “become as it were a Christ to others,” attending to their needs freely and abundantly.
2. Christians are called to see Christ in their neighbors – especially those neighbors facing deep need.

Each of the ministry leaders in the previous sessions described how they see the presence of Christ among their neighbors. Read their responses in Handout #2 – “Christ in our midst.” (This can be done in small groups, as with the previous activity, or together as a whole group.)

Reflecting on these statements and looking again at the responses from the last activity, ask participants:

- How have we felt the presence of Christ within us during our times of need?
- What does it mean to see the presence of Christ among people facing these manifestations of hunger? How does that change our relationship to them?
- What difference does it make to approach anti-hunger work as a person of faith – recognizing Christ in the face of our neighbor who hungers – rather than as a secular person?

THE CHURCH RESPONDS

Each of the ministries featured in this Lenten study responds to hunger in different ways, yet all are also united by a shared faith that God calls followers of Christ to “become as it were a Christ to others” to meet our neighbor’s needs.

As with the previous activities, you can divide participants into three small groups, providing each with one of the quotes in Handout #3 – “The church responds,” or you can read and discuss them as a large group.

After reading and reflecting on the statements from Ranjita, Julinda and Patrick, ask the following questions:

- How does each ministry help people of faith “become ... a Christ to others”?
- What difference does it make to approach anti-hunger work as a person of faith – seeing your own work as representing Christ to your neighbor – rather than as a secular person?

Conclusion

What things stand out to you from this session and the reflections from Ranjita, Julinda and Patrick?

What questions did our conversations raise for you this Lent?



CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, by your grace, you dwell within our world, inviting us to share in your loving work and to bear witness to your presence. As we leave here, guide us this week to see ways we can share your love with those around us and seek your face in our neighbors. Bless us this Lent, as we reflect on the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, and prepare for his death and resurrection. In your holy name, Amen.

What is hunger?

Ranjita Borgoary (United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, India):

“[The women in our program] don’t need or don’t seek for food, drinks and shelter. Much more than these, they need and they seek identity, dignity and social standing. They are not suffering from mere lack of food and drinks but from social stigma and its consequent manifestations in patriarchal and hierarchical social structures that teach that women are inferior, weak, impure and polluted.”

The Rev. Julinda Sipayung (Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei, Indonesia):

“Being hungry is the state of wanting something because without having this fulfilled, there will be a void in oneself, which could cause weakness and pain. Simalungun people say that there are three things that can’t go empty: stomach, pocket or wallet, and faith. ... Those who come to the Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei mostly are those who are hungry or feeling the emptiness of love and compassion in their life. They are hungry for dignity and appreciation, for justice and truth, recognition of their rights and value as human and as women. They are hungry to receive recognition for their existence, which has been ignored for so long.”

The Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel (St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Minneapolis):

“In our neighborhood, hunger has at least two dimensions. One is physical – not so much lack of food but lack of quality food at reasonable prices. For many poor people with limited money, it’s easier to buy empty calorie food than it is to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Poor nutrition combined with older housing stock (lead paint, especially) and our neighborhood being the most polluted adds up to very negative health outcomes. The other dimension of hunger is spiritual. People in poverty receive a lot of messages – some internal, some external; some overt, some subtle – that they are not worth as much as others. That can contribute to a sense of powerlessness.”

Christ in our midst

Ranjita Borgoary (United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, India):

“We see Christ, the revelation of God, in each and every participant of our project. In every word, in every expression, and in every action of the participants, we see the heart cry of God for the suffering people, especially the women and girls as we hear all around in our church and society the cry of Rachel. With this conviction, we do our work not as mere charity work but fulfilling the commandment of God to love our neighbor as ourselves.”

The Rev. Julinda Sipayung (Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei, Indonesia):

“God is living within the woman who received sexual abuse from her boyfriend, within a wife who has received physical and psychological abuse from her husband for years. God is present in the life of kids who received sexual abuse from the adult they trust. God also is within the woman who has received sexual abuse from her neighbor after her husband passed away, while she has to support six children. God is present in those who are longing for the empathy, advocacy and care of those around them. We see that Christ lives within them by how they survive in day-to-day life when it seems impossible to do so.”

The Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel (St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Minneapolis):

“I see God working as a sower: literally working with people who plant vegetable gardens and pollinator-attracting boulevard gardens, and also planting hope through art, through building relationships across cultures and languages, and through acts of kindness towards others. For example, we have a member who lives in our senior citizen apartments, who has mental health issues, but who goes out every day to pick up trash on the street. She doesn’t get paid for this, and because our church sits on a busy street with a lot of traffic, there is trash anew every morning. But there ‘Susan’ is, walking the byways, making a difference.”

The church responds

Ranjita Borgoary (United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, India):

“When we do according to the word of Jesus Christ, ‘Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself,’ we are obviously doing the rituals next to God and truly will love and do good things to our neighbor. ... By doing this, we see Christ within us. ... In our vision, in our mission and in our actions, we are convinced that our work is not ours, but it is the compassionate work of Christ. In and through our work, we try to reveal Christ and God’s compassionate love and action. So, as Christ dwells in us and has called us to be partners in mission of fulfilling the reign of God here on earth, we realize that we represent ‘little Christs’ to those with whom we work.”

The Rev. Julinda Sipayung (Women’s Crisis Center Sopou Damei, Indonesia):

“When we share the experience and awareness about the wounds and pains of victims (and of perpetrators of abuse), it brings everyone to meet God, who is faithful, caring, just and full of love, compassion, and kindness. Christ is present through our work when we, together with the victim of abuse, help victims reclaim the life and dignity that was shattered by all they have experienced. When those victims stand back on their feet and claim the life they supposed to have, not blaming themselves anymore for what have happened in the past, we are sharing Christ with them. Christ is declared to them when they can get together with their children who have been take away forcefully from them. Christ is declared to the people when they receive justice from the legal system [and] through our willingness to support them without expecting to get anything in return.”

The Rev. Patrick Cabello Hansel (St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Minneapolis):

“We are part of the Shalom community garden a half block away – a partnership with neighbors and the church. It is the place where we teach young people how to grow vegetables in an urban environment; it is also the place where we make art to beautify the community and host gatherings to talk about issues in the community. Part of the harvest of the individuals or families who garden there is gleaned for a neighborhood food shelf. The church is not the only partner in Shalom, there are others. We are there because we are called to Shalom by our loving God, and because we can see Shalom being sown by our God in this neighborhood, and we want to stand with our neighbors to be good soil that welcomes the seed.”



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.