

BIBLE STUDY: Suffering and Rejoicing As One

This single-session Bible study and discussion guide can be used by adults or older teens, as individuals or in small groups, to consider civic commitment as people of faith in light of 1 Corinthians 12:21-26.

PRAYER • OPENING HYMN • BIBLE READING • REFLECTIONS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS • CLOSING HYMN

BIBLE STUDY & DISCUSSION GUIDE: Suffering and Rejoicing As One

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PRAYER

Gracious God, in the person of Christ Jesus you poured yourself out for your beloved people. Pour us out now for the sake of your children. Inspire us, give us wisdom to discern your will for all of humanity and give us courage to follow it.



OPENING HYMN

“One Bread, One Body” (ELW 496)

BIBLE READING

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. **If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it**” (1 Corinthians 12:21-26 NIV).

REFLECTIONS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

St. Paul wrote this passage in the context of a community conversation about whether one group of people should adjust their behavior to meet the needs of another group of people. He urges members of the Christian community at Corinth to understand that concern for and service to others is essential to their Christian identity. This understanding challenges us in our contexts. Should those who have enough make changes so that everyone’s needs can be met, or should they simply ensure that their own needs are met?

What are some spiritual and physical needs of people in your church?

How and where does your church care for its people?

What challenges (such as limits to time, expertise or resources) does the congregation encounter when confronted with varied needs?

Suffering and Rejoicing As One *continued*

When Martin Luther wrote about Christian freedom, he emphasized that we live out our faith through how we treat our neighbor: “Therefore, we conclude that Christian individuals do not live in themselves but in Christ and their neighbor, or else they are not Christian. They live in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love” ([The Freedom of a Christian](#), paragraph 113).

Our Christian calling in the world is directed toward loving our neighbor. Asked in the Gospel of Matthew to name the greatest commandment, Jesus responds: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40).

How does your life reflect this commandment?

Where does Jesus’ command to love the neighbor inspire you?

What are some ways your church accompanies and serves the most vulnerable in your community?

What are some needs churches do not meet in your community? Why might that be?

This calling carries over into our lives as citizens. Jesus’ words, Martin Luther’s writings and ELCA social teaching impart what one ELCA social statement referred to as “a distinctive quality to our life as citizens. Love born of faith calls us not to harm others and to help them in every need” ([For Peace in God’s World](#)). We are children of God, we are parents, we are siblings and we are citizens. In every one of those social structures are places where Christians find their calling to love and protect the neighbor and work for peace and justice.

What are some challenges people experience in your community that you would seek to resolve as a citizen?

What are some local organizations or agencies that work to overcome those challenges?

What relationships does or could your church have with those entities?

How do the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians and the words of Jesus and Matthew direct how you act in your community?

Citizens of a democracy have a number of ways to answer their calling as Christians in civic life, but the foundation of their civic life is voting. The most recent ELCA social message surmises: “Lutheran civic engagement arises both from a concern about disorder and injustice and from hope about what government can accomplish for the neighbor” ([Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy](#)). At every level — local, state, and federal - we choose representatives who make decisions that determine whose needs will be met first.

Regrettably, voter turnout in local elections is very low — around [25% for a mayoral election](#) is typical. Yet local governments have an impact on the quality of life available to everyone in that community. School initiatives are often on the ballot. Local governments approve zoning laws that may or may not allow affordable housing, and local communities have decided whether or not to opt into a state minimum wage. Children, veterans and low-income families depend on state and local governments for health care, school

Suffering and Rejoicing As One *continued*

services, and housing and food assistance. Addressing the needs of vulnerable people in our communities is the first concern of Christian citizenship.

*What does your local government do that contributes to the well-being of its population?
What needs in your community are being addressed in your local election?
What in your local election would represent good news to people who are suffering?
Do you find a connection between your Christian faith and the outcome of that election decision? How might you personally and/or congregationally use your civic life to honor people in your community?*

With powerful teaching to direct us, we as Christians live with the awareness that we suffer and rejoice as one. We pray that, through personal and corporate decisions, our civic life will honor people in our community and demonstrate love of neighbor.

CLOSING HYMN

“Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading” (ELW 401), “Where Charity and Love Prevail” (ELW 359) or “Ubi Caritas et Amor” (ELW 642)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- The ELCA has adopted social teaching documents on topics ranging from criminal justice to education to sexism. Start exploring these resources at <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements>.
- Learn about the ELCAvotes initiative, initiated by action of the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, at <https://ELCA.org/votes>.
- Register to vote at <https://vote.gov/>.
- Ballotpedia.org provides a wealth of information about local elections, municipal elections and ballot initiatives.
- Additional local election information can be found at <https://www.usa.gov/election-office>.
- State bar associations rank local judicial nominees on the ballot as qualified or unqualified. The American Bar Association also ranks judicial nominees. More at https://www.americanbar.org/groups/committees/federal_judiciary/ratings/.