

PRESIDING BISHOP EATON'S 4 FOUR EMPHASES BIBLE STUDY

Leader'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.

PRESIDING BISHOP EATON'S FOUR EMPHASES BIBLE STUDY

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

LEADER'S GUIDE: PRESIDING BISHOP EATON'S FOUR EMPHASES

by Marcus Kunz and Susan M. Lang

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.

a project of



book of faith
Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.

Remember that one person doesn't have to serve as the only leader. Instead, consider dividing the sessions among members of the group to share the leadership responsibility. All that is required of a leader is curiosity, advance time to read the material, good listening skills and the ability to ask good questions. No one should feel they have to have "all the answers" because the purpose of this study is exploration of the emphases and the texts.

As leader you have a variety of approaches that you can take in facilitating this material in your context. You don't need to use all the questions and material presented in each session. Think of them as offerings on a buffet table and select the items that will best serve your particular setting and discussion. Feel free to adapt as you go. Let the Spirit guide your discussion!

Some learners who are more linear may be frustrated by the options offered by this study. As you begin your first session describe the "buffet" imagery to the group to invite their participation in the selection of questions and options. Remind them they can always dive deeper into any section at home.

Encourage participants to do their own exploration of the topics being discussed. A website such as textweek.com is a good place to further study biblical texts. Participants can also explore the historical lens of the texts by doing web searches.

Components offered in each session include:

- Bishop Eaton's emphasis
- Scripture related to emphasis
- Book of Faith lenses
- Hymn references as sidebar to Scripture
- Context
- Additional questions for reflection (optional)
- Other learning options
- Additional Scripture
- Links and resources

Consider starting each session with the baptismal remembrance liturgy. If you do this, place the bowl of water in a central location in the meeting room so participants have easy access to it. It could be placed on its own table or in the middle of your meeting table. The resource offers additional instructions about the baptismal liturgy.

It is suggested that you start by reading aloud the session emphasis and the related Scripture. Then follow with a devotional reading of the Scripture to draw out what is being stirred up for participants. Additional promptings for leaders will be offered in each session.

Remember to print out the leader guide and study it or download and access it on your device. There is a separate download for the leader guide and the participant sheets. Encourage the participants to review the additional information on their sheets on their own. Encourage sharing of any new insights at the next session.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Additional information on the use of **Book of Faith** lenses.

“Some Helpful Ways to Read the Bible” by Dr. Diane Jacobson

Have copies of the **Book of Faith bookmark** on hand. You will find it at the end of this study.

Encourage participants to download the **Small Catechism app** for Apple or Android.

Supplies needed for sessions:

- Bibles (NRSV) – it would be helpful to have several good study Bibles on hand, such as the Lutheran Study Bible (Augsburg Fortress, 2009), to offer additional information on the text.
- Copies of the Small Catechism or the **Small Catechism app**
- Pens and markers, paper
- Whiteboard or newsprint and appropriate pens
- Copies of Evangelical Lutheran Worship
- Keyboard and musician if you are planning to sing

Supplies for opening baptismal liturgy:

- A large, colored cloth on which to place the bowl
- A large, glass or ceramic bowl at least 12 inches in diameter
- Pitcher of water
- A smaller bowl containing a variety of colored stones or glass used for floral arrangements
- A towel for drying hands when they remove a stone at the end of a session

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Sample schedule for a one hour class:

Baptismal liturgy	5 minutes
Reading of session emphasis	5 minutes
Devotional reading of Scripture	10 minutes
Book of Faith lenses	10 minutes
Review of context	10 minutes
Additional questions (optional)	15 minutes
Closing thoughts and prayer	5 minutes

If your group decides to dive deeper into an emphasis and Scripture, you could take two class sessions to cover one emphasis to give additional time for thought and conversation. Decide ahead of time if you will use any of the additional questions for reflection. Factor time for conversation into your session schedule.

Arrange the room for conversation according to the chosen learning options. If you plan to use any of the options that require writing or drawing, it is advisable to meet around tables. Be sure the whiteboard or newsprint is placed where it can be seen by all.

(Note: The baptismal liturgy has been written so that only the leader needs a copy.)

Prior to the class session, place the cloth and bowl on a table in a central location. Fill the pitcher with water and place the bowl of stones near the cloth and bowl.

OPENING BAPTISMAL LITURGY

Leader: *Through baptism we are transformed by the grace of God, the love of Jesus and the stirrings of the Holy Spirit within us. As we gather this day to engage God's word and especially as it relates to who we are as Lutherans, let us remember our baptism.*

(Pours water into the bowl)

We give you thanks, O God, for the gift of our baptism. Through it you have claimed us as your children and transformed our hearts and minds to live in service to you for the sake of the world. Even as you have blessed us, you call upon us to be ripples in the font and to celebrate the gift we have received from you. You call us to live ever reaching out to others in and with your love.

The leader drops stone into the water and says: *Remembering my baptism and giving thanks for the gift of God's love, I live as a ripple in the font, reaching out to others in Jesus' name. (Have this written on a whiteboard or newsprint for others to repeat as they come forward.)*

Invite each person present to come forward and drop a stone into the water as a reminder of their baptism and a reminder of their presence and participation in ministry and mission in this world.

When all are finished, the leader says: *We give you thanks, O God, for your continual presence in our lives. Bless us now as we invite your word to stir us up for service in Jesus' name for the sake of the world. Inspire us with your word so that we might burn brightly with our passion for loving and serving you. In all things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

At the end of the session invite learners to remove a stone and carry it with them throughout the week.

OPENING BAPTISMAL LITURGY

INTRODUCTION:

Ripples from the font

Leader: Briefly review this background with learners so they know where the conversation is headed and what the learning session format will be. After this session, invite feedback on which servings from the buffet of learning they are most interested in pursuing as a group. Remind them that they are always free to further reflect on or research questions not covered by the group.

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.

The waters of our baptism

Leader: Open the session with a devotional reading of each of the texts. Ask participants to reflect on the text as you read it and notice what draws them in. What words or thoughts does the text elicit in each person?

Read the first text out loud twice, leaving silence in between the readings. Discuss what each person was touched by or noticed. What might this say about the text? What does this say about baptism?

Learners can also refer to the Book of Faith Bookmark for additional questions.

If there is time, repeat with the second text. What themes have emerged from the **devotional** reading? (Write these on a whiteboard or newsprint) Ask for those who would like to share their connections with the text. Don't require participants to share their connections with the text.

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

OPENING BAPTISMAL LITURGY

HISTORICAL

We are introduced to Paul, then known as Saul, in Acts 8 where we learn of his extreme persecution of the early Christians. After his dramatic conversion in Acts 9, he becomes a staunch follower of Jesus and a missionary to communities of the early church.

Thirteen letters have been attributed to Paul, although many scholars believe he wrote only seven. Romans is one of his epistles. It is believed that it was written about 57 C.E. (Common Era) to a church that Paul had not founded nor yet visited. His writings are the earliest of the New Testament preceding even the Gospels.

Romans played an important part in the history of the church, and theologians such as Martin Luther frequently pointed to Paul's theology. Romans is not as contextual as other letters in that it doesn't address a specific issue but is more theological in nature. This passage highlights the importance of baptism.

What additional information would you like about the historical aspects of this text?

LITERARY

Today, to share information, we text or tweet, but in the days of the early church, you would write a letter. Paul made use of his epistles to encourage the fledgling churches of the early church and to address issues that were brought to his attention. In most cases the letters were very contextual. Romans differs in that it speaks of Paul's desire to visit Rome and shares his theological perspectives. Romans was dictated to Tertius (Romans 16:22) who transcribed it.

Paul uses metaphor in Romans and particularly in this passage. Take some time to consider these metaphors and what they mean for us today.

How does Paul use the metaphor "baptism into death"? What other metaphors do you notice? What do they mean to you? How do they help you understand baptism?

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 been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But 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.

Leader: Encourage reflection on baptism and how it creates the body of Christ. Decide in advance if you will look at both texts in a session or just one of them in order to give time for the optional questions at the end or for one of the other learning options.

OPENING BAPTISMAL LITURGY

HISTORICAL LENS

It is uncertain who the Gospel of Matthew is named after. Different theories point to several possibilities. The Gospel is written both after Mark and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem so it was most likely written in the 80s C.E. or slightly later, possibly in Antioch. Matthew uses both Mark and a document called “Q” as sources. The latter was also used by Luke, as a number of parallel verses are seen in both Gospels.

Matthew is addressed to a Jewish audience struggling with its identity and relationship with God (after the destruction of the temple), the Roman Empire and with gentiles.

This particular passage was Jesus’ commissioning of the disciples after his death and resurrection.

What additional information would you like about the historical aspects of this text?

LITERARY LENS

The Gospel of Matthew is a biography describing Jesus’ life and ministry. To set the scene, the opening verses place Jesus directly in the lineage of the house of David.

One important theme in Matthew is Jesus’ authority, which is referenced in this passage and often referred to as the “Great Commission” because Jesus directs the future ministry of the disciples. He also refers to the promise that Emmanuel will be with them for all time (Matthew 1:23).

What part does the mountain play in this text? What part does baptism play in discipleship? What other literary themes do you notice?

How is baptism the foundation for our life as the church?

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.”

Leader: Use the following hymn exercise as a further means to invite your group into a deeper discussion of baptism. Encourage participants to do research on the web via their tablets or smartphones. If using the hymn sidebar, be sure to have musical accompaniment.

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?

Leader: If you have time prior to the session, review Bishop Eaton’s 2016 Churchwide Assembly report on YouTube for additional background.

THE CHURCH WE ARE BECOMING

Goal one: A thriving church spreading the gospel and deepening faith for all people.

Goal two: A church equipping people for their baptismal vocations in the world and this church.

Goal three: An inviting and welcoming church that reflects and embraces the diversity in our communities and their gifts and the opportunities that diversity brings.

Goal four: A visible church deeply committed to working ecumenically and with other people of faith for justice, peace and reconciliation in our communities and around the world.

Goal five: A well-governed connected and sustainable church.

— Called Forward Together in Christ:
ELCA Future Directions 2025

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.

Leader: Point out the church we are becoming sidebar.

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.

Leader: Explore the following thoughts in each emphasis with learners. Take a broad view as you will have the opportunity to explore each in more detail in subsequent lessons.

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.

Leader: Review these now, but come back to them after your group has completed the study. Then ask them where and how they have grown. How might you spread this growth and understanding through your congregation? How might you share it "for the sake of the world?"

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

***Leader:** Start with a reading of the emphasis covered in this session and be prepared to refer to it as your group conversation progresses. Feel free to solicit readers for this material.*

SESSION 1: WE ARE CHURCH

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.

Leader: *Open the session with a **devotional** reading of each of the texts. Ask participants to reflect on the text as you read it and notice what draws them in. What words or thoughts does the text elicit in each person?*

Read the first text out loud twice, leaving silence in between the readings. Discuss what each person was touched by or noticed. What might this say about the text? What does this say about baptism?

Participants can also refer to the Book of Faith Bookmark for additional questions.

If there is time, repeat with the second text. What themes have emerged from the devotional reading? (Write these on a whiteboard or newsprint.) Ask for those who would like to share their connections with the text. Don't require participants to share their connections with the text.

How do these texts begin to speak to the first emphasis?

Leader: *Use the hymn sidebar exercise as a further means to invite your group into a deeper discussion of church.*

SESSION 1: WE ARE CHURCH

HISTORICAL

The salutation of this letter indicates that Paul is the author, but this has been debated over the years. Most of Paul's letters are contextual, addressing a specific issue in a local church. Ephesians does not. It may have been addressed to the church at Ephesus, a Roman capital in Asia Minor, but many think it was addressed to the wider church.

There are also stylistic differences in the writing. While Ephesians refers to the church "in Ephesus" (Ephesians 1:1) not all manuscripts contain these words, causing doubt as to the intended recipients of this letter. Most current scholarship believes that Ephesians was written by a devotee of Paul, possibly between 80-100 C.E. It was not unusual at the time for a follower to write in the name of a mentor or teacher. It was considered a way to honor that person.

LITERARY

While Ephesians is referred to as an epistle, some think it sounds more like a sermon because of its theological nature and cosmic view of God's work. There are similarities between Ephesians and Colossians, which further lead some scholars to believe that a devotee of Paul used one to write the other. The main theme of Ephesians is church unity in Christ.

Count the number of times the phrase "in Christ" is used in this passage. What does it mean to be "in Christ"?

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.

SESSION 1: WE ARE CHURCH

HISTORICAL

While named after Peter, Jesus' disciple, few scholars think he wrote this epistle, especially since there are no firsthand references to Jesus and his ministry. The letter is also a combination of the thoughts and theologies of both Peter and Paul.

This letter was probably written at the end of the first century by a devotee of Peter who lived in Rome. As we saw with the Ephesians text, it is not unusual in the days of the early church for someone to write in the name of another person. It was a form of honoring the person in whose name you wrote.

This letter was written to encourage holy living as God's chosen people in a hostile world of persecution.

LITERARY

This letter was written in sophisticated Greek to encourage those suffering persecution because of their faith. It is a reassurance of God's love and commitment to the people of God even amid hard times.

What metaphors does 1 Peter use in this text? How are these metaphors relevant to Bishop Eaton's first emphasis?

Hymn: ELW 655 Son of God, Eternal Savior

"Son of God, eternal Savior, source of life and truth and grace, Word made flesh, whose birth among us hallows all our human race: by your praying, by your willing that your people should be one, grant, oh grant your hopes fruition: here on earth your will be done."

Sing hymn 655, "Son of God, Eternal Savior," in Evangelical Lutheran Worship.

How does God's grace create and transform the church on earth?

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.

Leader: This material can be read together in class or learners can be encouraged to read this context material prior to each class and note thoughts that challenge or confuse them. What, for them, is the main point related to Bishop Eaton's emphasis?

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."

[VII. Concerning the Church]

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 ..."

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SESSION 1: WE ARE CHURCH

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?

SESSION 1: WE ARE CHURCH

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Leader: Select questions for discussion and 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

Leader: Consider the learning styles of the members of your group when deciding to select one of these options. These could also be done on one's own after the session.

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](#)

SESSION 2: WE ARE LUTHERAN

ELCA CONSTITUTION

2.02. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.

b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

What intrigues you about the ELCA's description of the Word of God?

We are Lutheran

Leader: *Start with a reading of the emphasis covered in this session, and be prepared to refer to it as your group conversation progresses. Feel free to solicit readers for this material.*

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.

Leader: *Open the session with a **devotional** reading of each of the texts. Ask participants to reflect on the text as you read it and notice what draws them in. What words or thoughts does the text elicit in each person?*

Read the first text out loud twice leaving silence in between the readings. Discuss what each person was touched by or noticed. What might this say about the text? What does this say about baptism?

Participants can also refer to the Book of Faith Bookmark for additional questions.

SESSION 2: WE ARE LUTHERAN

If there is time, repeat with the second text. What themes have emerged from the devotional reading? (Write these on a whiteboard or newsprint.) Ask for those who would like to share their connections with the text. Don't require participants to share their connections with the text.

How do these texts begin to speak to the second emphasis?

HISTORICAL

Reread the historical lens for Romans 6:3-11 in the Introduction for general background on the Romans epistle.

This passage is written to highlight God's power to save humanity.

In what context have you heard this text previously?

HISTORICAL

Corinth was a maritime center and Roman capital of Achaia. It was also known as a place of vice, partly because of so many people traveling through it. The gentile church, however, also suffered from factions created by divisions and abuse of rank and power in the church.

1 Corinthians was believed to have been Paul's second letter to the church, the first having been lost. Scholars estimate that the letter was written around 53-54 C.E. from Ephesus in response to questions and concerns addressed to him. He was also advised by informants within Corinth of the developing factions.

This text was likely written to address the Greek context in which they were used to philosophers publicly debating their thoughts. Paul makes it clear that the gospel is not about debating and wisdom—instead it is about Christ and the power of God.

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?

SESSION 2: WE ARE LUTHERAN

LITERARY

The intent of 1 Corinthians is to address the specific context of the church at Corinth. Some scholars note that because of the number of issues taken up it feels as if the letter itself isn't as cohesive as others. Paul is focused on specific issues and his intent is to persuade the church to live and act differently as a community in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:19 is a quote from Isaiah 29:14 with a goal of connecting the Jewish scriptures and tradition with the gentile Christian church.

Leader: Use the hymn exercise below as a further means to invite your group into a deeper discussion of what it means to be Lutheran.

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?

Leader: This material can be read together in class or learners can be encouraged to read this context material prior to each class and note thoughts that challenge or confuse them. What, for them, is the main point related to Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's emphasis?

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.

SESSION 2: WE ARE LUTHERAN

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

Leader: Select questions for discussion and 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.

SESSION 2: WE ARE LUTHERAN

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."

[VII. Concerning the Church]

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.

SESSION 2: WE ARE LUTHERAN

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

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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?

SESSION 2: WE ARE LUTHERAN

OTHER LEARNING OPTIONS

Leader: Consider the learning styles of the members of your group when deciding to select one of these options. These could also be done on one's own after the session.

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.

SESSION 3: WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

Leader: *Start with a reading of the emphasis covered in this session and be prepared to refer to it as your group conversation progresses. Feel free to solicit readers for this material.*

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.

Leader: *Open the session with a **devotional** reading of each of the texts. Ask participants to reflect on the text as you read it and notice what draws them in. What words or thoughts does the text elicit in each person?*

SESSION 3: WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

Read the first text out loud twice, leaving silence in between the readings. Discuss what each person was touched by or noticed. What might this say about the text? What does this say about baptism?

Participants can also refer to the Book of Faith Bookmark for additional questions.

If there is time repeat with the second text. What themes have emerged from the devotional reading? (Write these on a whiteboard or newsprint.) Ask for those who would like to share their connections with the text. Don't require participants to share their connections with the text.

How do these texts begin to speak to the third emphasis?

HISTORICAL

Reread the historical lens in the “We are church” session.

Some scholars believe that Ephesians 2:14 refers to the dividing wall in the temple of Jerusalem that separated gentiles from Jews. If the wall were removed, there would be unity.

LITERARY

Chapters 2-3 in Ephesians focus on church unity and what it means for believers. What metaphors do you notice in the text? How do they contribute to the message of unity?

Some scholars think that Ephesians 2:14 is a hymn fragment.

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.

SESSION 3: WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

HISTORICAL

Reread the historical lens in the “We are Lutheran” session.

1 Corinthians 11:2-14:40 focuses on what happens when the church gathers. It also addresses the spiritual gifts that are given to believers and their source.

LITERARY

Reread the literary lens in the “We are Lutheran” session.

What do you notice about Paul’s use of words in this text? How do they contribute to his message?

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 allots 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?

Leader: Use the hymn exercise below as a further means to invite your group into a deeper discussion of what it means to be church together.

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?

SESSION 3: WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

CONTEXT

Leader: *This material can be read together in class or learners can be encouraged to read this context material prior to each class and note thoughts that challenge or confuse them. What, for them, is the main point related to Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's emphasis?*

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?

SESSION 3: WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Leader: *Select questions for discussion and 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?

SESSION 3: WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

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

Leader: Consider the learning styles of the members of your group when deciding to select one of these options. These could also be done on one's own after the session.

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

Leader: *Start with a reading of the emphasis covered in this session and be prepared to refer to it as your group conversation progresses. Feel free to solicit readers for this material.*

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.

Leader: *Open the session with a **devotional** reading of each of the texts. Ask participants to reflect on the text as you read it and notice what draws them in. What words or thoughts does the text elicit in each person?*

Read the first text out loud twice leaving silence in between the readings. Discuss what each person was touched by or noticed. What might this say about the text? What does this say about baptism?

Participants can also refer to the Book of Faith Bookmark for additional questions.

WE ARE CHURCH FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

HISTORICAL

Isaiah is actually three books in one and is typically referred to as First, Second and Third Isaiah. This Scripture passage is part of Second Isaiah and dates from ca. 550 B.C.E. (Before Common Era). The temple had been destroyed and Nebuchadnezzar had seized Judah. This period is known as the Babylonian Captivity because many Israelites had been sent to Babylon. The people were downtrodden and uncertain of their future. Second Isaiah is a message of hope in troubled times.

LITERARY

This passage is a hymn praising God and acknowledging God as creator of earth and the heavens. It also lifts up God's covenant with the Israelites and their place in the world as a "light to the nations."

What does it mean to be a light to the nations? How can we, as the people of God, be a "light to the nations"?

HISTORICAL

Reread the historical lens in the "We are Lutheran" session. 1 Corinthians is believed to have been written 53-54 C.E. 2 Corinthians was written sometime after that when Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth had gone downhill and there was conflict between them.

Throughout the extensive communications with Corinth, Paul addresses issues specifically within their church. This text can also be interpreted as Paul's defense of his ministry and an acknowledgement that all are reconciled, or made friends, through Christ.

LITERARY

Some scholars think that 2 Corinthians might be several letters edited together because some of the segues in thought are rougher than others. However, rough transitions were not unusual in ancient times when they did not have the luxury of "cut and paste" document programs.

What does it mean to regard someone "from a human point of view"? What does it mean to be a "new creation"?

If there is time, repeat with the second text. What themes have emerged from the devotional reading? (Write these on a whiteboard or newsprint.) Ask for those who would like to share their connections with the text. Don't require participants to share their connections with the text.

How do these texts begin to speak to the fourth emphasis?

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.

WE ARE CHURCH FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

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?

Leader: *Use the hymn exercise below as a further means to invite your group into a deeper discussion of what it means to be church for the sake of the world.*

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

Leader: *This material can be read together in class or learners can be encouraged to read this context material prior to each class and note thoughts that challenge or confuse them. What, for them, is the main point related to Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's emphasis?*

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

WE ARE CHURCH FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

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

Leader: Select questions for discussion and 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

Leader: Consider the learning styles of the members of your group when deciding to select one of these options. These could also be done on one's own after the session.

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](#)

Leader: *Return to the Introduction and ask the group where each of them has grown. How might you spread this growth and understanding through your congregation? How might you share it “for the sake of the world?”*



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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?

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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?

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