

**EVER-REFORMING:  
A REFORMATION 500  
CROSS-GENERATIONAL STUDY**

**A COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY  
OF THE NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD**

**EDITED BY  
MINDY MAKANT AND ERIC CHILDERS**



# Table of Contents

## PREFACE

Welcome and Foreword by Bishop Timothy Smith

A Few (Useful) Words from the Editors

## CHURCH HISTORY

|        |  |                |
|--------|--|----------------|
| Week 1 | A Very, Very Brief History of the Pre-Reformation Christian Church | Mark Ellingsen |
| Week 2 | The Church on October 30, 1517                                     | Mark Ellingsen |
| Week 3 | The Reformation's Major Figures                                    | Mark Ellingsen |
| Week 4 | Who, What, When, Where, and Why—Reformation Basics                 | Mark Ellingsen |

## MARTIN LUTHER

|        |                              |                |
|--------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Week 5 | Luther the Priest and Pastor | Andrew Weisner |
| Week 6 | Luther the Scholar           | David Ratke    |
| Week 7 | Luther the Reformer          | David Ratke    |
| Week 8 | Luther the Father            | Eric Childers  |

## LUTHER IN THE HOME

|         |   |                   |
|---------|---|-------------------|
| Week 9  | Vocation of Marriage and Family                         | Christy Lohr Sapp |
| Week 10 | Who Was Katherine von Bora?                             | Christy Lohr Sapp |
| Week 11 | Martin and Katie at Home                                | Christy Lohr Sapp |
| Week 12 | The Establishment of the Home Altar—Parents as Teachers | Christy Lohr Sapp |

## LUTHERAN THEOLOGY PART I

|         |   |                   |
|---------|---|-------------------|
| Week 13 | God with Us—A Theology of the Cross                               | Russell Makant    |
| Week 14 | Death and Life—A Theology of Law and Gospel                       | Mary Hinkle Shore |
| Week 15 | Saved by Grace—A Theology of Justification by Grace through Faith | Joshua Copeland   |
| Week 16 | <i>Simul Justus et Peccator</i> —A Theology of Saints and Sinners | Katherine Shaner  |

## WORSHIP AND LITURGY

|         |   |               |
|---------|---|---------------|
| Week 17 | Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Gathering) | Eric Childers |
| Week 18 | Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Word)      | Eric Childers |
| Week 19 | Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Meal)      | Eric Childers |
| Week 20 | Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Sending)   | Eric Childers |

## MUSIC AND HYMNODY

|         |  |            |
|---------|--|------------|
| Week 21 | The Roots of Reformation Music                   | Paul Weber |
| Week 22 | Luther, the Musical Poet of Spiritual Songs      | Paul Weber |
| Week 23 | The Context and Performance of Reformation Hymns | Paul Weber |
| Week 24 | Through the Church the Song Goes On              | Paul Weber |

## LUTHERAN THEOLOGY PART II

|         |  |               |
|---------|--|---------------|
| Week 25 | The Priesthood of All Believers—A Theology of Vocation | Eric Childers |
| Week 26 | What Does This Mean?—A Theology of Teaching            | Clay Schmit   |
| Week 27 | There and Here—A Theology of Two Kingdoms              | Sarah Lischer |
| Week 28 | Social Justice and the Church                          | Tim Smith     |

## LUTHERAN ETHICS

|         |  |              |
|---------|--|--------------|
| Week 29 | The Church in Society—A Lutheran Perspective (ELCA Social Statements)      | Mindy Makant |
| Week 30 | Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility (ELCA Social Statements)               | Mindy Makant |
| Week 31 | The Church and Criminal Justice—Hearing the Cries (ELCA Social Statements) | Mindy Makant |
| Week 32 | Human Sexuality—Gift and Trust (ELCA Social Statements)                    | Mindy Makant |

## LUTHERANS IN AMERICA AND THE WORLD

|         |   |                 |
|---------|---|-----------------|
| Week 33 | A Very Brief History of Lutherans in America  | Susan McArver   |
| Week 34 | Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church Today | C. Pierson Shaw |
| Week 35 | The Work and the Reach of the ELCA Today      | Leonard Bolick  |
| Week 36 | The Legacy of the Reformation                 | Bill Trexler    |

## NORTH CAROLINA LUTHERANS AND OUR PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

|         |  |                 |
|---------|--|-----------------|
| Week 37 | Synod Companions—the Costa Rican Synod | Bob Johnson     |
| Week 38 | North Carolina Ecumenical Partners     | C. Pierson Shaw |
| Week 39 | Lutheran Social Services               | Ted Goins       |
| Week 40 | Refugees, Immigration, and Lutherans   | Ted Goins       |

## TOWARD REFORMATION 1000

|         |                            |                 |
|---------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Week 41 | Toward Reformation 1000... | Wayne Powell    |
| Week 42 | Toward Reformation 1000... | Clay Schmit     |
| Week 43 | Toward Reformation 1000... | Tim Smith       |
| Week 44 | Toward Reformation 1000... | Elizabeth Eaton |



**North Carolina Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

April 22, 2016

Greetings and blessings to you members and affiliates, brothers and sisters in Christ, of the North Carolina Synod!

I am so very pleased with how this Ever-Reforming curriculum has come together to help us focus our observation of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It really is a fine collection of lessons for small groups, circles, Sunday school, adult forums — you name it! I am so very grateful for the stellar collection of contributors to the curriculum.

Why celebrate the Reformation at all? Well, if it means our liturgical and doctrinal way of collectively sticking our tongue out at our Roman Catholic forebears, then we shouldn't! Reformation is something that each of us through our baptism into Christ is about daily—dying to sin and rising with Christ. Even as we remember when our Gospel convictions led to separation from our mother Church in Rome, we yearn for that day of the earthly and the heavenly fulfilment of Jesus' prayer in John 17 "that they may be one." We also observe Reformation as an ongoing reminder that because Christ is alive and loose in the world, God in Christ is still creating, still evoking, still calling forth new life. *Semper reformanda!* Always reforming. Always being made new.

Australian Lutheran Pastor Harry Wendt, author of the Crossways Bible Series, notes that whereas Jesus played with children and taught adults, the church today tends to teach children and play with adults. I certainly agree with him that ongoing adult education and faith formation is critical to the life of a vibrant and reforming church that addresses a world and culture changing at light speed. We can't know what to do until we know who we are. The great commission of Matthew 28 is often quoted as making disciples and baptizing, but another verb is there as well—teaching. It's the core of how disciples are made. Teaching is relational as well as informational. Preaching is a monologue, but teaching is a dialogue. Ongoing teaching and learning for both clergy and laity is essential to a vibrant church!

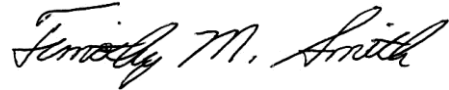
Ideally we would love for this resource to be used in a cross-generational setting. Our best faith formation comes just as it did for Jesus with the disciples, not just through words but through mentoring, accompanying, example, relationship. This resource could be used in a Senior Citizens group and in a Youth Group, but it would be best used in a context with seniors and youth interacting and sharing together.

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The Reformation Task Force has been hard at work for years getting ready not only for this curriculum but for many of the Reformation 500 events to help us usher in the 500th anniversary observance. Several of those events have already taken place, like the kickoff worship service with NC and SC Synods at Christ Lutheran Church in September of 2015, inviting Garrison Keillor to Lenoir-Rhyne to speak and having Christian Priesmeier, 14th generation direct descendent of Martin Luther, speaking in several of our congregations across the state. In the spring of 2017, our synod is sponsoring a special Lenoir-Rhyne A Cappella Choir tour focused on Reformation. On September 23, 2017 the NC and SC Synods will gather in worship again, with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton of the ELCA preaching. We also hope to have officials from our companion synod in Costa Rica joining us for that event. And the North Carolina Synod will be sponsoring a trip to "Lutherland" in Germany in October of 2016, and we'd love to have you come along!

Many thanks to all the hard work invested by so many already, but special thanks to Pastor Eric Childers from St. John's in Cherryville and to Dr. Mindy Makant of Lenoir-Rhyne University's theology faculty. They have gone beyond the call of duty and spent countless hours putting together not only this curriculum but this observance in general.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy M. Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Peace,".

Bishop Tim Smith

The Office of the Bishop [synod@nclutheran.org](mailto:synod@nclutheran.org)

# A Few (Useful) Words from the Editors

BY DR. MINDY MAKANT AND THE REV. DR. ERIC CHILDERS

## WELCOME!

First, we would like to thank all of the contributors! It has been an absolute pleasure working with people across the synod. Each of the writers has taken this task seriously and worked very hard to provide a study series that will be both edifying and engaging. While each of the writers was chosen because of their expertise on a particular topic, none are curriculum writers. And we gave them the very difficult task of taking huge topics (historical, theological, ethical, and liturgical) and determining what is at the core of the subject and explaining it in a way that is easily accessible and is limited to a single page. And we asked them to do this without watering anything down. And every single writer took this charge seriously and did incredible work. In fact, the diverse voices of the authors are the greatest strength of *Ever-Reforming*.

We envision this series as being used in a myriad of Christian Education venues—Sunday school, adult forums, circle groups, *and* especially in cross-generational settings. (See below for tips on incorporating children and youth in a cross-generational setting!)

As we have edited this series we have sought a balance between maintaining the integrity of each author’s voice and creating a level of cohesiveness that comes in unity of form. Thus, each lesson follows an intentionally similar format. The “Topic Summary” is designed to be read ahead of time by the person facilitating the discussion. It may be copied and shared with the group, read aloud, or summarized by the facilitator. Most lessons also include a few scripture verses that you may find helpful in shaping your discussion. In sessions that do not directly address Luther, a “Where Does Luther Stand?” section is also included to help you make connections between the life of the church today as a people standing in the Reformation tradition and thus ever-reforming. And, each session ends with a set of “Discussion Starters.” These are intended to be just that - discussion starters! Our hope is that these questions will help begin an on-going conversation about what it means to be Lutherans who are grounded both in a very particular history but who are also moving forward into God’s promised future.

## SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

The scope of *Ever-Reforming* is broad, covering what we believe to be a thorough sampling of the Lutheran tradition. The study is designed in four week units. It begins with an overview of Reformation history; sessions that will help us understand how we got where we are today. This is followed by a more in-depth look at the personal side of the Reformation with four sessions on different aspects of Martin Luther’s persona, followed by four sessions that look at the person of Katie Luther and the life that Martin and Katie lived together.

The study then shifts to a four week study of the theological foundations of Lutheranism. This theological study leads us into a study of our worship and hymnody. And our worship, of course, leads us out into the world, so we conclude the theological portion of the study by looking at four of the ELCA's most recent social statements.

After this, the next four week series turns our attention to the Lutheran Church in the United States. This is followed by a focus on the work of the NC synod—what are we doing as church right now?

Our study ends by looking forward. One of the key teachings of the Reformation is that the church is *always* reforming. Until Christ's return we will never yet be who we are called to be. So any commemoration of the Reformation (even, and perhaps especially the commemoration as significant as a 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary) must not simply look backwards, but must also look forward. We learn who we were to understand who we are. And we learn who we are in order to understand who we are called to be. So, our final four sessions will challenge us to imagine the church of the future and to ask ourselves where we continue to be in need of re-formation.

## TEACHING AND FACILITATING TIPS

*Ever-Reforming* is intended to be utilized. We hope our North Carolina congregations will use it! We gave the contributors a tall order: cover the topic in a few hundred words, and do so in a way that does not talk down to learners but also does not intimidate learners unfamiliar with the topics. We believe the lessons are accessible, engaging, and worthwhile. Relax; you are in good hands.

While we have intended *Ever-Reforming* to be taught *for* a wide audience—from middle schoolers to seasoned church members—we also have intended the study to be taught *by* a wide range of teachers. (Facilitator might be a better word.) Yes, parish pastors may teach the lesson, but so might lay persons. *Ever-Reforming* has been designed and written in a way that people without seminary preparation can easily and successfully lead each lesson.

We have also paid close attention to convenience and “teachability.” Once the curriculum is accessed at [www.nclutheran.org](http://www.nclutheran.org), the facilitator or facilitators of *Ever-Reforming* can easily print copies of each lesson (all fit on a single front-and-back sheet of paper) for participants. Then the group can walk through the material together with the help of a facilitator. It's really that simple.

Consider a few helpful teaching/facilitating tips:

- + Each church is certainly welcome to begin the 44-lesson study at any time. It is available for download at [www.nclutheran.org](http://www.nclutheran.org) beginning August 1, 2016. However, we suggest beginning the study on September 18, 2016. Assuming that many congregations observe Rally Day (the launch of a new parish education year) on the weekend after Labor Day and assuming that congregations will join together for



“God’s Work Our Hands” Day of Service on that same Sunday, September 11, to begin the study the following Sunday makes sense. It also keeps the synod—more or less—on a path to study *Ever-Reforming* together for the next ten months.

- + Facilitators may want to print all 44 lessons and compile them in notebooks for learners. On the other hand, facilitators may choose to distribute one-sheet copies of the lesson each week. Facilitators will know what works best for their settings.
- + While facilitators are encouraged to read and give prayerful thought to each lesson before the group meets, extensive preparation is **not** required. Discover the content as a group. Walk through the lesson together, but the facilitator should be at least a few steps ahead of the group.
- + *Ever-Reforming* is designed to be taught in a variety of time segments. Generally speaking, facilitators may consider **a thirty minute lesson** (using Content Summary, Key Words, and selected Discussion Starters), **a forty-five minute lesson** (using Content Summary, Where Does Luther Stand, and selected Discussion Starters), or **a one hour lesson** (using all sections, including readings from Bible Connections). The lessons are quite flexible and intended to meet the needs and interests of individual groups across diverse settings.
- + Create a sense of community. Begin each discussion with a prayer. Perhaps end the meeting with the Lord’s Prayer. Serve coffee and drinks. Food, of course, is incentive for participation, and eating together is a wonderfully communal experience.
- + Consider making *Ever-Reforming* a truly cross-generational experience. What does this mean? Plan the class to include people of all ages—ranging from confirmands to octogenarians—in a common setting. You may be surprised at what you learn from one other.
- + Give thought to the best time and location for your class. Will your study meet on Sunday mornings? Will *Ever-Reforming* be part of a catechism class? Will your class meet on Tuesday mornings in the church parlor or on Thursday evenings poolside at a parishioner’s home? Use the occasion of Reformation 500 to invite new people to participate in the study, especially non-Lutherans.
- + Share your teaching and learning experiences with us or with the synod office. We would love to hear participants’ reactions. Did students learn new things? Were learners’ surprised by content? If so, by what? Was there disagreement? Which topics were most helpful? What did your participants want to know more about?
- + Have fun!

## A FEW WORDS OF THANKS

We want to end by thanking Bishop Tim Smith. He has been an integral part of this cross-generational study from the moment of the project’s inception. Bishop Tim has been a wonderful sounding board and a constant source of encouragement and support. We also thank Betty Lohr for her keen eye as copyeditor. And we would like to thank all of the synod office staff, especially Catherine Fink for her curricular expertise, Bob Shoffner for

his help with promotion, and Rick Godby for his web and digital support. Without them and the synod staff, we simply could not have done this.

Finally, we thank you. You have chosen to journey with fellow North Carolina Lutherans to learn a bit about our Lutheran tradition. Some of the material will be a review of familiar content; some topics will be new and maybe even challenging. Some lessons are provocative, and that can be a good thing. Maybe you will add to the conversation, or maybe you will participate by being an eager and engaged listener. In any event, we hope you will leave this endeavor with a clearer and deeper understanding of Lutheranism, as well as a renewed spirit of Reformation.

*Reformation 500 in North Carolina—Looking Forward, Ever-Reforming.*

May the peace of the Lord be with you always,

Dr. Mindy Makant  
Editor

The Rev. Dr. Eric Childers  
Editor

## WEEK 1: A Very, Very, Brief History of the Pre-Reformation Christian Church

BY DR. MARK ELLINGSEN (PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY, INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

The church grew like wildfire in the 1500 years after Jesus' death. It quickly changed from being a small Jewish sect into *the* religion of Europe. Although Christianity had originally been a movement of Jews, immediately after gaining a Gentile majority of the membership sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, it was still a religion with its heaviest concentration in Israel, the Near East, and North Africa. It was not until the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century that Christianity began to be associated with Europe and Western culture. (We must never forget how Jewish, Asian, and African our faith is.)

Most of the first Christians, much like Jesus, came from lower-class backgrounds. However, their commitment, willingness to suffer for their faith, and care for the poor attracted more and more powerful people within the Roman Empire. This accounted for much of the church's phenomenal growth. This in turn led the church to gain educated leaders who in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries developed some of our great doctrines: the Trinity, the two natures of Jesus, original sin, and the prioritizing of grace over works. (Liturgical styles of worship, teaching about the sacraments, and the determination of what books would and would not be in the Bible had been addressed in previous centuries.) The increasing numbers of Christians among the educated elite meant that Christian theology developed in conversation with the cutting-edge intellectual developments of the day.

Christians often perceived the Roman Empire as meddling in the Church, so the Church developed powerful leadership positions (bishops, and eventually the papacy) in order to counter Roman influence. Monasticism developed during this time period, in part, as a resistance movement to the blending of power and faith. Despite numerous controversies, the church remained one church until the Great Schism in 1054, which divided East and West – the West being those Christians loyal to the leadership of the Bishop of Rome (the Pope), today's Roman Catholic Church, and the East being those Christians more inclined to take leadership from the rival Bishop of Constantinople (today's Eastern Orthodox Churches).

In order to understand the Reformation itself, we must pay special attention to the church in Europe prior to the time of the Reformation. The conquest of Rome in 455 by Germans ended the Roman Empire's dominance in Europe and led to a millennium of poverty and political instability throughout Europe. European Christians endured much suffering in these years, and the European standard of living drastically diminished. But, the church continued to gain both power and influence, including influence over both the military and royalty in various parts of the Continent. The church was also largely responsible for the emerging educational system. It was the one institution that could provide the masses with hope in the midst of their struggles. Of course, with power comes temptation and corruption. Not surprisingly, then, by the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Church in Europe was falling prey to both political and theological corruption.

## KEY WORDS

**Augustine** (354-430): An African Bishop and important theologian of the early church; he is most famous for developing the doctrine of Original Sin and for affirming the priority of grace in God's Work of saving us. His writings influenced both Luther and John Calvin, as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

**Episcopal Polity:** A way of organizing denominations by having bishops as foremost authorities.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

1 Corinthians 12:27 | Romans 12:4-5 | Ephesians 2:19-22

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In *Here I Stand*, famed professor and Luther biographer Roland Bainton framed Luther the Reformer with these theses: "Very naturally he is a controversial figure. The multitudinous portrayals fall into certain broad types already delineated in his own generation. His followers hailed him as the prophet of the Lord and the deliverer of Germany. His opponents on the Catholic side called him the son of perdition and the demolisher of Christendom. The agrarian agitators branded him as the sycophant of the princes, and the radical sectaries compared him to Moses, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt and left them to perish in the wilderness. But such judgments belong to an epilogue rather than a prologue. The first endeavor must be to understand the man."

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + In the first few centuries, the Church grew at a remarkable rate, both numerically but also ethnically. Is the church today ethnically diverse? What about your local congregation? Why or why not?
- + One reason the early Church grew so quickly was its reputation as a community that cared for the least of these (esp. the poor). Are we known for our care of the least of these today? Why or why not? Do you think this impacts the Church's growth?
- + There is little question that the connection Christianity made with the Roman Empire and its leaders helped the Church to grow. But was it good for the Christian faith? Should the Church align itself with the state? Or does the Church act most faithfully when it is perceived as counter-cultural, advocating values that challenge society?
- + From the 2<sup>nd</sup> century until the Reformation the Church had an episcopal polity (Bishops and priests as its leaders, along with deacons). The ELCA, along with many other denominations, continues this form of leadership today. What is the role of the bishop? The pastor? Lay people?

## WEEK 2: The Church on October 30, 1517

BY DR. MARK ELLINGSEN (PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY, INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Throughout the Middle Ages all of Europe suffered extremely difficult economic times. This took its toll on the church. Yet, throughout this time the church's priests, bishops, and the pope gained social and political influence. And the church continued to lead the way in education. The church was the one institution that could provide the masses with hope in the midst of their struggles, with security in the midst of the socio-cultural turmoil of the times. Western Europe in late 15<sup>th</sup> century was indeed undergoing radical transformation. Much like today, the economy was changing and the vast gap between rich and poor continued to widen. The people were in the midst of a revolution in communications (the invention of the printing press) and they were being confronted with new scientific findings that seemed to challenge faith.

With power came temptation and corruption. More and more church leadership positions were being "bought." Rich families would get younger sons and daughters who were not eligible to inherit the family fortune appointed as bishops, Cathedral priests, or heads of monasteries, even if the sons and daughters were not interested in a religious life. These practices were taking a toll on the spiritual life of monasteries, convents, and in parishes. There was a lot of perceived scandal and corruption among church leaders. In addition, the leaders of the church, including the Pope, had become political figures, concerned primarily with gaining wealth for themselves and for their parishioners. This was most evident in 1517 in the Pope's contract with a young German bishop to sell indulgences in order to raise money for the construction of St. Peter's Cathedral. The sell of indulgences took advantage of the guilt and fear of the average person. Of course, indulgences seemed like a good thing, providing comfort and security about the fate of loved ones. With just some money you could get it. But you did not need to be overly pious or spiritual or committed to Jesus to get the job done. More corruption.

The selling of indulgences was facilitated by the teaching that works needed to contribute to justification. But whereas the official Roman Catholic position was that grace made works possible, some were teaching that you had to *do* something first to qualify for grace. This created among the European masses on the eve of the Reformation a sense of uncertainty about salvation, and a belief that God was a righteous, judgmental, and wrathful God.

## KEY WORDS

**Indulgences:** The remission by the Church of penalties due for sins committed. Indulgences qualify one for a faster release from purgatory and entrance into heaven.

**Purgatory:** Based on the teachings of Matthew 12:31 and 2 Maccabees 12:39-45, the Roman Catholic teachings that this is a reality where those who have died in Christ are taken, in order to get any remaining sins forgiven (to be there as long as it takes in order to get the job done) in order to qualify as the saints for entrance into heaven.

**Justification** (as officially taught by the Roman Catholic Church): Justification is the doctrine of salvation, how we are saved. The official Roman Catholic position is that it happens both by grace and works, though grace is prevenient (it always comes first) stimulating good works which in turn save us.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Romans 5:1-2 | Romans 11:6 | Galatians 2:16

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Luther appeared before Johann Eck for public questioning. Upon demands by the Roman Catholic Church to recant his writings and teachings or face excommunication (and likely death), Luther famously responded: "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen."

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + In what ways do you see our contemporary society as similar to that of the Church in 1517? How and why?
- + The Catholic Church no longer sells indulgences, but it does still grant them. In view of the Biblical support for indulgences and purgatory cited above, is Lutheranism wrong to condemn these ideas? Why not?
- + Does it matter whether grace precedes good works? Why or why not?
- + Is the Nominalist idea that Luther confronted (that we must do works in order to merit grace) still around today? Consider the so-called Prosperity Gospel and its belief that God blesses those who give or come to Him.

## WEEK 3: The Reformation's Major Figures

BY DR. MARK ELLINGSEN (PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY, INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

It is good that we not concentrate on Martin Luther alone. Let's start with his friend (sort of), then get to his enemies, and finish with three other Reformers.

**Philip Melancthon** (1497-1560): Melancthon had an elite Renaissance education, far superior to Luther's. In fact, he was Luther's tutor in Biblical language during their years as colleagues at Wittenberg University. Melancthon seems to have adopted Luther's theological commitments and actually wrote the primary authoritative statement of Lutheran theology, *The Augsburg Confession*. But he was perceived by Luther as a bit too compromising, and after Luther's death he diverged from Luther on a number of significant theological points.

**Frederick** (1463-1525): The Elector of Saxony from 1486 until his death, he was Luther's ruler. Known as Frederick the Wise, he coveted such a title, wanting to be known as scrupulously fair and just. This was evidenced in his efforts to ensure that Luther received a fair hearing in proceedings with the Roman hierarchy and from other German princes. To that end he rescued Luther from possible persecution after the Reformer's condemnation by the majority of Electors of the Holy Roman Empire, hiding him in Wartburg Castle where the budding Reformer worked on his German translation of the Bible. Eventually Frederick became a supporter of Luther.

**Pope Leo X** (1475-1511) (Giovanni de' Medici): The Pope from 1513 until his death. He presided over the church at the outset of the Reformation and excommunicated Luther in 1520. He came to the papal throne with much promise, with a high-quality Renaissance education, a connoisseur of the arts; he seemed just the right man to finish the rebuilding of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. He sought to raise funds by selling indulgences, and his principal German ally was a bishop from a wealthy German family, Albert of Mainz, who was Luther's bishop.

**Charles V** (1500-1558): The King of Europe's super-power of the era, Spain, and also Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. A devout Catholic, he sought to quash the emerging Reformation movements militarily. Ultimately he failed, abdicating the throne to live out his days in a monastery.

**Ulrich Zwingli** (1484-1531): Led the Reform in Zurich. His most radical students became leaders of the Anabaptist Movement. But Zwingli is especially influential on some Reformed denominations like the Reformed Churches in Germany and the United Church of Christ.

**John Calvin** (1509-1564): Led the Reformation in Geneva. Plays the role Luther does for Lutherans in the Presbyterian Church and also influential in segments of the United Church of Christ.

## KEY WORDS

**Holy Roman Empire:** A political entity created in 800 AD by the papacy aimed at facilitating the collaboration of the various European principalities not part of established kingdoms into a harmony. It included Saxony (the principality in which Luther lived). This loose confederation continued until 1806.

**Anabaptist Reformers:** A group of Reformers dedicated to restoring New Testament practices in the present. They were among the most anti-Catholic of the Reformers, seeking to do away with most Catholic practices, including infant Baptism. They were so-named because they practiced rebaptisms of those baptized as infants. The largest denominations with Anabaptist roots are the Mennonites, Hutterite Brethren, and the Amish.

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In Philip Melanchthon's eulogy at Luther's funeral, he spoke these words: "He was an important instrument, in the hands of God, of public utility; let us diligently study the truth he taught, imitating in our humble situations his fear of God, his faith, the intensity of his devotions, the integrity of his ministerial character, his purity, his careful avoidance of seditious counsel, his ardent thirst of knowledge. And as we frequently meditate upon the pious examples of those illustrious guides of the Church, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul, whose histories are transmitted to us, so let us frequently reflect upon the doctrine and course of life which distinguished our departed friend."

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + One of the ways Melanchthon differed from Luther was in his understanding of free will. Melanchthon believed that we played an active role in our conversion whereas Luther saw conversion as solely the work of the Holy Spirit. What do you think? Why?
- + We might condemn the selling of indulgences. But how is that different from what we do when we stage fund-raisers to build our churches or enhance our church programs?
- + The other Protestant Reformers share many commitments with Luther, even teaching justification by grace through faith like he did. But they don't stress justification and freedom as much as Lutherans do, don't have our view of the Sacraments, and don't use the liturgy. Should these differences matter today? Why or why not?
- + Imagine you were a Roman Catholic in the sixteenth century. What might you have thought of Luther? What might Roman Catholics think of Martin Luther today?



## WEEK 4: Who, What, When, Where, and Why: Reformation Basics

BY DR. MARK ELLINGSEN (PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY, INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

The Reformation is a 16<sup>th</sup>-century movement in Western Europe when many leaders of the Catholic Church mounted efforts to rid the church of what they perceived to be corruption and false teachings. These leaders understood themselves to be recapturing the biblical faith and/or the best of the ancient traditions of the faith. (In the case of Martin Luther this meant a return to Paul's teaching of justification by grace through faith.) When Catholic leaders failed to move quickly enough or thoroughly enough on the reforms demanded, various Protestant bodies, including Lutheranism, emerged.

October 31, 1517, is usually identified as the watershed moment of the Reformation—its beginning—for that is the day that a German monk and university professor Martin Luther is said to have posted a protest against the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences in Wittenberg, Germany, where he served. The events which transpired as a result of this protest (his Ninety-Five Theses) awakened a movement of protest and efforts to reform the Catholic Church which we now call the Reformation.

Luther was by no means the first Reformer. Most church leaders in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries dreamed of reform, believing the Church needed to rid itself of corruption and get back to biblical principles. Even the famous Queen Isabella of Spain had tried to reform the Catholic Church in her nation. But most of these reforms petered out until Luther's in 1517. Though it failed (like his peers Luther was seeking to reform the Catholic Church from the inside, not start a new church), Luther captured the attention of the media of his day, gained a lot of German nationalistic support (he was perceived by Germans as "our guy" standing up to Spanish, Italian, and Dutch power-brokers). His was a movement that could not be denied or crushed, and so once he was excommunicated by the Pope for his failure to renounce positions he held, he and his followers were forced to start a new church. Subsequently other Reformation leaders like Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Menno Simons, and various English Reformers followed by starting their own evangelical communities.

There is a lot of controversy over whether Luther actually nailed The Ninety-Five Theses on the Church Door in Germany. We do know that he sent a copy on October 31 to his bishop, but the only evidence we have that he publically attached the Theses to the Wittenberg Castle Church on that date comes from the writings of Philip Melancthon. Luther himself never claims to have done this. Perhaps he did it, and perhaps he sent a student or servant to do it surreptitiously for him.

Why did he do it? The standard rationale is that selling indulgences implied that by our own works we could contribute to our own salvation, since buying indulgences is something we do. And this contradicted Luther's new insight (which he received from Paul and perhaps from the ancient African theologian St. Augustine) regarding our salvation by grace alone. But Luther also posted The Ninety-Five Theses because he found the sale of indulgences undermining the quality of faith, as if one who obtained salvation or who was concerned about the salvation of others might pay no attention to repentance, prayer, and thankfulness to God, but just pay money.

## KEY WORDS

**Augustine (354-430):** The greatest, most influential theologian of the West. An African Bishop, he is most famous for developing the doctrine of Original Sin and for affirming the priority of grace in God's Work of saving us. His writings influenced both Luther and John Calvin, as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In one of Luther's most important writings, "The Freedom of a Christian," the reformer outlined the Christian's simultaneous freedom and bondage, an idea that shaped his understanding of God, the church, and the relationship of Christians and God. Luther writes, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. These two theses seem to contradict each other. If, however, they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully...Love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved."

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Is the Reformation something to celebrate – the birth of the Lutheran Church and the rediscovery of justification by grace alone? Or is it something to mourn – a series of events that further divided Christians from each other?
- + The first thesis of The Ninety-Five Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers be one of repentance." Is he right? Can't we improve so we don't need to keep repenting?
- + Was Luther really attacking the papacy? Or was he a good Catholic seeking to defend the Pope and just trying to set the church straight? Read thesis #42, #50, #51, #55 of The Ninety-Five Theses (<http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>). What do you think our relationship with the Roman Catholic Church should be today?
- + Consider #43 and #45 of The Ninety-Five Theses. What do Luther's expressions of concern about the poor getting fleeced by Indulgences say to us about Lutheran views regarding poverty?
- + Has the Reformation been a success?

## WEEK 5: Luther the Priest and Pastor

BY THE REV. DR. ANDREW WEISNER (CAMPUS PASTOR, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

The title of this entry, “Luther as Priest and Pastor,” may suggest these are two separate topics, two separate times; that there is somehow a “break” in Martin Luther’s life when he ceased being one and began to be the other. Such is not the case. Luther’s life, like all our lives, evolved, was changed by new encounters, circumstances, and developments. But for this son of the church, these did not present discontinuity.

Luther became an Augustinian monk in July of 1505 (after the famous thunderstorm incident that same summer). As a monk, his life was immersed in prayer and Bible reading. He prayed often – rising at 3:00 a.m. to do so; he prayed together with fellow monks at least seven times per day; praying all 150 psalms of the Old Testament at least every week (if not more often; such was common in the middle ages for all monasteries; and one historian states that one had to memorize all 150 psalms in order to be ordained!). When Luther entered the Augustinian monastery, he was given a personal copy of the Bible and read it diligently, memorizing whole portions of it. “Sometimes, one important statement occupied my thoughts for a whole day.” Eventually Luther was assigned by his Augustinian order to do advanced study in scripture, was ceremoniously awarded a doctorate October 19, 1512 and was installed as a professor of scripture at the University of Wittenberg later that month.

Luther’s exercise of and commitment to prayer extended to his experience of Bible study. He wrote to a friend in 1518, “It is absolutely certain that one cannot enter into the meaning of Scripture by study or innate intelligence. Therefore your first task is to begin with prayer. You must ask that the Lord in his great mercy grant you a true understanding of his words... You must completely despair of your own diligence and intelligence and rely solely on the infusion of the Spirit. Believe me, for I have had personal experience in this matter” (Gritsch, 1983, p. 8). Biographies of Luther show such a loyalty to prayer throughout his life.

Further, Luther did not doubt the validity of his ordination to priesthood (Spring, 1507), even after his excommunication in 1521 and despite the corruption of the late medieval Roman Church. (Haile, 1980, p.108). But as dramatic events of his life proceeded, challenges from the Roman Church hierarchy (and civil authorities) that Luther interpreted as contrary to scripture, and as church reform and evangelical churches became established, he began to redefine “priesthood.” Priesthood became the privilege and duty of all the baptized as a responsibility to prayer and intercession in word and deed on behalf of others. The duty of the ordained was to serve as teachers and leaders—shepherds, in Latin, *pastores*—among and for the baptized. His own personal role, because of his ordination and his training in scripture, became just that: pastor. Thus, through his writings (such as the Small and Large Catechisms) and sermons, that was the role Luther sought to fulfill.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Psalms 46 | 1 Peter 2:5 | 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

The Psalms formed Luther as a Christian and as a priest and pastor. In his “Preface to his 1545 Commentary on the Psalms,” Luther writes: “Every Christian who would abound in prayer and piety ought, in all reason, to make the Psalter his manual; and, moreover, it were well if every Christian so used it and were so expert in it as to have it word for word by heart, and could have it even in his heart as often as he chanced to be called to speak or act, that he might be able to draw forth or employ some sentence out of it, by way of a proverb. For indeed the truth is, that everything that a pious heart can desire to ask in prayer, it here finds Psalms and words to match, so aptly and sweetly, that no man—no, nor all the men in the world—shall be able to devise forms of words so good and devout. Moreover, the Psalter doth minister such instruction and comfort in the act of supplication; and the Lord’s Prayer doth so run through it, and it through the Lord’s Prayer, that the one helpeth us finely to understand the other, and the two together make a pleasant harmony.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How might a daily regimen of psalm reading shape your faith and your experience of everyday life?
- + Do you memorize scripture? Why or why not? Would you be willing to commit to memorizing one psalm each month? Each week?
- + Luther understood prayer to be an integral part of the Christian vocation. What do you think of the following quotes attributed to Luther about prayer?
  - “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”
  - “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”
- + What connections do you see between Luther’s emphasis on the Christian vocation to a life of prayer and his emphasis on the priesthood of all the baptized?

## WEEK 6: Luther the Scholar

BY THE REV. DR. DAVID RATKE (PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Most people, if they know anything about Luther's life, know that when he was a young man he had a life-changing event. He was traveling down a road when a storm broke out. Luther got scared and cried out, "St. Anne, help me! I will become a monk!" Luther survived the storm and honored his promise. He became a monk.

Luther was a student when he was traveling down that road and he was a student after that. In many ways Luther never really left school once he began his education.

In Luther's time, most people believed that God was a kind of moral book-keeper who kept an Excel spreadsheet of people's good deeds and bad deeds. It was assumed that the bad deeds outnumbered the good deeds. Moreover, bad deeds condemned one to hell or, at the very least, to a cleansing punishment in purgatory. One way to avoid punishment (in either purgatory or hell) was to be punished for your sins in this life.

The best monks were those who repented of their sins by fasting, praying, depriving themselves of sleep, and beating themselves. First, Luther's pastor, John Staupitz, and then later Luther himself recognized that this kind of life was unhelpful and unhealthy for Luther (and anyone else for that matter). Staupitz ordered Luther to study the Bible. He spent the rest of his life as a university professor teaching Bible.

Learning (and teaching) were central to Luther's identity. He signed most of his writings "Dr. Martin Luther." Luther was a scholar and understood that role to be part of his identity and discipleship. In his "Commentary on the Alleged Imperial Edict" he wrote: "I, Dr. Martinus, have been called to this work and was compelled to become a doctor, without any initiative of my own, but out of pure obedience. Then I had to accept the office of doctor and swear a vow to my most beloved Holy Scriptures that I would preach and teach them faithfully and purely."

More than that, there is a sense in which Luther thought all Christians should be scholars. He wrote the *Small Catechism* so that the Christian faith—theology—could be taught and learned in households.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

2 Timothy 3:16-17 | Deuteronomy 11:18-21 | Hebrews 4:12

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther's definition of a theologian or the activity of theologian is one that is really—when you think about it—a definition that applies to all of us. Luther said that a theologian does three things. First, theologians pray “to God with real humility and earnestness” to receive the Holy Spirit, who will enlighten, lead, and give understanding.” Second, theologians meditate on scripture by reading and rereading the Bible. And finally, theologians experience God's Word in such a way that “the devil will harry you” and torment you.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How has learning made a difference in your life?
- + How important is the study of Scripture for you?
- + Do you prefer to study the Bible alone or in a group?
- + Do you ever find yourself mentally keeping track of your good deeds and bad deeds? What helps you in these times?
- + Who has been an important teacher or mentor to you in your faith? What did this person teach about you about Christian faith and discipleship?
- + Have you thought of your prayer life, your life as a Christian, as a life of being a theologian? What difference does this—will this make—in your discipleship?

## WEEK 7: Luther the Reformer

BY THE REV. DR. DAVID RATKE (PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Being a scholar was central to Luther's identity. He spent most of his life as a university professor in Wittenberg. Luther understood his life as a scholar to be one where he interpreted scripture with a view to how it was understood – and misunderstood – in the world around him.

In 1517, a Dominican monk, Johann Tetzel, appeared near Wittenberg selling indulgences. Indulgences were, to put it crassly, coupons to get into heaven. They didn't actually give a person admission into heaven, but they could reduce the time an unfortunate soul would spend in purgatory. They were tickets to hope.

The people who tended to buy indulgences were probably of two types: the pious and devout; and those without hope and in need of hope. Luther himself had sought them out for relatives when he made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1510. For people who were illiterate and had little to look forward to except misery, pain, and suffering (which described the vast majority of the population in 1517), indulgences offered hope for a better life sooner.

To help us understand indulgences and the psychology of indulgences better, let's consider the sale of lottery tickets. In general, lottery tickets are sold to support education. That seems like a noble idea just as selling indulgences to support the work of the church seems noble. However, the poor and uneducated in our society tend to spend more on lottery tickets. They see lottery tickets as a path to a better life. Indulgences functioned in a similar way.

When Luther saw poor peasants leaving Wittenberg and crossing the river in order to buy indulgences, he was outraged and felt compelled to say something. Many of these uneducated peasants spent a good portion of what little wealth they had. Again, think about stories of poor and uneducated people spending hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars on lottery tickets in order to increase their odds of winning the lottery and thereby obtaining a better life.

In "Against Hans Worst," Luther claims that the Reformation began because, in the selling of indulgences, Tetzel was stealing from the poor and wouldn't stop:

This is the first, real, fundamental beginning of the Lutheran rumpus... Indeed, it goes back rather to Tetzel's blasphemous preaching, which (as you have heard) was aimed at stealing and robbing the people of their money to pay for the bishop's pallium and pomp. Yet after having been admonished by me, he would not stop Tetzel, but rather increased the price and wanted to steal far more money than he had already stolen under the guise of indulgences; thus he showed regard for neither the truth nor the salvation of men's souls.

Luther's life was one of scholarship in the service of reform. He wrote the *Small Catechism* so that people could claim their own personal faith. He translated the Bible into German so that people could read it for themselves. Luther developed an order of worship that was not just translated into German but expressed the German spirit so that people could worship God in ways that they understood. He advocated the establishment of schools supported by government so that the poor could have an opportunity to contribute meaningfully and fully to society.

## **BIBLE CONNECTIONS**

Amos 5:11-12 | Proverbs 22:22-23 | Matthew 19:21

## **WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?**

In “Ordinance of a Common Chest,” Luther says, “There is no greater service of God than Christian love which helps and serves the needy.”

## **DISCUSSION STARTERS**

- + What are things in your community that keep others from knowing God and from finding hope in their lives?
- + How do we take advantage of the poor and vulnerable rather than helping them?
- + Can you think of ways that the church could make a difference in your community? How?
- + In addition to objecting that indulgences victimized the poor, what other reasons might one have for objecting to the selling of indulgences?
- + Do you know of other ways Luther sought to reform church and society? Who benefited from these (proposed) reforms?



## WEEK 8: Luther the Father

BY THE REV. DR. ERIC CHILDERS (PASTOR, ST. JOHN'S, CHERRYVILLE, NC)

## TOPIC SUMMARY

The Reformation was not only a reform of teaching and preaching but also of worship, music, and theology. Another important fruit of the Reformation, sometimes forgotten, is the evolution of the role of pastor. Yes, we know that Luther argued the church did not need a priest to serve as intermediary between the believer and God. In practice, though, Luther the pastor (who began as an Augustinian priest in the Roman Catholic Church) was existentially different after his excommunication. The Reformation shifted Luther's practice and purpose. A major reason was that Luther suddenly saw the pastorate through new eyes: unlike his fellow Roman Catholic priests, Luther was quite suddenly married with children.

Luther the father most certainly shaped Luther the pastor. The renegade monk and runaway nun—whom some predicted would spawn the Anti-Christ—were blessed with six children: Johannes (1526), Elisabeth (1527), Magdalena (1529), Martin (1531), Paul (1533), and Margaret (1534). Elizabeth died at eight weeks; Magdalena at fourteen years.

This lesson's takeaway is that Luther's role as parent opened up new perspectives for pastoring people. Later in the *Ever-Reforming* study, Christy Lohr-Sapp of Duke University writes about Luther in the home and Martin's life with Katie. In the thumping heartbeat of domestic life, Martin Luther very likely saw in hearth and home new ways of being a pastor. He experienced firsthand the vocation of parenthood. The challenges and joys of parenthood prepared Luther for empathizing with a broader spectrum of humanity.

Imagine Luther the Father. Did he change diapers? Did he play with the children? Did he tend colds? Did he negotiate squabbles between children? Did he read to his children? Did he sing to them? How might his role as parent have prepared Luther for his role as a parish pastor?

An entry in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (September 1524) by Luther's friend, Caspar Heydenreich, captures another side of Luther that lore often misses. This entry describes the death of Martin and Katie's 14-year-old daughter, Magdalena, after a brief illness: "Later when she was lying in bed, he said to his daughter: 'Magdalene, little daughter, you would gladly remain here with me, your father. Are you also glad to go to your Father in heaven?' The sick girl replied: 'Yes, dear father, as God wills.' The father said, 'Dear daughter!' (Turning away from her, he said:) "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. I love her very much. If this flesh is so strong, what must the spirit be?' And among other things he said: 'In the last thousand years God has given to no bishop such great gifts as he has given to me. I am angry with myself that I am unable to rejoice from my heart and be thankful to God, although I do at times sing a little hymn and thank God. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.' When his wife wept loudly, Martin Luther comforted her by saying: 'Remember where she is going. It will be well with her. The flesh dies but the spirit lives. Children do not argue. They believe what they are told. To children everything is plain. They die without anxiety, without complaint, without fear of death, without great physical pain, just as if they were falling asleep.' When his daughter was in the agony of death, he fell upon knees before the bed and, weeping bitterly, prayed that God might save her if it be his will. Thus, she gave up the ghost in the arms of her father. Her mother was in the same room but was farther from the bed on account of her grief. It was a little after nine o'clock on the Wednesday following the fifteenth Sunday after Trinity in the year 1542."

How could this experience as Papa Luther *not* affect his pastoral heart?

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Genesis 46:30 | Ephesians 6:4 | Mark 5:21-43 | Luke 15:11-32

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

For the fourth birthday of his son, Hans, Luther wrote this story: “I know a beautiful garden. There are many children in it with golden garments, picking up beautiful apples under the trees, and pears, cherries, prunes, and plums; they sing, hop about, and are happy; they also have pretty little horses with golden bridles and silver saddles. I asked a man whose garden it was whose children they were. He answered: they are the children that like to pray and learn and are pious. Then I spoke: Dear man, I, too, have a son. His name is Hansichen Luther. Wouldn't he like to come into the garden, too, so he can eat such lovely apples and pears, and ride such lovely little horses and play with these children? Then the man replied: If he, too, likes to pray and learn and is pious, he should come into the garden too.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How might Luther's role as a parent have helped him be a better pastor?
- + Think about times in your life when you have experienced loss, challenge, scorn, fear, and disappointment. How did you overcome these episodes? Where did you find strength?
- + How might difficult times in your life help you minister to others you encounter?
- + Read Mark 5:21-43. What does this story tell us about parenting?
- + Read Luke 15:11-32. What does the parable of the Prodigal Son tell us about parenting?
- + What qualities do you think make a good pastor?

## WEEK 9: Vocation of Marriage and Family

BY DR. CHRISTY LOHR SAPP (ASSOCIATE DEAN OF RELIGIOUS LIFE, DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Vocation comes from the Latin *vocare* for “to call” and is a term that Martin Luther breathed new life into through his teachings and writings. Rather than referring exclusively to the taking of religious vows or church-related employment, Luther suggested that vocation could be understood as Christians embodying their commitments to faithfulness in many ways. For Luther, life’s vocations become places where a person can live into his or her baptism. Any employment could be vocational if one were to approach it with meaning and purpose and in reverence to God.

Luther understood vocation as a means of maintaining social order and reinforcing the importance of each person’s role in the larger system. One did not need to cloister oneself away in a monastery or convent to live a life pleasing to God. Ordinary work and anything that contributed to the common good could have spiritual worth and give glory to the Lord of heaven. As such, marriage and family became important vocational acts as they required earnest commitment and grounding in God’s word, and Luther wrote often about the importance of marriage in the life of the Christian faithful. He famously lauded even the dirty work of changing diapers as vocation in his treatise on married life written in 1522 – years before his own rounds of diaper duty began.

In truth, Luther began writing of marriage as a vocation years before he even met his own bride. He spoke openly about his disdain of the vow of celibacy – not because he advocated wanton living, but because he believed that vows of celibacy denied human nature and led the religious astray. He understood marriage to be a God-ordained institution that allowed people to live more fully and honestly in the ways that they were made. In keeping with church teaching, Luther maintained that the bonds of marriage served primarily to 1) unite two individuals in mutual affection and growth, 2) provide the best means of procreating and rearing children, and 3) combat sinfulness through the allure of extramarital sexual activity. Luther’s writings on marriage and family and their places in the Christian life helped to inspire scores of monastics to leave the cloister.

Since Luther believed that marriage was ordained by God as good, it logically followed that the realities of married life were a divine gift, as well. This included pregnancy and childbearing, and by some measures the Reformation ideology shone a more favorable light on the estate of women by association. There were limits on the roles of medieval women, but their positions in maintaining the faith, the family and the foundations of the home were all viewed as godly work – work that could be nobly and aptly shared between both genders. In Luther’s estimation, one of the most profoundly important vocations a person could assume was that of spouse and parent in a household of sincere faith. This was a task God assigned to men and women. Lutheran scholar Hans Hillerbrand writes, “the Protestant notion of vocation had a special applicability to women in that women’s daily round of chores received uncommon appreciation.” Likewise, Luther surmised, “If the wife is honorable, virtuous and pious, she shares in all the cares, endeavors, duties and functions of her husband.”

## KEY WORDS

**Marriage:** a covenant of fidelity between two people which has been ordained by God and is a biblical metaphor for the relationship between God and God's chosen people .

**Sacrament:** outward sign of an inward grace requiring a mandate from God and a promise of grace.

Through the sacraments forgiveness and connection with Christ are offered. Lutherans recognize two sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist.

**Vocation:** literally "calling" – a means of living out one's baptism through daily work and life

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Genesis 2:21-25 | Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 | Ephesians 4:1-3

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Former Metro New York Synod Bishop William Lazareth wrote in his book, *Luther on the Christian Home*, "By restoring the Christian home as the cornerstone of society, therefore, Luther prepared the way for liberating all of daily life from the clericalism of Rome for the service of God. 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing.'"

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What are the ways in which your own work speaks to a sense of "calling" in your life? What are the ways in which your family and social life contribute to your vocation?
- + Gender roles were clear and limiting in Luther's time. Social mobility was also a challenge. How could these factors have contributed to or challenged a sense of vocation for men and women in the sixteenth century?
- + Imagine ways in which Luther's understanding of the spiritual worth of ordinary work and of vocation that supports the social order could be used to contribute to a misuse of power by the privileged or elite.
- + Luther and Katie knew the grief of losing children. What could the medieval emphasis on procreation in marriage suggest for couples who are childless?
- + Read the introduction to the rite of marriage in the ELW and discuss the insights it gives to the Lutheran understanding of marriage based.

## WEEK 10: Who Was Katherine von Bora?

BY DR. CHRISTY LOHR SAPP (ASSOCIATE DEAN OF RELIGIOUS LIFE, DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

There should be a picture of Katherine von Bora (aka, “Katie Luther”) in the Wikipedia entry on strong women of faith as she tops the charts in a demonstration of a life lived in deep religious commitment and feminine resilience. Born in 1499 in Saxony to Hans & Anna von Bora, she was sent to a Benedictine boarding school in 1505, following the death of her mother and remarriage of her father. Four years later she was transferred to a Cistercian convent where she was consecrated a nun in 1515. Research suggests that her family could not afford to keep her at the school in Brehna and that she had relatives in the Marienthron convent near Nimbschen.

Life in the cloister taught Katherine much about animal husbandry, small-scale farming, tending to the sick, and, most importantly, a life lived in religious practice and contemplation. The Cistercian religious communities observed a regular rhythm of daily prayer that began before dawn, punctuated with long observations of silence. Katherine was believed to have been a reverent and faithful postulant who took her vows seriously for the decade that she lived in the convent. Yet, just a few years after she entered the novitiate, the Reformation began, the peasants revolted, and questions about faith, class, and injustice resonated meaningfully with Katherine.

Thanks to the inspiration of Luther’s writing, and with the help of his friend and local merchant, Leonhard Koppe, Katherine left the nunnery with eleven other sisters Easter 1523. The dramatic tale had them escaping under the cover of darkness by hiding in a wagon full of herring barrels. Unable to return to their family homes, Katherine and many of her sister-nuns became religious refugees with no resources and no prospects other than their trust in God’s mercy and provision. Luther and his colleagues worked diligently to find homes and work for the nuns and to arrange marriages, as appropriate.

Katherine proved to be a difficult person to partner, however. Her penniless state left her undesirable to some potential suitors, and her strong personality and sense of self made other suitors undesirable to her. Luther proposed to Katherine, and they were married in June 1525. Hans, the first of six children, arrived a year later. Together, Luther and Katherine set the tone for marriage and family life post-Reformation.

Luther referred to Katherine as a hard worker and household manager and as the “Morning Star of Wittenberg” for her tendency to rise before the sun to begin morning chores. Luther was a horrible administrator, but Katherine carried the ball of managing the family finances. She served as Luther’s publishing agent, a personal secretary who scheduled visitors and meetings, the real estate manager who oversaw the stream of guests and boarders, a nurse who tended to the family’s many illnesses, cook, livestock supervisor, beer maker, herbalist, and gardener. She regularly managed their household and child-rearing alone while Luther traveled. His letters and writings revealed a deep respect and affection between the two. In one letter he wrote, “Katie, you have married an honest man who loves you; you are an empress.” After Luther’s death in 1546, Katherine stayed in Wittenberg as long as finances and politics allowed. After fleeing Wittenberg to escape the plague, she died from injuries sustained in a wagon accident in Torgau in December, 1552.

## KEY WORDS

**Benedictine:** Roman Catholic religious order following the rule of St. Benedict – the order and rhythm of life written in the sixth century and followed by medieval monastics.

**Black Monastery:** abbey and university in Wittenberg that became Lutherhaus, the home of the Luther family. It was called the Black Monastery (also the Black Cloister) in reference to the color of the robes that Augustinian monks wore.

**Brehna:** town in Saxony where Kathrine von Bora was sent to a Benedictine boarding school.

**Cistercian**—Roman Catholic contemplative order following the role of St. Benedict and dedicated to the veneration of Mary, the mother of God.

**Marienthron:** “Mary’s throne”—abbey in Nimbschen run by the Cistercian order where Katherine von Bora took vows.

**Pickled Herring:** fish cured with salt and spices that served as a medieval European food staple. It was stored in big barrels for easy transportation.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Proverbs 31 | Colossians 3:23-24 | Matthew 25:14-30

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Do not underestimate the scandalous and radical idea of the marriage of a monk and nun in sixteenth century Europe. However, in his *Table Talk* series, Luther purportedly said this about marriage: “There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion, or company than a good marriage.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + From an early age, Katherine had important decisions made for her, yet when the time came she made bold moves to take control of her own life and decisions. What might it have been like to be a woman in the sixteenth century?
- + What can women today learn from or be inspired by in Katherine’s faith and life story?
- + Katherine von Bora was sent to a convent at a very young age in part to provide for her education and in part because her family was not materially rich. What are the sacrifices that families around the world make today in order to provide an education for young girls? Who are modern day advocates for girls’ education?

## WEEK 11: Martin and Katie at Home

BY DR. CHRISTY LOHR SAPP (ASSOCIATE DEAN OF RELIGIOUS LIFE, DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

By all accounts, Luther adored his family and saw his relationship with Katie as a true partnership. The Luther household became not only a testing ground for the theories and ideologies that Luther was bold to profess, but it also became a place for him to live out his baptism in partnership with a loving spouse, children and friends. Like many good marriages, the relationship between Dr. and Mrs. Luther seemed to be based on mutual regard and respect. Luther was known to have challenged several medieval negative stereotypes about women and their roles. With a head-strong independent spouse in Katie, this brand of progressivism might have helped to make their home a more equitable place.

The Luther household duties were clearly defined; in some ways, Luther was the celebrity and Katie was the agent. She managed the family finances and operations while Luther maintained the social calendar with a steady stream of house guests, students, and visitors. Luther traveled quite a lot and correspondence between him and Katie revealed a high level of trust and collegiality in their shared life. Katie oversaw the daily logistics and Luther dealt with the external relations and public profile.

Luther and Katie had six children: three sons and three daughters. The eldest two daughters both died at young ages (eight months and thirteen years, respectively). The loss of these two was devastating for the couple. The Luthers were active parents who loved their children. Biographers recount that Luther helped with the child-rearing and some household duties when he was home. These aspects of life were understood to be a part of the vocation of family. Thus, diapering, disciplining, and making dinner were all honorable engagements for both men and women. Luther used his literary skills to pen stories and poems for his children. At the death of thirteen-year old Magdalena, he wrote an epitaph to console her mother and express his own deep sorrow.

Luther and Katie had a twenty-year marriage that produced children and a functioning, hospitable household. One can imagine a constant flurry of activity when all members of the family and invited guests were present. An active farm, garden, brewery, boarding house, and kitchen made for plenty of chores to go around. While the Luthers were not always financially solvent, there seems to have been an ample supply of love and generosity in the midst of this active and dynamic family. Luther's correspondence with Katie while traveling, as well as his notes to others, revealed a deep regard and real love for this woman he saw as a true partner. What began as a marriage of convenience turned into deep regard, genuine love, and happiness together. These are remarkable gifts for parents to give their children: a household built around respect, faithfulness, community connections, and hospitality.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Hebrews 10:24 | 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Martin Luther was a prolific writer. In addition to the volumes Luther himself wrote, countless books, articles, and sermons have been written about him. Of all this material, many pithy and clever quotes are often credited to Luther, some true and some not. One of those famous and frequently quoted statements captures Luther's playfulness: "Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and let him make her sorry to see him leave."

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + While the Luthers' marriage ended in great affection and love, the two did not embody popular images of romantic love when they first wed. What can couples today learn from Luther's and Katie's commitment to each other and to their family?
- + Luther and Katie knew the grief of losing children. How does this reality help to humanize the man who is often portrayed first as a scholar, theologian, and Reformer?
- + Luther and Katie often entertained and housed guests and students yet struggled to make ends meet. What can they teach about hospitality?



## WEEK 12: The Establishment of the Home Altar—Parents as Teachers

BY DR. CHRISTY LOHR SAPP (ASSOCIATE DEAN OF RELIGIOUS LIFE, DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Faith begins at home; this is an apt means of summarizing Luther's emphasis on the importance of education for children and families. Luther viewed marriage and family life as important vocations and understood them to be models for the structuring of society. In addition, the home was a place for nurture and instruction in the fundamentals of faith. Parents in this way became priests – not in terms of ordination but in terms of transmission of religious principles and ideals.

The *Small Catechism* is Luther's most famous teaching tool for parents and families. Luther wrote this with home instruction in mind. He intended it to be a resource that heads of households could use to impart the basic tenets of Christian life and belief to children or others in the household. In his preface to the *Small Catechism*, Luther laid out the need for such instruction and the consequences for those who do not adhere to it. He urged parents "to rule wisely and educate their children" and suggested that not to train children properly will result in laying waste to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. The establishment of a "home altar" involves a clear commitment to religious instruction, household prayer and mutual encouragement in the Christian life.

Luther points to the fourth commandment as a good starting point for children in relation to Christian education from their parents. The "Table of Duties" at the end of the *Small Catechism* offers specific directives based on scripture for husbands, wives, parents and children. The instructions call for humility, respect and proper obedience for the sake of harmony and following the ways of the Lord. . Parents are challenged not to "provoke children in anger, lest they become discouraged, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Similarly, children are charged to "obey your parents in the Lord ... that you may live long on the earth."

The compulsion of parents to take responsibility for the religious education of children reflected Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers and the order of society. The home became a nexus of heaven as it provided a place for the creation of a solid foundation of faith. This foundation then served the larger good as those guided rightly were better equipped to contribute to the smooth ordering of society. Parents played an integral role in this as they reinforced and expanded upon the teachings heard and developed at church and in more formal religious instruction. The task of Christian education was not the sole responsibility of clergy but required the commitment of parents, god parents and governing authorities, as well. It was important to Luther that the messages of faith were shared widely and reinforced throughout the community. This not only built a better-educated populace but also allowed for the best functioning of family as well as public life. The following rhyme found at the end of the "Table of Duties" summarizes the Lutheran approach to this hands-on approach to Christian education: *Let each his lesson learn with care and all the household well will fare.*

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Deuteronomy 6:5-9, 11:19 | Matthew 19:13-15

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

The *Small Catechism* is among Luther's most enduring and important works. Timothy Wengert, former Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, wrote in his study guide preface to Luther's *Small Catechism*: "One time Martin Luther reflected on this order and said that it was like a physician who begins with the diagnosis (the Ten Commandments) before offering treatment (the good news in the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer). The point of the *Small Catechism* is to give us comfort and support when we face problems in our Christian life. At least that is what Katherine Luther, Martin Luther's wife, once said. In a letter to her near the end of his life, Martin Luther tried to calm her worries about his health by reminding her, 'You, dear Katie, read [my sermons on the gospel of] John and the *Small Catechism*, about which you once said: 'Everything in this book has been said about me.' For you prefer to worry about me instead of letting God worry.'"

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What are the ways in which your own family maintains a "home altar" that encourages instruction in matters of faith?
- + Who are the members of your community outside the nuclear family who play a role in the Christian education? Read the promises baptismal sponsors make during the rite of baptism found in the ELW and discuss how these are implemented in your community.
- + Luther encouraged diligence in religious instruction at every phase of life. How/what might children teach parents or other adults about important aspects and elements of faith?
- + In the preface to the *Small Catechism*, Luther admonishes religious leaders and public officials for giving mixed messages about articles of faith. Where does your family encounter challenges to religious teaching?
- + Read the Table Blessing found in the Small Catechism (from the ELW) and consider using this in your own home.

## WEEK 13: God with Us—A Theology of the Cross

BY THE REV. RUSSELL MAKANT (PASTOR, MT. HEBRON LUTHERAN CHURCH, HILDEBRAN, NC)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Christ crucified! Christ risen! The theology of the cross focuses our thinking and gaze on the first claim; yet, does not negate or exclude the second. We cannot begin to comprehend the power and promise of resurrection or receive faith as a gift of God without encountering and clinging to the crucified Christ.

Martin Luther coined the phrase “theology of the cross.” You can find the Heidelberg Disputation (1518) online and look at Luther’s theses for a sense of the usage (esp. 19, 20, 21). Luther coined the phrase; he didn’t invent the theological framework. One can see the theology in Mark’s Gospel and Paul’s writing to the Corinthians.

The theology of the cross is *not* a set doctrine but more of a way of doing theological reflection. Doing theology is part of the church’s work—all of us in our varying vocations, in thought, word and deed. The theology of the cross seeks to keep Jesus, the crucified Christ, at the center of the theological task. One could (some do) approach theological reflection as a path to mediate and correlate our experience. This path often seeks to fit Jesus into life’s generalities. This easily, subtly, can turn Jesus into a facilitator instead of the subject of faith. (For example, we wind up with things like *Ten Biblical Ways to Reduce Stress*. Ask: “Where’s the focus?”)

The theology of the cross is less prescription of what we ought to do and more description of what God has done, (is doing, and promises yet to do). Anselm spoke of “faith seeking understand.” We have received the gift of faith, and this gift from God—handed down through the church—changes all. Thus, we interpret life in light of this gift and through the lens of Christ crucified. The *crucified* and *living* Word interprets the world as the claim. We are seeking to understand the meaning, to unpack it, to wrap our heads around how this transforms our life and the world God so loves.

One way to explore concepts is by what they are not. Luther contrasted theology of the *cross* with a theology of *glory*. Certainly we want to glorify God. Theologies of glory are places in our thinking about God and salvation that put greater emphasis on our ability to reason or work our way into God’s favor.

As opposed to earning or working our way into salvation, the theology of the cross points to the depth God goes as God makes a relationship with God’s people. In the face of the paradoxes, uncertainties, pain, and suffering of life we’re not left wondering about some distant god—we look to the cross and see God incarnate, stretched out in love. Christ crucified doesn’t give all the answers in a neatly wrapped package. It gives a glimpse of God’s willingness to step into the muck of it all with us. The resurrection takes us further into seeing. As yet, it is always as “in a mirror dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

## KEY WORDS

**Doctrine:** a set and systematized body of teachings on a topic

**Theology:** thinking about God

**Incarnate:** made flesh, human (for example, John 1:14)

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 | Matthew 4:1-11

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

[I]n John 14[:8], Philip spoke according to the theology of glory: “Show us the Father.” Christ forthwith set aside his flighty thought about seeking God elsewhere and led him to himself, saying, “Philip, he who has seen me has seen the Father” [John 14:9]. For this reason, true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ...

*(Luther Works, vol 31: Career of the Reformer I. (Pelikan, Oswald, Lehmann, editors; Fortress Press, 1999) page 53.)*

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Many theologians have tried to help explain the theology of the cross by helping us understand what it is not. How do these phrases help expand thought and discussion?
  - o Martin Luther: “the word without the cross”
  - o Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “cheap grace”
  - o Søren Kierkegaard: “admiring Christ instead of following Christ”
  - o Douglas John Hall: “triumphalism”
- + How easy is it to misplace the glory we want to give God and shift the focus to us?
- + How does the theology of the cross help shape our understanding of Church as Mission?
- + Does theology matter only on Sunday mornings? Does the theology of the cross point us to the radical call of discipleship? If so, how does this speak to our day to day lives—how we shop, spend, care for the neighbor, the enemy, the environment?
- + The theology of the cross can help us live as witnesses to God’s love in a pluralistic society. Are we to defend God or be what Henri Nouwen called “fools for Christ?”
- + Douglas John Hall wrote, “So Jesus, the living variable of Christian theology, when it is true to its mandate, continuously assails the theologian and the church with the great fact of his livingness” (The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World, Fortress Press; 2003, page 123) How does the livingness of Jesus confront your thinking as we encounter both the tragedy and the joy of life?

## WEEK 14: Death and Life: A Theology of Law and Gospel

BY THE REV. DR. MARY HINKLE SHORE (PASTOR, LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, BREVARD, NC)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

As theological terms, the words, “law” and “gospel” do not refer to the Old and New Testaments or to types of literature in the Bible. Rather, the terms name functions. “Pretty is as pretty does,” the saying goes. The saying means that an abstract quality (like the quality of being pretty) is defined more by function than state. What one *does* goes farther to define one as pretty than what one *is*. In the same way, the words, “law” and “gospel” in Lutheran theology describe functions: the law kills; the gospel makes alive.

This means that the same verse in Scripture can function as law for one person and gospel for another—or it can be law for you at one time in your life and gospel for you at another. In the Magnificat, Mary sings, “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52). Let’s say you hear that song as an indictment on your practice of living for yourself rather than others. You have pursued power and now you hear the powerful are losing their position. In the words, you recognize that God intended something altogether different for you. In that case, the word is law for you. It puts to death your striving and your feeling impressed with yourself and your accomplishments.

In other circumstances, the Magnificat speaks a different word, a word of gospel. Maybe you know what it is like to be ground in the dust, to be ignored or shunned. You identify with the lowly and you have always wondered whether God cared about you. To you, Mary’s song bears the good news. She sings of exaltation as if it has already happened. You have what you need. You have been lifted up. The verse proclaims gospel: it creates life where there was only despair before.

Confirmation students sometimes learn two shorthand phrases that begin with the letters “S.O.S.” The law shows our sin. The gospel shows our savior. Hearing the law is that experience of hearing God’s call in such a way that we realize how far we are from living the life God intends for us. Hearing the gospel is the experience of realizing that God travels to the farthest of far countries to bring us home.

## KEY WORDS

**Magnificat:** The name given to the words Mary's speaks (or sings) in Luke 1:46-55 about God's work through her life and that of her baby, Jesus. In the church today, the Magnificat is often sung as part of the Service of Evening Prayer.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Romans 6:1-11 | 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther defined the law as what we are to do, and the gospel as what God has done for us. "The law commands and requires us to do certain things. The law is thus directed solely to our behavior and consists in making requirements. For God speaks through the law, saying, 'Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you.' The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says, 'this is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake'" (*Luther's Works* 35:162).

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + In addition to death and life, the following pairs of words speak about the "lost and found" nature of human existence lived within the reality of God's grace. Does one of these pairs speak to you more than others? Why or how? (The list comes from W. Paul Jones, *Theological Worlds*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.)
  - Exile and Homecoming.
  - Slavery and Liberation.
  - Emptiness and Fulfillment.
  - Sin and Forgiveness.
  - Suffering and Endurance.
- + Choose a favorite Bible verse and read it to the group. Work together to identify law and/or gospel in it. Does the verse say what we are to do (law)? Does it say what God has done in Christ (gospel)? Can you put its message of law and/or gospel into your own words?
- + Does a biblical passage need to speak about Jesus to be gospel? Why or why not?

## WEEK 15: Saved by Grace—A Theology of Justification by Grace through Faith

BY MR. JOSHUA LEWIS COPELAND (RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT MAJOR, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

In this session, we will be discussing the Lutheran theology of justification by grace through faith. We will be focusing on three questions throughout this session: “What is grace and what does justification mean?”, “So what? What does this mean to us?”, and “Now what? Now that we know what it means, how should we live our lives?”

What? What do grace and justification mean? To answer this question, we need to go back to the very beginning of the Bible. Genesis 3, has an account of Adam and Eve’s temptation to sin and subsequent “fall.” It is from this point that our discussion of grace starts. As a result of the fall, all humans are under the impact of original sin and thus in bondage to sin. Theologians call this humanity “the old Adam” and Luther believed that when baptized, the old Adam dies and we are completely free from sin! The only reason the old Adam dies is because God gave us the unconditional gift of his son, Jesus Christ, so that he could die for our sins and we are free from the bondage of sin. Justification by grace is the action done on the cross. We are saved by God’s unconditional love for us, even though we are a fallen people. There is nothing that we must or even can do to receive this love. It is pure, unmerited gift!

So what? Now that we know what grace and justification are, what does this mean? Justification is forgiveness of sins and reconciliation through Christ. We receive this forgiveness by faith alone, meaning that we do not receive this forgiveness by our own good deeds. However, even though we are forgiven of our sins, we are still sinners. Thus, we are sinners and justified at the same time. Because of this need, we constantly renew our faith and confess our sins together. The main thing you need to understand is that this justification is by God’s grace alone and that we receive this wonderful gift through faith alone.

Now what? Now that we understand what all of this means, how’re we supposed to live our lives? Well, as we learned earlier, justification frees us from the bondage of sin; however, we are also called to be servants to all. You might be thinking, “Wait, didn’t he just tell us that we are free? Doesn’t that mean we can do anything we want?” On the contrary, justification means, that instead of focusing on ourselves, we return our focus to God. God calls us to be disciples of Christ and spread his love. Therefore, as Christians, we are called to be servants to those who need us most and that is how we should live our lives.

Justification by grace through faith is one of the central tenants of the Lutheran faith. We, as Lutherans, must understand that grace is a gift from God and that we can only achieve this grace through faith. Most importantly, we must remember that, though we are freed from all bondage, we are also called to be servants of all.

## KEY WORDS

**Justification:** The act of being placed in right relationship with God; this includes freedom from bondage to sin, death, and the devil.

**Grace:** God's unconditional and unmerited love for us evidenced through Christ's action on the cross.

**Faith:** Trust in the promise of mercy in Christ

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Romans 3:28 | Ephesians 2:8-9 | Romans 4:1-25 | Galatians 3:1-29

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In his letter to Jerome Weller (a friend and mentee) Luther admonishes: "When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: "I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God. Where He is there I shall be also!"

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Where have you experienced God's grace in your life?
- + What does grace change?
- + What does it mean to be free from the bondage of sin? Is this the same thing as not sinning? Why or why not?
- + If we are justified by grace through faith and not by any merit of our own, do we have to *do* anything as Christians? If not, why do we come to church?



WEEK 16: *Simul Justus et Peccator*. A Theology of Saints and Sinners

BY REV. DR. KATHERINE SHANER (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT, WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY)

## TOPIC SUMMARY

Latin is no longer the universal language for either the church or educational institutions, but this phrase, *simul justus et peccator*, is one that many Lutheran pastors and lay people have heard before. Literally translated it means that a person is “at the same time upright and one who stumbles” or in Lutheran speak “simultaneously justified and sinner.” In our relationship to God we are fully saved and counted as righteous because we have been baptized into Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. At the same time, we are thoroughly steeped in the very sin that keeps us from right relationship with God. Each of us is at each moment of each day both sinner and saint.

Lutherans believe that Christians do not receive God’s love in proportion to our piety, our generosity with others, our access to wealth and political influence, our importance within our church and civic communities, our family status and configuration, our vocation, or our privilege within the larger global community. None of these things matter to God. Luther’s lasting legacy is the idea that God’s outreach, unconditional love, and infinite mercy—all of which we certainly (but not exclusively) receive through baptism and Eucharist—have made us irrevocably, completely, wonderfully God’s perfect image (Gen 1:28). We are saints not because we are innocent of wrong-doing but because Christ has restored this image to its completeness for us.

At the same time, Lutherans recognize, lament, and confess humanity’s compulsion toward and participation in sin. Sinfulness is not only individual actions, thoughts, and desires that disobey God. Sinfulness is about living (consciously or unconsciously) in ways that rupture the completeness of our relationship with God. Sin is not just about individual one-on-one relationship with God, as if the sinner/saint next to us in the pew—or at the end of our block, across the continent, in prison, sleeping on the street, running the school, ringing up groceries—is inconsequential to our relationship with God. Sin is collective, systemic, and pervasive.

If sainthood is about living fully in God (Ps 139:7–12) trusting that God’s abundant grace enfolds us, then sinfulness is about the mistrust of God’s grace for our own perceived gain. The two concepts—sainthood and sinfulness—seem mutually exclusive. Yet our Lutheran heritage keeps these two opposites in tension: in God’s eyes we are each *at the same time* sinners and saints. We are *both* saints and sinners, saved and condemned, holy and depraved, fully complete in God and broken in that relationship. Our own struggle comes not just in reconciling our understanding of ourselves as individuals with this paradox but also in reconciling our human relationships within it. Each of us and each of our communities is *at the same time* sinful and saintly.

## KEY WORDS

**Saint (justus):** A person who lives in a complete, holy, whole, intimate relationship with God. A person who embodies the image of God in the world.

**Sinner (peccator):** A person who lives in an incomplete, broken, adversarial relationship with God. A person who alienates himself/herself or others from God and God's creation.

**Justified:** The act of absolving a person of wrong-doing. The action that draws humans into full relationship with God.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Genesis 1:26–31 | Psalm 139 | Romans 3:21–31; 6:1–11 | Matthew 26:6–13

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Two sections of Luther's Small Catechism are helpful to read together in trying to understand how the theology of sinners and saints comes out of our reformation heritage: the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and Part IV of the Explanation of Baptism. The first explores why we need forgiveness of sin. The second explains why baptism makes us saints.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How can we who blaspheme, reject, and/or eliminate God actually "get away with it?"
- + Why are we who are kind to our chosen neighbors, loyal to our families, and conservative in our energy use responsible for the mistreatment of others or the destruction of God's beloved creation?
- + Why should those who sin receive anything other than condemnation from God?
- + Why would God see our comfortable, modest, good-intentioned lives as sinful just because poverty, inequality, and racism produce suffering elsewhere in our communities?
- + Why do we often identify ourselves as either saints or sinners, but not both? Why do we identify others as either saints or sinners, but not both?
- + What difference would it make in our individual lives and our communities if we recognized our theology of sinners and saints at work in our human relationships?

## WEEK 17: Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Gathering)

BY THE REV. DR. ERIC CHILDERS (PASTOR, ST. JOHN'S, CHERRYVILLE, NC)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

This session begins a four-week study of our Lutheran worship, organized by its four primary parts—Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. Despite fundamental liturgical reforms, Luther preserved the basic ancient pattern of worship. For Christians, worship is the center of faith life. Through the centuries, we have gathered, traditionally on the Sabbath, to confess our sin, to receive forgiveness, to pray, to be prayed for, to hear the Word announced, to proclaim the Crucified and Risen Christ, to remember God's promises declared in baptism, to receive the body and blood of our Lord in Holy Communion, and to be sent renewed and empowered into the world to love and serve. All ministry sparked at church revolves around the assembly's regular worship together. Worship unites us.

Since they were toddlers, my children have enjoyed acting out worship—playing church. Maybe you have observed a child in your life who has done the same. In what ways would children play church? Would they preach a little homily? Would they sing? Would they distribute crackers and juice? Would they baptize their dolls? My children would take turns carrying the cross, the Bible, the banners, and the make-believe torches. Unknowingly, they were enacting a part of the Gathering.

The Gathering begins as believers and seekers are called to experience God—to *be met by God*—in sacred space. Worship is not so much about what we do but rather what God does *to us and for us*. We gather for worship because we need to meet God in the company of other Christians. We are called to worship to publicly confess our sin and our need for God's forgiveness, seeking renewal by God's grace in community. We come to worship not because we are prepared and perfect; in fact, we come for the opposite reasons. We gather as we are and as best we can to receive God's promises declared in worship.

After we have gathered, we hear a prelude that decompresses us and helps prepare us for sacred worship time; we confess our sins and receive absolution (and in this act, we remember our baptism); we sing a song with perfect and imperfect voices; we greet one another in the name of Christ; we cry out to God for mercy in the kyrie; we sing another song of praise; and we offer a prayer that collects the themes and images of the day's lessons.

In our weekly gathering, we *are* the church. Our vocation is expressed in many ways, one of the most profound being God's call to gather us for worship. The Gathering is not only a signal that something *is about* to happen, but it is also a sign that something *has happened*. Gathered in the name of Christ, the church is alive!

## KEY WORDS

**Liturgy:** the form, shape, and order of our Christian worship together, meaning “work of the people”

**Confession and Forgiveness:** the public proclamation of our corporate and individual sins, followed by the unconditional absolution of those sins by God’s grace

**Kyrie:** a cry to God, “Lord, have mercy,” which serves to invoke and greet Christ Jesus in worship

**Prayer of the Day:** the main themes, images, and messages of the day are collected (this prayer is also called the “collect”) or summarized in this brief introductory prayer

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Isaiah 48:14 | Luke 4:15-16 | Matthew 18:20

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

As Luther the Reformer set out to correct abuses in the Roman Catholic Church, he did not seek to begin a new church. While he retained the basic liturgical shape of the Western Church (Roman Catholic), Luther did make several notable worship reforms: (1) emphasizing the liturgy as the “work of the people,” rather than exclusively in the hands of clergy, (2) insisting that laity receive both the bread *and* wine of Holy Communion, and (3) inviting hymnody as a more central and inclusive expression of worship.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Why is the prelude important?
- + Why do we (sometimes or always, depending upon your congregation) carry the cross, Bible, torches, and banners into the worship space?
- + Why do we very often begin worship with Confession and Forgiveness?
- + What is the “Thanksgiving for Baptism,” the alternative to Confession and Forgiveness?
- + Why is it a good idea to begin worship with the Confession and Forgiveness at the baptismal font?
- + Why do we make the sign of the cross?
- + What is happening in our confession? What are we saying and doing? What does it mean to you?
- + What is the point of the gathering song?
- + What is the purpose of the greeting?
- + What is the point of the dialogue, this back-and-forth between the pastor and the congregation?
- + What are the *kyrie*, the “Glory to God,” and the “Now the Feast?”
- + Why is the Prayer of the Day significant?
- + Are people “called” to the Gathering? If so, in what ways?

## WEEK 18: Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Word)

BY THE REV. DR. ERIC CHILDERS (PASTOR, ST. JOHN'S, CHERRYVILLE, NC)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Our Lutheran liturgy follows the ancient pattern in four parts—Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. This lesson addresses the second section of our worship, the Word. In this part of the liturgy, the Word is proclaimed in various forms by a variety of voices. While the pastor plays an important role in this part of public worship, it is not he or she exclusively who proclaims the Word. The entire assembly plays a role; all baptized people proclaim God's Word. Recall what has just happened in the liturgy: the church has gathered, greeted one another in the name of the Risen Christ, and prayed the Prayer of the Day. The assembly is ready to hear the Word proclaimed and also to proclaim the Word together.

Traditionally, we follow the lectionary, which includes an Old Testament reading, a psalm, a New Testament reading, and a gospel reading. The Revised Common lectionary unites a broad spectrum of Christians in proclaiming the same set of readings each Sunday over a recurring three-year cycle. Lay people often share in the reading of the lessons. The sermon is preceded by the reading of the gospel. If the worship space features a lectern and pulpit, the pastor typically reads the gospel at the pulpit, inviting the assembly to stand. Attention and honor are given to this public reading of good news, introduced with acclaim sung by the congregation.

Children's sermons can be very useful in proclaiming the gospel or telling the day's stories in creative and simpler ways. Beware. Children's sermons should be handled as serious business, another opportunity for proclaiming God's word in the assembly—to children *and* adults. While children do often say the darnedest things, these moments are not comedy bits, opportunities for exploiting children's innocence for a quick laugh during worship. Preachers of children's sermons should be creative and have fun, but they should also remember the responsibility of sharing God's word.

The sermon is the interpretation of the Word for the congregation. The ELCA document, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, describes it this way: "Preaching is the living and contemporary voice of one who interprets in all the Scriptures the things concerning Jesus Christ." Following the sermon is the Hymn of the Day, a uniquely Lutheran contribution to worship. This is not simply the song that follows the sermon but rather the opportunity for the assembly to respond in voice to what it has heard during the sermon.

Following the hymn of the day, many congregations include a statement of belief, traditionally the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed. The Creeds are ancient public confessions of our belief in the Triune God. Following the Creeds, which are actually optional, the assembly prays the prayers of intercession. The prayers are a remarkably significant part of worship, for it is here that we enact the lessons, praying for one another and receiving the prayers that are offered to God on our behalf.

Finally, the sharing of the peace is another corporate activity in which the assembly joins together to proclaim and extend Christ's love to one another. The corporate proclamation of the Word prepares the assembly for the next part of worship—the Meal.

## KEY WORDS

**Alleluia:** acclamation meaning “praise the Lord” (Greek); the Hebrew spelling is “hallelujah”

**Creeds:** statements of faith in the Triune God outlined in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. The Nicene Creed was adopted in 325 C.E. at the Council of Nicaea; the Apostles’ Creed may date back to 390 C.E. at the Council of Milan. A third statement, the Athanasian Creed, is rarely used.

**Lectionary:** a systematic collection of scheduled and pre-appointed readings from the Holy Scriptures, organized over a three-year cycle. By the end of that cycle, much (if not all) of the Holy Scriptures will be read, studied, spoken, and heard by the assembly. Because of the length of the Old Testament, a smaller proportion is included in the cycle. The cycles are organized by Year A (featuring Matthew’s gospel), Year B (Mark), and Year C (Luke). John’s gospel, different from the three synoptic gospels in tone and form, is included throughout the three-year cycle.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Psalms 119:105 | Romans 10:17 | Matthew 13:10-17

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther and the Reformers placed both preaching and the sacraments as central to worship. Preaching, including teaching, serves not only to illuminate and interpret, but also to create faith in the listener. Philip Melancthon, Luther’s colleague, writes in Article V of the Augsburg Confession: “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.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What happens in this section of the service? What are the parts?
- + What is the lectionary?
- + Why do Christians read the Old Testament?
- + Why do we have a psalm, and why is it so often sung?
- + Why do we stand for the gospel?
- + What is the gospel acclamation?
- + What is the purpose of the sermon?
- + What do you like in a sermon?
- + What is the importance of the hymn of the day?
- + Why do we say the creeds(s)?
- + Why do we share the peace, especially during this part of the service?

## WEEK 19: Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Meal)

BY THE REV. DR. ERIC CHILDERS (PASTOR, ST. JOHN'S, CHERRYVILLE, NC)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

After the Gathering and Word, our assembly prepares for the Meal. The 1997 ELCA document, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, describes that Holy Communion is where “we receive Christ’s body and blood and God’s gifts of forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation to be received by faith for the strengthening of faith.” It is God, truly present in our Lord Jesus, who declares and accomplishes this mystery.

Before the table is set and the meal is celebrated, the assembly collects an offering. This is an important part of the service and can be easily misunderstood. Would the word “collection” be more appropriate, as we are *collecting* items to present at the altar? In some congregations, ushers gather or *collect* food for the needy, monetary gifts from parishioners, and wine and bread to be consecrated for the Sacrament. This collection, presented at the altar, is not a “cover charge,” an entrance fee for Holy Communion. This collection is not *quid pro quo*, this for that. The collection is simply a return of the gifts that God has given. Holy Communion is not dependent upon our action; it is the Lord’s Supper.

After the offering prayer, the bread and wine, gathered from the wheat and grapes of creation, are consecrated, and the table is set. Whatever it is called—Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, the Sacrament of the Altar—what comes next is a meal. Communion is a community meal of both bread and wine, celebrated around a table after sins are confessed, the Word is spoken, and prayers are offered. It is a meal in which Christ is truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine. My teacher, Timothy Wengert, described the real presence of Christ this way: “When Jesus throws a party, Jesus shows up.” In other words, Holy Communion is not a memorial that simply remembers Jesus; rather, the event is a celebration of the Crucified and Risen Christ, giving his true body and blood as food and drink. At the table, we are nourished, forgiven, and called to be witnesses to the Gospel.

So who should receive Holy Communion, and how often should he or she receive it? The answers vary according to pastor and parish. Doctrine tells us that Holy Communion is given to the baptized, and lifelong catechesis (learning) is essential for all believers of all ages. Baptized children receive Holy Communion at a time agreed upon by the pastor, parent, and parish. The Bible does not name an exact age for receiving the sacrament, but our Lutheran tradition tells us that ongoing catechesis is important to fostering faith. Some congregations choose fifth grade as a time for first communion, but that age has been lowered in recent years. As a parish pastor, I see this issue clearly: since we do not affirm believers’ baptism, why would we affirm a form of believers’ communion? These sacraments are events in which God comes to us and for us. The efficacy of these sacraments—tangible in the water, bread, and wine—is not a result of our work or even our understanding. It is God’s work. Accordingly, my children first received Holy Communion when they were able to swallow the bread. Ultimately, it is the decision of parents (in conversation with the pastor) to determine the best time for a child to receive the wine and bread.

In recent years, the Lutheran church has focused on returning to weekly celebration of Holy Communion. Weekly communion is the traditional practice of the Church. Believers need the sacrament regularly, just as they need the Word, to nourish, sustain, and renew. After experiencing the real presence of Christ, we are prepared to be sent out into the world.

## KEY WORDS

**Holy Communion:** According to Luther in the Small Catechism, “it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.”

**Eucharist:** From the Greek meaning “thanksgiving,” it is another name for the sacrament of Communion

**Real Presence:** (From *The Use of the Means of Grace*) “In this sacrament the crucified and risen Christ is present, giving his true body and blood as food and drink. This real presence is a mystery.”

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Isaiah 25:6-8 | John 13:1-14:7 | 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In the Small Catechism, Luther writes of the Sacrament of the Table: “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink....The words ‘given for you’ and ‘shed for you for the forgiveness of sin’ show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation....Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: ‘given for you’ and ‘shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.’ These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, ‘forgiveness of sin.’”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Why should we celebrate Holy Communion every Sunday?
- + What do Lutherans believe is happening in Holy Communion?
- + Why might “collection” be a better word than “offering?” What, after all, are we collecting?
- + What is the offering prayer?
- + What names do we have for communion? Which do you prefer? Why?
- + What does communion mean to you?
- + What is the Great Thanksgiving?
- + What is the significance of the preface, the *Sanctus* (Holy Holy Holy), and the *Agnes Dei* (Lamb of God)?
- + What are the words of institution? What message do those words speak to you?
- + What is the Lord’s Prayer, and why do we pray it at this part of the service?
- + Is there a “best” way to distribute communion (common cup, intinction, etc.)?
- + Why do we sing a post communion canticle? (And what’s a canticle anyway?)
- + Why do we pray a post-communion prayer?



## WEEK 20: Liturgy and Why We Do the Things We Do in Worship (The Sending)

BY THE REV. DR. ERIC CHILDERS (PASTOR, ST. JOHN'S, CHERRYVILLE, NC)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Do not underestimate the significance of the Sending. Though brief, this fourth portion of Lutheran worship is just as important as the Gathering, Word, and Meal. After the assembly is called and gathered, sins confessed, forgiveness declared, word proclaimed, prayers offered, gifts collected, meal celebrated, and Christ encountered, the assembled Body of Christ is blessed and sent back into the world for mission. Redeemed and renewed, we are sent outside the worship space to live out our vocations in lovingkindness to neighbor.

The Sending portion is brief, consisting of a blessing, sending song, and dismissal. Certain services may also include the sending of communion at this time; that is, a prayer offered for communion that will be taken to homebound parishioners by lay Eucharistic ministers. Some congregations include the announcements during the Sending, just prior to the dismissal. In my parish, I regularly include the “Affirmation of Christian Vocation,” found on page 84 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, as another blessing and remembrance of baptismal call.

The Sending is important because it draws a bold line under why we worship. Moreover, it tells us what worship is centrally about. Worship is not simply a rote exercise in which the assembly gathers, faces the altar, sings a song or two, offers praise, and leaves until the next gathering. Worship is not so much about what we do for God; worship is more significantly what God does *to us* and *for us*. Because of what God does in worship—hears, forgives, heals, nourishes, feeds, blesses, affirms, and redeems—we are prepared to be sent out to enact the gospel, to tell the story, and *to be* the church in the world. Now that we have received the Bread of Life—the Body of Christ—we are sent out into the world to *be* the Body of Christ.

In his article, “The Missional Trinity,” Lutheran theologian John Hoffmeyer writes: “Our gathering as a church is a sending and our sending is a gathering....To neglect our missional sending is to betray the inherent dynamic of word and sacrament.” The end of our worship service together is the beginning of our missional service together. The same cross that we followed into the worship space (along with the Bible, torches, and banners) is returned to the entrance of the church. We follow these things out of the worship space across the threshold into God’s creation, the earthly kingdom, the mission field, the place we are called to be little Christs in the world.

## KEY WORDS

**Mass:** A name given for the service of Holy Communion, from the Latin *missa*, widely held to be closely connected to “dismissal” or “sending”

**Benediction:** A proclamation of blessing as the end of mass or a religious service

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Amos 5:24 | Ephesians 4 | Galatians 2:10 | Luke 4:16-21

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession outlines the mass: "Falsely are our churches accused of abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. We do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it... we keep the traditional liturgical form... In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other holy days, when the sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved."

As worship ends (at the conclusion of mass), we are sent out to love and serve our neighbor. In one of his most important works, “The Freedom of a Christian,” Luther writes: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all....Love by its very nature is ready to serve and be subject to him who is loved.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What are the components of this part of the service?
- + Why is this the preferred place for the weekly announcements? What are arguments for and against including the parish announcements during the Sending?
- + What are we sent to do?
- + Why might “Affirmation of Christian Vocation” (ELW, p. 84) be a good way to conclude the service?
- + Why and how do we bless at the end of the service?
- + Why do we have the Sending Song?
- + What is the purpose of the dismissal?
- + One of our dismissal phrases is “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.” Another is “Remember the poor.” Which phrase most deeply speaks to you? Why?
- + What other dismissal phrases would you write?

## WEEK 21: The Roots of Reformation Music

BY THE REV. DR. PAUL WEBER (PROFESSOR OF MUSIC, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

## TOPIC SUMMARY

Music played an important role in Martin Luther's day. Whether you were in school or at church or around the family table, singing was part of the fabric of life. As a schoolchild, Luther learned well-known sacred songs and hymns. He was taught how to *chant* the psalms for worship using old melodic tones. He was part of a student choir that sang for worship and of a band of schoolboys that sang on the town streets. In church he would hear the scripture readings and communion liturgy sung in Latin, and his school choir would perform Latin motets in harmony. In Luther's day, the music of the church shaped the faith of the school child and of his parents. It also reflected the harmony of the universe and the perfect nature of God. When Luther went on to university he immersed himself in the science and history of music. When he became a monk, he absorbed what St. Augustine wrote about music's power to stir hearts to love God. But Luther did not only study the science and history of music; he performed it. He sang in a lovely tenor voice. He composed a psalm refrain in four parts. He arranged Latin *motets* so that he could play them on the *lute*. Around the dinner table in his home, Luther invited students and colleagues to sing and to play church music written by famous composers of the day, the greatest of them being Josquin de Prez (1450-1521), whom Luther called "the master of the notes."

The music of the Reformation was inspired by several kinds of music: 1) the chanting of psalms and lessons in worship; 2) choral and organ performance of regular parts of the *mass* called the *Ordinary*, as well as short choral pieces by trained composers; 3) sacred songs that people sang on festivals of the *church year* or for special religious occasions; 4) new tunes and texts of professional poet-composers. Only in one instance does a hymn by Martin Luther carry a secular tune.

Based on his experience and understanding of music, Luther gave music a central role in his worship reforms. He felt that next to God's Word, music deserved the highest praise because it proclaimed the gospel, it modeled the unity and holiness of God, and it stirred faith in the believer. In 1523 Luther outlined in great detail a communion service in Latin that combined the artistic music of choir and clergy with songs of the people in their native tongue. Luther's use of music was groundbreaking in that he encouraged people to sing throughout the service—between the lessons, at the time of the creed, during the communion liturgy, and even while communion was being distributed. For this to happen, Luther needed a new repertoire of hymns in German. He would draw on the help of poets and musicians of the day and on his own expertise in music and theology to craft these new songs. In this challenge Luther inspired his followers to become a singing church.

## KEY WORDS

**Chant:** a simple, speech-like singing of psalms, readings, and the liturgy. Early Christians adopted this Jewish practice because the scriptures were considered too holy to be spoken.

**Motet:** three or four-part vocal pieces carrying liturgical or devotional texts that were sung or played by instruments.

**Lute:** in the medieval period, a plucked instrument of seven or nine strings, held like a guitar; often used to accompany vocal pieces; the instrument's maker is a "luthier."

**Mass:** literally, the "gathering" of God's people; also referring to the liturgy, or worship order; the mass was sung in Latin, though Luther advocated for the use of many languages.

**Ordinary:** regular texts of the liturgy sung at each mass; the Gloria (Glory to God in the highest) is one such text; often performed by a trained choir or singer.

**Church Year:** the seasons of Christian worship as they progress from Advent to Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Luke 2:14 | Isaiah 6:3 | John 1:29

Did you realize that when we sing the Ordinary, we are singing the Bible? What liturgical songs did these passages inspire?

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

One of Luther's most famous quotes on music is found in a preface he wrote for a collection of 52 motets, one for each week of the church year, designed to give young people a more godly character and to promote artistic expression. Luther wrote: "I would certainly like to praise music with all my heart as the excellent gift of God which it is and to commend it to everyone...Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise...For whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate...what more effective means than music could you find?" What does this mean to you?

"I also wish we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. . . . But poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them [Col. 3:16], worthy to be used in the church of God."

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How does your congregation cultivate the role of music in worship?
- + How is music in worship like a sermon?
- + What does it mean when we say, music is "the living voice of the gospel?"
- + How can the church support the training of young musicians?
- + How do you support your church musicians and musical leaders?
- + Is the chanting of psalms an outdated practice? How does it connect us to our roots?
- + Are we a "singing church?" Do our men sing in worship? Has our culture encouraged or discouraged our singing?
- + How has the music of the church shaped your faith? Give an example.
- + Have you ever felt the power of the Holy Spirit when we have sung together?
- + Do we still sing biblical songs of the ordinary: Lord, have mercy...Glory to God...Holy, holy, holy Lord...Lamb of God?
- + A saying attributed to St. Augustine is: "He who sings, prays twice." What does that mean?

## WEEK 22: Luther, the Musical Poet of Spiritual Songs

BY THE REV. DR. PAUL WEBER (PROFESSOR OF MUSIC, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

## TOPIC SUMMARY

A little competition is a good thing! In Martin Luther's day there were musical craftsmen who tried to outdo each other when writing poetic texts and melodies. They were called "*mastersingers*," and Luther was the best of them. He was called the "Wittenberg nightingale." What enabled Luther to compose some of the strongest and best spiritual songs of the church like *A Mighty Fortress*? For one, Luther knew well the music sung in worship and the artistic songs of his day. He also possessed a superior facility at language and translation. And, of course, he had a deep knowledge of the Bible. Hymns of the Reformation, which are now referred to as "*chorales*," were originally called "spiritual songs." Luther wrote twenty-three of his thirty-seven songs during the years 1523-1524 when he was reforming the Latin mass. He wrote new texts and tunes. He adapted existing texts and chant melodies. He translated early Latin hymns of St. Ambrose. Sometimes he asked his musical collaborator and the Lutheran church's first music director, Johann Walter, to compose a new tune to one of his texts. Luther's chief purpose in creating hymns was to enable people to sing the liturgy in their own language and to nurture their faith. To this end, Luther wrote hymns to take the place of the service Ordinary, for example the Creed and the Sanctus. His hymns were written for specific moments in the liturgy and the church year. He also wrote several hymns for funerals, one for a wedding, and a hymn for each part of the Small Catechism (Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Communion).

Besides being a creator of spiritual songs, Luther was also a master educator. His hymns were often placed on "*broadsheets*" and taken into the marketplace to be shared with the public. For an hour every day after lunch schoolchildren would sing these songs to help them digest their food; they would then go home and teach these new songs to their parents. At worship on Sunday, students would be primed to help lead the congregational singing. These were not what we think of today as "children's songs." Luther's hymns were strong biblical and theological expressions of the church's faith and praise. His lyrics were simple and direct so that the common person could understand them. His melodies were strong and original, inspired by the chant he knew so well and the artistic songs of his day.

In 1523 Luther wrote his first hymn, a paraphrase of Psalm 130, "Out of the Depths I Cry to You" (ELW 600, LBW 295). You can hear the psalmist's cry for God's help and also his resolve to live in hope and praise of God. Luther's plaintive melody is so poignant. This hymn is appropriate for Ash Wednesday and other times of lament and confession. It became one of Luther's favorites and was used at funerals, including his own. For his second hymn, "Dear Christians One and All Rejoice" (ELW 594, LBW 299), Luther wrote a free poetic Christ-hymn on the story of salvation. It is a fresh, new ballad of the believer's justification through faith. Luther's sole use of a secular tune for this text expresses the unbounded joy of all who know that Christ has defeated sin, death, and evil to bring us to eternal life. Taken together, these two songs provide a summary of law and gospel: we sinners are redeemed by Christ's saving death. They were included in the first Lutheran hymnal in 1524.

## KEY WORDS

**Mastersingers (Ger., *Meistersinger*):** professional composers of text and tune in Luther's day.

**Chorales:** Reformation hymns originally called "spiritual songs" (Ger., *geistliche Lieder*).

**Broadsheets:** one-page printed copies of Reformation songs that could be disseminated to the public.

**Eight Song Book (Ger., *Achtliederbuch*):** the first Lutheran hymnal containing eight hymns published in Wittenberg in 1524.

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther's hymns still speak to our deep need for help and comfort. As a group read aloud Psalm 130 and then Luther's paraphrase of this psalm at ELW 600 or LBW 295. Is Luther faithful to the biblical text? What gives us hope? In a later version of this hymn, Luther added a fifth stanza referring to Christ as the Good Shepherd. Without using any accompaniment, have a soloist sing verses 1 and 3, and the class verses 2 and 4 in alternation. Does the music reflect the text?

Turn to Psalm 46 and have a person read it aloud with the group joining on the refrain at verses 7 and 11. Now look at ELW 503 or LBW 228, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." Note how Luther inserts Christ, our champion, into the psalm text at verse 2. By doing this, Luther transforms an Old Testament psalm into a New Testament "Christ-hymn." Jesus is our refuge and strength, the one who brings us to the eternal city of God. Luther's tune is vigorous and rhythmic. Stand together and sing it with gusto without accompaniment. Does the melody portray the strength of the text in a new way not experienced before?

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Turn to page 1191 at the back of ELW or page 942 in LBW and discover how many of Luther's 37 hymns are in your hymnal.
- + Can you find Luther's famous Christmas song of 14 stanzas (LBW has 15 stanzas)? This hymn was written for Luther's children. It is a Christmas pageant that you can read dramatically: verses 1-5, an angel; verse 6, all; verses 7-13 (LBW 7-14) by individuals; and verse 14 (LBW 15) by all. Luther took the text of a children's song as a model and created this family devotion with his own original melody.
- + Find Luther's Easter hymn text at ELW 370 (LBW 134) and read the dramatic struggle between life and death. Luther's musical partner, Johann Walter, is credited with the hymn tune. It is based on an old German song from 1100 (ELW 372 or LBW 136), which, in turn, was inspired by the chant of ELW 317 (LBW 137). The tunes for Luther's hymns were inspired by chant, by older hymns, and by art songs. Luther wrote no purely Lenten hymns but instead wrote hymns for Easter and communion that mention Christ's death.
- + These are old texts and tunes that may be new to you. How do you feel about learning new hymns that are very old? What about new songs inspired by the Spirit?
- + Do Lutherans sing Luther's hymns? Should they? How about learning Luther's famous communion hymn (ELW 499; LBW 215)? Read the text together first. Notice how Luther draws together Christmas and Good Friday in verse 2! Verse 3 is a strong expression of how God's grace is lived out in Christian community.

## WEEK 23: The Context and Performance of Reformation Hymns

BY THE REV. DR. PAUL WEBER (PROFESSOR OF MUSIC, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Luther was a masterful hymn writer. He poured the story of God’s grace into hymn texts and tunes that have stood the test of time. Reformation songs were practiced at school and home and found their intended place within the Sunday service. Their use was strongly *liturgical*. They reflected the season of the church year, or they functioned within the service for a specific purpose (i.e., a German hymn could replace the chanting of “Kyrie eleison” or a choral performance of the same).

If we were to go back to Luther’s time, we might be surprised at how musically rich worship really was. Within a service of Word and Sacrament, hymns were sung with variety and color. An organist might introduce the hymn tune by improvising on it. The congregation would sing in unison without any accompaniment. Alternating verses could be sung by the choir in elaborate settings, sometimes doubled by instruments. This “*alternation practice*” between congregation and choir with instruments made for a colorful treatment of the text and gave everyone a voice. Luther’s creedal hymn, “We All Believe in One True God” (ELW 411, LBW 374), might be performed in this manner:

- + Introduction: Organ improvisation on the melody
- + Stanza 1: The congregation sings the melody without accompaniment
- + Stanza 2: The choir sings a complex four or five-part setting with *trombones*
- + Stanza 3: The congregation and choir sing the melody without accompaniment

The performance of early Reformation hymns combined the refined performance of choir and instruments with the people’s voice. Such treatment of new German hymns was set side by side in worship with the chanting of lessons and communion liturgy in Latin. Luther welcomed this diversity of music to proclaim the gospel and to sing God’s praise. Voice and instrument, congregation and choir, clergy and lay, youth and adults—all were invited to lend their God-given musical gifts in the worship of God’s immeasurable grace. No other reformer had such a lasting impact on the church’s music.

We often assume that the Reformation church was a singing church, but the reality is that Luther’s hope was not fulfilled without great effort. Students had to learn these new songs and teach them to their parents. Composers had to write new hymn settings for choirs and instruments to perform. Organists had to practice *improvisations* on the new tunes because, at the time, no written organ music existed. Practice and education were essential to learn new hymns, and the results at times were mixed. But our forebears persisted in singing the faith. Can we do any less? When we sing a new hymn or learn an old hymn of Luther, we grow in our faith and proclaim the love of Christ together. There is nothing else so invigorating and so deeply inspiring!

## KEY WORDS

**Liturgical music:** Worship texts sung by a choir, congregation, or pastor/leader.

**Alternation practice:** The method of singing hymns with diverse forces, with the result that not everyone sings every stanza, but all have a part to play

**Improvisation:** Creation of a piece that is inspired by a musical idea or melody. In Luther's time organists spontaneously created introductions to new Reformation songs.

**Sackbut:** A Renaissance trombone whose sound was closest to the human voice; trombone choirs still play from German church towers and are a favorite among Moravians.

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther wrote that sacred vocal music “teaches us to understand better God’s Word, and prepares us for the reception of divine grace, while making us better persons and happy Christians and driving out the devil and all vices.” Do you agree?

How about these words of Luther: “Sing with the congregation and you will sing well. Even if your singing is not melodious, it will be swallowed up by the crowd.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What does Reformation music sound like? Today’s musicians have recreated the sounds of Reformation music. Go to Apple iTunes and find the album, “Musik der Reformation” or “Music of the Reformation.” Luther’s portrait is on the album cover with the title of his famous hymn, “Ein feste Burg is unser Gott.” Download track 8 of CD1. You will hear an example of alternation practice: the choir sings verses 1 and 4, and a tenor soloist sings verses 2 and 3. Every verse is supported by trombones. The musical setting is by Johann Walter, Martin Luther’s musical colleague in Wittenberg. Notice that the melody is sung by the highest male voice, the tenor, and not by sopranos. It was the custom for schoolboys to take the soprano part. You may want to download and listen to other tracks of this album. Track 1 is a choral setting of Luther’s Pentecost hymn text, “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord” (ELW 395, LBW 163). Read the English words silently as the choir sings the verses. String and reed instruments may be heard on Track 2 of CD2, “Nun komm der Heiden Heiland.” This is Luther’s German translation of St. Ambrose’s Latin hymn for Advent, “Savior of the Nations, Come” (ELW 263, LBW 28).
- + Experience Reformation performance practice: Turn to ELW 517 (LBW 230), “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word.” Luther’s hymn, written at a very dangerous time in history, was considered a children’s song! Stand to sing this hymn in unison without any accompanying instrument! The women sing stanza 1; children or a solo voice stanza 2; and all join on stanza 3.
- + When might we practice new hymns to be used in worship?
- + What is the effect of singing without accompaniment? Alternating stanzas?
- + Are instrumentalists in our church or community invited to play the hymns?
- + How and why are hymns selected for worship, and by whom?
- + Are we teaching youth the classic hymns of faith? If not, why not?
- + How do we reinvigorate a children’s choir for the learning of hymns?
- + Do we encourage young people to play the organ?
- + Do we provide our organist and music director new opportunities to learn their craft?



## WEEK 24: Through the Church the Song Goes On

BY THE REV. DR. PAUL WEBER (PROFESSOR OF MUSIC, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Martin Luther trumpeted the freedom of the gospel. Jesus' death on the cross frees us from sin, death, and the power of evil, and gives us the opportunity to serve God and our neighbor. Luther applied this freedom to worship reforms and avoided establishing a new set of laws. He encouraged others to make worship changes that reflected their local customs. He moved slowly in his own worship reforms, "partly because of the weak in faith..." He would not have imagined radical innovations to the liturgy, but he strongly advocated for a sense of freedom in the gospel to make changes over time.

This freedom applied to music as well. Luther, after all, had freely adapted scripture in his new Christ hymns. God's grace freed the church to incorporate these new tunes and texts along with a diversity of musical expression into worship, but only if such music were consonant with the gospel and appropriate to the liturgy and the church year. Whereas other reformers denied a place for music in worship, or relegated the church to sing only biblical psalms without accompaniment, Luther openly and warmly embraced a rich musical expression that encompassed the congregation, choirs, instruments, and organ, so that the power of the gospel could be heard and received.

Within one hundred years of the Reformation, large three-manual organs had been built in northern Germany. Town and school choirs sang Latin music in the liturgy and led the congregation in singing German hymns in ever more expansive settings. The composer, Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), learned Luther's hymns from his father, a Lutheran pastor who had studied theology at the University of Wittenberg. Praetorius composed both small-scale and monumental settings of Luther's hymns for voices and instruments. The list of Lutheran composers who have set Reformation hymns encompasses musical giants and lesser-known liturgical craftsmen: Johann Crüger, Heinrich Schütz, Dietrich Buxtehude, Johann Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelssohn, Johannes Brahms, Hugo Distler, Jan Bender, Richard Wienhorst, Carl Schalk, David Cherwien, and countless others.

Luther's attitude toward music for the liturgy was realized so majestically by the greatest Lutheran composer and organist of all, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). In Bach's time, the Lutheran liturgy included chant, congregational hymns sung without accompaniment, motets of older Lutheran and Catholic composers, and Bach's own large-scale choral and instrumental works based on the gospel of the day. Bach's music was composed to the glory of God and deeply reflected Luther's theology of the cross. It was the "living voice of the gospel."

Because of Martin Luther's warm embrace of music, we should also strive for a strong music ministry in our churches. If we are to be faithful to our heritage, we must:

- 1) thank and support our church musicians;
- 2) boldly sing old and new hymns in ever creative ways;
- 3) welcome the best of the church's music—past and present—into our worship;
- 4) retain a spirit of freedom in worship that comes through the cross of Christ.

What a great honor it is to pass Martin Luther's love of music to the next generation of saints!

## KEY WORDS

**Michael Praetorius:** Lutheran court composer in Dresden, Germany, who arranged the famous Christmas carol, “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” (ELW 272, LBW 58)

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

What does Colossians 3:15-17 say about the importance of music in the community of God’s people? In your church?

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther wrote: “The Holy Spirit itself honors music as an instrument for its proper work...The gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to us to let us know that we should praise God with both words and music...When learning is added to all this and artistic music which corrects, develops, and refines the natural music, then at last it is possible to taste with wonder God’s absolute and perfect wisdom in his wondrous work of music.” Discuss.

Luther said this about worship reforms: “Nor did I make any innovations. For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one,...”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Take a moment to explore the music of Bach. Much of Johann Sebastian Bach’s music was intended for Lutheran worship in his day, when services lasted three to four hours, and included an hour-long sermon and a twenty minute cantata! Play the opening movement of Bach’s Cantata 80, based on Luther’s hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. You may find it on iTunes under “BWV 80.” Listen to Philippe Herreweghe’s recording of this cantata on the album, “Magnificat.” What do you think of this music? Have you heard anything like it? Can you hear the melody of the hymn? After listening to the first movement, play the third movement? Can you hear the melody now? Finally, play the last movement, the chorale. This cantata is an example of how Luther’s simple hymns for the people inspired elaborate creations by composers. If time allows listen to the fourth movement of Felix Mendelssohn’s Symphony No. 5, also inspired by Luther’s *A Mighty Fortress*. Does this music feed your soul?
- + What does it mean to say that music is “the living voice of the gospel?”
- + Is your music each Sunday based on the Gospel reading as Bach’s music was?
- + Why is music a “ministry” and not a “job?”
- + How does your church honor those engaged in music ministry?
- + Because Christ’s death has made you free, how are you free to make your music ministry stronger?
- + Congregational singing improves when a) the amount of carpet in church is reduced; b) people sit closer together; c) there is strong musical leadership. Discuss how this applies to your church.
- + As you conclude, stand and sing Luther’s catechism hymn on the Lord’s Prayer, ELW 746 (LBW 442), “Our Father, God in Heaven Above.” Only use accompaniment if necessary.

## WEEK 25: The Priesthood of All Believers—A Theology of Vocation

BY THE REV. DR. ERIC CHILDERS (PASTOR, ST. JOHN'S, CHERRYVILLE, NC)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Vocation is service to God and neighbor, a life of faith active in love. From the Latin *vocare* (or *vocat*), which means “to call,” the Christian understanding of vocation is created in baptism. The Holy Scriptures are filled with call narratives—stories that demonstrate God calling both intimately and epically unlikely people to use as important instruments. From Noah to Jonah to Moses to Mary to Abraham to Sarah to Martha to Paul, God called people for important work. God calls us too. In Holy Baptism, we are renewed and named as children of God, and we are called to love and serve our neighbor.

In early sixteenth century Roman Catholicism, before Luther described his understanding, vocation was limited to religious orders. Vocation was for clergy, nuns, and the work of the church. The modern twentieth century version of vocation developed to include the secular sphere. Today, vocation is too often confused with vocational training (preparation for a specific trade), a secular understanding which is detached from its religious origins. This lesson primarily focuses on Luther’s doctrine of vocation and how we affirm it in the Lutheran Church today.

Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren wrote about vocation: “God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.” Luther’s doctrine (or theology) of vocation is about our life together in this earthly kingdom, about serving neighbor, and about God acting in the mundanity of human work and relationships. Since we are freed in Christ and claimed in baptism, salvation is our starting point—not the destination—which frees us to live and serve neighbor in thanksgiving and love. In his “Lecture on Galatians,” Luther said that we relate to God through faith to each other through love.

Vocation is not simply our careers, the work for which we are paid—our livelihoods. Rather, vocation also includes our relationships. What does this mean? We live out our vocations—our baptismal identities—by being husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, students and citizens. Luther argued that, through vocation, God abides in our human work and relationships as we love and serve neighbor. Just as God is truly present in the waters of baptism and in the bread and wine of communion, God is also present in our vocations.

Vocation is centrally about serving others. Very rarely do I preach a funeral or wedding homily without discussing vocation. Even on Sunday mornings, the doctrine of vocation appears nearly as much as talk of baptism, the supper, and the gospel itself. After all, isn’t vocation that important? Aren’t we called in baptism to cheerfully and gratefully serve neighbor in lovingkindness? For all the while, God is hiding and abiding in our human work and relationships.

## KEY WORDS

**Vocation:** service to God and one's neighbor, called in one's baptismal identity

**Vocational training:** Preparation for a specific trade; secular understanding which emerged in the twentieth century

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | Ephesians 4:11-13 | Luke 10:38-42

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In his "Sermon in the Castle Church at Weimar" on October 25, 1522, Luther preached: "The prince should think: Christ has served me and made everything to follow him; therefore, I should also serve my neighbor, protect him and everything that belongs to him. That is why God has given me this office, and I have it that I might serve him. That would be a good prince and ruler. When a prince sees his neighbor oppressed, he should think: That concerns me! I must protect and shield my neighbor. The same is true for shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor. When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present; that is not Christian living."

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What are your vocations?
- + How is vocation born in baptism?
- + How might we better listen for God's call in our lives?
- + Whom does your work benefit?
- + Are some jobs more important than others? What about vocations?
- + How might a clearer understanding of vocation affect your relationship with God? With your neighbor?
- + Who is your neighbor?
- + The theology of vocation also includes our relationships. What is your most significant vocation?
- + How does God call you?
- + How could a clear understanding of vocation reveal a clearer purpose for your life?

## WEEK 26: What Does This Mean?—A Theology of Teaching

BY THE REV. DR. CLAY SCHMIT (PROVOST, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY/LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SOUTHERN SEMINARY)

## TOPIC SUMMARY

“What does this mean” is a very familiar phrase to Lutherans. In 1529 Martin Luther published *The Small Catechism*, a little book designed to teach children about the Christian faith. Luther explains the meaning of some of the Christian faith’s most important statements by repeatedly asking, “What does this mean?” For example, he writes, “Our Father who art in heaven. What does this mean?” Each time he asks the question, Luther provides a brief explanation to answer it. For hundreds of years, Lutherans have used the catechism as the primary resource for confirmation classes. Until recently, confirmation students would be expected to memorize the entire book. So, when Lutherans hear the words “what does this mean?” they understand them to refer to Luther’s strong desire that children be taught the Christian faith.

Luther’s interest in teaching the faith comes from the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, we are told of the need for parents to teach their children. In Deuteronomy 6:6, for example, it is written: “And these words which I command you shall be in your heart. You shall teach them to your children . . .” The books of Proverbs and Psalms are especially rich with reminders that parents should teach their children the ways and knowledge of the Lord. There are also passages in the New Testament that speak of the importance of educating young people in the faith.

Martin Luther’s interest in education went beyond teaching the elements of the Christian faith. He argued that the local government was to be responsible for the establishment of schools for children in each community, both for boys and girls. He was the product of a public school himself, and he knew that it was important for society that people be able to read and be trained for adult careers. For some, this meant learning crafts; for others it meant learning Latin, Greek, and Hebrew in order to become priests or scholars. We know that Luther valued reading so highly that he set himself the task of translating the entire Bible from scholarly Latin into the German language so that ordinary people could read it.

This basis in educational thinking from the Bible and from Luther has given the Lutheran Church today a strong tradition of forming schools. Many Lutheran congregations have pre-schools; others have grade schools and middle or junior high schools. There are a number of Lutheran high schools across the country. And, there are many Lutheran colleges and universities, such as Lenoir-Rhyne, Newberry, and Roanoke dotted across the country. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America currently has 26 affiliated colleges or universities. Many of these schools were started in order to provide training for pastors and for teachers. There are also eight seminaries associated with the ELCA, and many more universities and seminaries relating to other Lutheran denominations throughout the country. It is clear that Lutherans love education and have a strong theological foundation for teaching.

One interesting historical note is that in the South, Lutherans were among the first to provide schools for African American children. Because of this, many African American families joined the Lutheran Church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Deuteronomy 6:6 | Proverbs 22:6 | Psalm 32:8

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In the Preface to *The Small Catechism* Luther says: “The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! Many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach [so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it]. Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians, have been baptized and receive the [common] holy Sacraments. Yet they [*do not* understand and] cannot [*even*] recite either the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs... therefore I entreat [and adjure] you all for God's sake, my dear sirs and brethren, who are pastors or preachers, to devote yourselves heartily to your office, to have pity on the people who are entrusted to you, and to help us inculcate the Catechism upon the people, and especially upon the young.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How many of you studied *The Small Catechism* in confirmation classes? Were you required to memorize it? Have we lost anything by losing this tradition of memorization?
- + How many Lutheran schools can you name? Have you ever visited any of our Lutheran colleges or universities? Have you attended or graduated from one of them?
- + How important is Christian education in your congregation? Do you have a pre-school or grade school? Is there, or should there be Sunday School for all ages, including adults?
- + What kinds of education would you like to see happening in your congregation? In the synod?
- + Why is it important that Lutherans emphasize education? What would our church lose if faith-based schools were to go away? And, what would our culture lose? How might faith-based education bring about renewal in our culture?

## WEEK 27: There and Here—A Theology of Two Kingdoms

BY DR. SARAH LISCHER (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Some of the most admired people in the world are lawbreakers. In fact, many of these people have received the Nobel Peace Prize, recognizing them as moral and spiritual leaders. Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr. all had arrest records. Their oppressive governments labeled them dangerous criminals, subversives, or terrorists.

Despite many obvious abuses of political power, Martin Luther's teaching about the Two Kingdoms tells us that God has instituted worldly authority for our benefit, and as an extension of God's will. This implies that the most Christian course of action is to follow the law and obey political authorities. So where does that leave us when the Syrian government bombs its own citizens, European states roll out barbed wire to block refugees, and American politicians knowingly expose impoverished children to lead poisoning in Flint, Michigan? When I read the newspaper, I sometimes wonder if Luther weren't a bit too optimistic about the beneficial role of political authority.

The Christian attempting to navigate the current political scene while remaining faithful to the Kingdom of God faces numerous confusions. We frequently observe people claiming religious freedom or obedience to a higher authority as a vindication for breaking the law. For example, a Christian magistrate defies the US Supreme Court and the Constitution by refusing to issue marriage licenses to homosexual couples. At the same time, a Christian activist cites the law of God when engaging in civil disobedience to protest discrimination based on gender or sexual preference. Reliance on Luther does not resolve these dilemmas. Although Luther taught that God himself appoints all authority, he repeatedly clashed with both political and religious authorities in his day.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Romans 13:1 | 1 Peter 2:13-15 | Luke 20:25

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In the Kingdom of God, Christ is ruler and the citizens—the true believers—are governed by the Spirit. Not all humans are citizens of God’s Kingdom, however, and evil continues to exist. Luther taught that God created earthly authority, such as national governments, for the purpose of countering the devil. Humans are meant to wield that God-given political authority to ensure justice and peace (or, to paraphrase Obi-Wan Kenobi, “to use their powers for good, not evil”).

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + As Lutherans, how do we evaluate the competing claims of Christian lawbreakers, all of whom cite the law of God as justification for their actions? How might Luther understand these clashing views?
- + In a secular democracy like the United States, how relevant is Luther’s understanding of the relationship between the church and the state?
- + Should we separate our political participation from religious and moral contexts? Is this even possible?
- + When might it be legitimate to defy political authority?
- + Do you agree with Luther that political authority is bestowed by God?
- + Does the type of government make a difference in how you interpret these issues (for example, democracy or dictatorship or socialist republic)?



## WEEK 28: Social Justice and the Church

BY THE REV. DR. TIM SMITH (BISHOP OF THE NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Social Justice means “all people share a common humanity and therefore have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources,” (Toowoomba Catholic Education, 2006). Social Justice urges responsibility not just for the self but for the community and world. It challenges systems designed to uphold the status quo, especially when business as usual perpetuates injustice by denying certain groups of people access to basic human rights.

From the very beginning of scripture, the community is emphasized over the individual. Unlike all of creation before him, Adam was incomplete. “It is not good that the man should be alone.” (Genesis 2:18) We are made from the very beginning to be in relationship with God and with others. We are made in, through, and for relationships of love with God and with each other.

The popular Greek symbol of the “scales of justice” grace the back of our \$1 bills. Such a view of “justice” suggests that “you get what you deserve.” Even so, the core value and command to show hospitality to strangers (Gen. 18 & 19, Abraham and Lot) raises up how necessary it is that we care not only for our own but for the deep needs of our neighbor. The Levitical mandate to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor as our self is the root of a biblical view of justice.

The Hebrew prophets lift up a clear understanding of justice (Hebrew: *mishpat*) not as “everyone gets what they deserve;” rather, “everyone has what s/he needs.” Hosea, Amos, and Micah are scathing indictments of a culture and religion in which the rich and privileged have created and enforced systems that preserve their wealth, power, and advantage at the expense of the poor. Micah 6:8 sums it up. “He has told you, O mortal, what is right, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?”

Jesus, especially in Luke’s Gospel, clearly continues this prophetic perspective. Mary’s Magnificat, the “topic sentence” for Luke, celebrates turning social structures upside down (right side up?) “He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly... He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly, he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty.” (Luke 1: 46-55) In the book of Acts, authored by Luke, “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2: 44-45)

The Christian community, ever since the time of Jesus and the days of the early Church, has seen not its justification or salvation (all God’s gracious gift) but its sanctification (holy living response to God’s grace) and discipleship as grounded in the basic human needs and rights of all people.

## KEY WORDS

**Protestant work ethic:** an emphasis on hard work which grows out of our nation's Puritan background. The Puritans taught that it was one's Christian duty to work hard in order to be successful. The resulting worldly success was interpreted as a sign of God's favor and thus of one's salvation. In other words, the Protestant work ethic is not a form of works righteousness - the work does not justify - but it does offer an assurance of justification.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Micah 6:8 | Luke 1: 46-55 | Acts 2: 44-45

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Martin Luther from his 1521 exile in the Wartburg Castle wrote a sermon based on the Lukan narrative of Christ's birth for Christmas day that was read far and wide. To this day it is one of his most famous. To those expecting a nice warm and fuzzy sermon for Christmas, Luther railed, "Oh, you're thinking, those wicked people of Bethlehem, to turn away the mother of our Lord. Had *we* been there, *we* would have taken them in, we would have helped Mary, *we* would have changed Jesus' little diaper and kept him warm. But you say this only because we now know who he was! Had you been there you would have treated him no differently, or if you think you would have, then why do you neglect your neighbor in need, who is Christ in your midst?"

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How do the "Protestant work ethic" and the American emphasis on rugged individualism and "pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps" compare and contrast to the biblical understanding of and mandate to pursue Social Justice?
- + If the prophets emphasize justice as "everybody gets what he or she needs," then what is it that we need? What role, if any, does the Church play in providing for those needs? The government?
- + What is your reaction to the ideal Christian community, as described in Acts 2:44-45 cited above? Why, do you suppose, Christian communities apparently abandoned that practice relatively quickly?
- + How might you be an advocate for Social Justice? How might your congregation?

## WEEK 29: The Church in Society—A Lutheran Perspective (ELCA Social Statements)

BY DR. MINDY MAKANT (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Today's session begins a four week study of ELCA Social Statements. The ELCA's first social statement, "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective," calls for the church to draft social statements that "will guide the life of this church as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty."

What is a social statement? A social statement is first and foremost a theological document which is developed and written through a communal process of study and deliberation (involving a large number of people: theologians, bishops, pastors, and laity). A social statement is also a teaching document which is intended to involve the entire church in the task of theological ethics and guide the institutional life of the church. The primary responsible for the initiation of the process for the writing of a social statement lies with the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

Why do we need social statements? As the ELCA's first social statement "The Church in Society" reminds us, "the proclamation of the Gospel...distinguishes the Church from all other communities." The church lives always "in" the world, but is called to be set apart in important ways. One critical component of the church's calling in society is a commitment to justice, a commitment which is always a response to the gift of grace we receive through the church in Word and Sacrament. The church is a community transformed by the Gospel to go out into the world as ambassadors of Christ's love.

The pursuit of justice is our enacted prayer that God's "will be done on earth as in heaven." As a church we are called to live in the promised "now" of the reign of Christ – to live "as" those who know the truth of Christ's reign – even while we recognize – acutely, in repentance and sorrow – the "not yet" reality of a fallen world in which justice is often left undone. The primary teaching of "The Church in Society" is that we, as church, are called to resist injustice in all of its many forms, and that "the God who justifies expects all people to do justice." While we are to honor the governing authorities of this world – and support all institutions and policies which work for the common good – the church also has a prophetic obligation to name the false cultural ideals that hinder us from our calling to serve God and neighbor. This means speaking up on behalf of those who are marginalized or voiceless.

The church's social statements reflect the ELCA's belief that the church is called to be a community of moral deliberation which seeks "to strive for peace and justice throughout the world." (See the Affirmation of Baptism, ELW p236). Moral deliberation, no matter how faithfully it is carried out, does *not* guarantee agreement. But the act of deliberation, the critical and faithful engagement in conversation with one another over key social issues of justice is a necessary part of living together as church together in society.

## KEY WORDS

**Office of the Presiding Bishop:** The ELCA is one church body organized in three expressions – the local congregation, the synod, and the churchwide organization. Local congregations are (usually) led by called and ordained pastors. Synods are led by bishops and the churchwide ELCA is led by the Presiding Bishop. Presiding Bishops are elected during Churchwide Assembly to six-year terms. Bishop Elizabeth Eaton is our current presiding bishop.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Micah 6:8 | Matthew 6:10 | Romans 12:2

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Art. IV, Luther argues that the church is gathered by the Holy Spirit to be a liberating presence in the world. This includes praising and supporting those in authority when they promote peace and justice and calling them to account when they fail to do so. Luther understands faith active through love - the love of the neighbor - to be the heart of Christian discipleship and thus the key to understanding Lutheran ethics.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How is the church different from other social communities?
- + What does it mean to say that the church is “set apart” from the world?
- + How do Word and Sacrament transform us?
- + What does it mean to enact prayer?
- + How is God’s reign both “now” and “not yet”? What does this mean?
- + What is justice?
- + What are the critical questions of justice in your community?
- + Who are the marginalized and voiceless in your community?
- + What might it look like to “do justice” in your setting?
- + If moral deliberation does *not* mean unanimous agreement, how do we handle disagreements as a community?
- + Which is more important, our differences of opinion or our unity in Christ? Why?

**WEEK 30: Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility (ELCA Social Statements)**  
BY DR. MINDY MAKANT (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

**TOPIC SUMMARY**

The primary claim of the ELCA's social statement, "Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility" is that we are, in all things, to "promote the community of life." In a world in which the knowledge and technologies of genetic science has grown and continues to grow at mind-numbing speeds, the social statement reminds us that this growth comes with a tremendous amount of power. It also reminds us that these "new powers mean human beings increasingly bear the moral burden" for the ways in which our genetic knowledge is used. Knowledge, and especially the application of that knowledge, is *not* morally neutral. "As a community of moral deliberation, this church is called to discern an ethical framework to engender moral formation, responsible deliberation and action in response to the challenges of unprecedented power." (14)

Because the field of genetic knowledge and the power to significantly alter life is constantly changing, the social statement calls on us to focus on the discernment process. The details may change, but if we are formed in ways of meaningful dialogue about critical issues, we can be a people whose common life is informed in and through faithful discernment.

The social statement calls us to remember that we always – even, and perhaps especially, in our scientific knowledge and technological abilities - embody ambiguity. "Good and bad, right and wrong, sin and redemption are always mixed together." Genetics can "enable human beings to find new ways to promote the community of life." And yet at the same time, "it also carries the potential for personal and social evil." Thus, just because we *can* do something does not mean that we *should*. We are called to discern responsible stewardship.

Right discernment avoids the sin of pride (the belief that with enough knowledge and power we can save ourselves) on the one hand and the sin of resignation (the assumption that we are powerless bystanders) on the other. We are, indeed, called to be co-creators with God—to use our gifts—including our intellect and our technologies – in responsible ways to help promote the common good, but we are also reminded that "God's redemption will not come through genetics." (20)

The social statement also reminds us that there are NO isolated choices and many choices may have intended – and even unimagined – consequences. The social statement encourages us, as Christians, to embrace the use of the human imagination, including genetic science, to "relieve human suffering and improve the human condition." (20) But we are called to do so by and through faithful and just means in and through which we seek the common good. The common good cannot be defined by/as those with the greatest power and access to resources, but must promote the community of life for all. Especially the most vulnerable.

## KEY WORDS

**Common good:** The common good means that which is good for *all* members of society. The common good is understood in contrast to the utilitarian understanding that justice is on behalf of the “greater good.” The theological Christian claim is that justice cannot exclude or harm anyone, *especially* the marginalized and most vulnerable.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Genesis 1 | 1 Corinthians 12

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In his essay, “Luther on Creation,” Johannes Schwanke points to Luther’s descriptive on creation: “I believe that God has created me together with all that exists.” Schwanke suggests this quote to be a summary of Luther’s doctrine of creation, meaning “that the human being owes its individuality solely to God, and may know that this individuality is ordained and accepted by God.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + While it avoids being overly prescriptive, the social statement rules out, in principle, human cloning. What other applications of genetics knowledge do you think should be ruled out in principle?
- + The social statement understands (a) that knowledge is a form of power and (b) that power comes with responsibility. How much responsibility do you think an individual Christian can take for the application of genetics research?
- + Do you agree that a litmus test for the application of genetics knowledge is how it impacts the most vulnerable? How and why is vulnerability a factor?
- + What do you think about the understanding of “responsible stewardship”? What does this mean?
- + What does it mean to say that genetics research and technology “embody ambiguity”?
- + How do we rightly discern the space between pride and resignation?

## WEEK 31: The Church and Criminal Justice—Hearing the Cries (ELCA Social Statements)

BY DR. MINDY MAKANT (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

The social statement is primarily grounded in the Christian claim that *all* people are created in the image and likeness of God. And this includes even the most heinous offenders. The statement also reminds us that as Christians we are called in our baptism to strive for justice and peace in all the world.

The ELCA understands that the role of government is to reduce “fear by establishing security. Freed from this fear, people and communities can more easily develop and enjoy the full range of human benefits.” When the criminal justice system is broken and the government is no longer serving its God-appointed duty to a people, it is time for the church to speak up on behalf of the vulnerable.

However, we first need to confess our complicity in injustice. The US criminal justice system relies heavily on mass incarceration as a punitive (rather than rehabilitative) practice in which race and social class are often the primary determining factors in sentencing practices. Additionally, the US prison system houses increasingly large populations of mentally ill and juvenile offenders. While incarceration is often an appropriate response to crime, our current incarceration practices often contribute to the systems of sin rather than challenging them. Recognizing the brokenness of the system, and the roles we play in that system (*passivity is part of the problem!*) is a necessary first step and one of the “marks of the church.” (Luther)

The criminal justice system is not only unjust to offenders; it is often unjust to victims of crime as well. In a system in which all crime is considered a crime “against the state” and punished accordingly, the needs of victims are, at best, an ancillary concern and often are often completely ignored.

Thus the Social statement calls upon the church to respond in the following ways:

1. **Hearing the cries:** We are called to listen to the stories of victims and families of victims as well as to the stories of offenders and their families, especially their children.
2. **Hospitality:** “The injunction to hospitality is profound and must be practiced with equally profound recognition of the church’s care for the vulnerable in its community.”
3. **Accompaniment:** As the church, we are called to a ministry of “walking with.” This can take many forms – prison ministry, survivor groups, care for children,
4. **Advocacy:** As Christians we are called to be *in* the world. This means becoming informed about the realities of our criminal justice system and attending to public policy as well as voting and serving jury duty.

The primary goal of the criminal justice system is restored social order. The social statement calls on us to seek just and merciful alternatives to our current punitive and unjust incarceration practices – practices focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and restorative justice.

## KEY WORDS

**Rehabilitation:** generally refers to type of restoration. In the criminal justice system this often includes counseling as well as job training so that someone is less likely to commit another crime

**Restorative Justice:** focuses on the people rather than the crime and often involves restoring of property and provision of medical and/or counseling services to victims of crime and sometimes involves reconciliation between perpetrators and victims of crime. Restorative justice does *not* rule out punitive measures, but it is not dictated by them.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Micah 6:8 | Amos 5:24

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + In what ways might a “tough on crime” stance make it more difficult to see those accused and convicted of wrong-doing as people created in the image of God?
- + How are divine justice and human justice similar? How are they different?
- + How might hearing the cries of both offenders and victims shape our justice practices?



## WEEK 32: Human Sexuality—Gift and Trust (ELCA Social Statements)

BY DR. MINDY MAKANT (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Though the vast majority of attention that the wider church has paid to this social statement has centered on same-gender relationships, the statement itself focuses on how we, as people created male and female in the image of God, are called to be in relationship with one another and to love our neighbors. Though we are not our bodies, as incarnational beings we understand our bodies—and all that comes with them, including gender and sexuality—to be a gift from a good and gracious God. Though we are unclear on exactly what this means theologically, Christians have always understood our maleness and femaleness to be connected to what it means to be created in the image of God. Bodies, gender, sexuality, and sex—then—are good. But as is true of all good gifts, they can be misused and abused. And by virtue of the fact that sexuality is integrally connected with our physical bodies and our bodies with our identities, when sexuality is misused and abused, seemingly irreparable harm can occur. For this reason, the ELCA's social statement on human sexuality is grounded in an understanding of the critical nature of relationships of trust and care in caring for our individual bodies as well as the Body of Christ.

The social statement is also predicated upon the core Lutheran understanding that our salvation is *not* dependent upon morally approved behavior. We cannot *behave* our way to heaven. Lutherans are not, however, antinomians. What we do with our bodies does matter. The social statement also recognizes that social views regarding sexuality and socially appropriate expressions of sexuality change over time. This change is *not* a problem. However, the church is called to consider how such changes may either enhance or erode trust, both between individuals and within the community as a whole. (13)

The social statement reminds us that “Lutherans believe that God works through social structures for the good of society.” (15) Marriage and the family are among the social structures that enhance trust. “Marriage...is a binding relationship that provides conditions for personal well-being, the flourishing of the partner, and the possibility of procreation and the nurturing of children...[it is]to support long-term and durable communion for the good of others.” Marriage, in other words, is not first and foremost about sex but about care and trust and nurture. As such, though we lament the need for divorce, marriage is not indissoluble and the church is called to support those for whom marriage has been a place of broken trust and sometimes even grave harm.

One of the primary responsibilities of the family (and the social statement suggests that while we often speak of “family” perhaps we would be better served – and more accurate – to speak of the “household” as Luther often did) is to provide for the safety of children. In the United States an estimated 1 out of 10 children are sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday. Protection of our children should be a priority for the church!

## KEY WORDS

**Antinomian:** Antinomians claim that because of grace, the law is nullified. If faith alone is necessary for salvation, they argue, there is no longer any need for the law. Luther, however, argued against the antinomians of his day, and Lutherans today continue to hold that there is, indeed, a place for the law. The law does not save us, but it continues to guide behavior and draw us to Christ until Christ comes again.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Matthew 22:36-40 | Genesis 2:23-25 | Galatians 6:10

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + This Social Statement is predicated upon the claim that our bodies are good and that gender and sexuality are *good gifts*. In what ways do we treat these as good? In what ways do we treat them as sinful or shameful?
- + The Social Statement suggests that in terms of sexuality, accountability and responsibility are key. What does this mean? To whom are we accountable? How do we live into such a practice?
- + Sexuality and relational intimacy are at once blessed gift and deep vulnerability. In order to protect that vulnerability from exploitation, commitment and trust are key to a healthy and faithful sexual relationship. What happens when you become vulnerable to someone who cannot be trusted to hold your current and future wholeness and well-being as a primary concern?
- + While the Social Statement largely focuses on marriage and the role of families in care and the development of trusting relationships, it also stresses the importance of friendships. Sexuality is not just about sex or body parts but is an inherent part of who we are as created beings. How can we nurture relationships of mutual care in which trust can be developed and is honored?
- + The ELCA holds that marriage is – and is to remain – the normative relationship in which sexuality is expressed. However, it also acknowledges that obedience to the social norms that govern our understanding of right and wrong behavior does not affect our salvation. How do you understand this? If sexual behavior is not a matter for salvation, does it matter? How? Why?
- + The Social Statement acknowledges that this church is not of one mind about same-sex relationships. Among members of the ELCA regarding same-sex relationships, in what ways might the conversation look different if we focus (a) on the understanding that gender and sexuality are gifts and (b) on keeping love of neighbor as a primary concern?

## WEEK 33: A *Very* Brief History of Lutherans in America

BY DR. SUSAN MCARVER (PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND EDUCATIONAL MINISTRIES, LENOIR-RHYNE/LTSS)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

The ELCA is a relatively young church, formed only in 1988. Its roots in North America, however, extend much further back in time—to Lutherans who began arriving in the New World as early as the 1600's. In the colonial period, Danes settled in the Danish West Indies (US Virgin Islands), Swedes in the Delaware Valley, and Germans in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Carolinas. Each group brought its own languages, cultures and traditions to this new land. Even some persons of African descent, first taken to the Caribbean and later to the southern mainland, over time came to adopt Lutheranism as their own and added their own distinctive voice.

Many Lutherans in the Carolinas can trace their roots back to Germans who came here in the early 1700's. Some came down the Old Wagon Road from Pennsylvania, through the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, and settled heavily in the piedmont of North Carolina. Others came inland from the port of Charleston into the interior of South Carolina and settled in the central portion of the state. Many of these colonial-era German Lutherans arrived poor, friendless, and often quite literally with a price on their heads. Others had bound themselves into indentured servitude in order to pay their passage across the Atlantic. To this day, one can see churches still clustered in the areas where these immigrants first settled.

A century or more later, a similar explosion of Lutheran immigrants began to arrive from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Germany, and this wave tended to cluster in the Southwest and Midwest in Texas, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. Isolated by geography, language and folkways, many European Lutherans often felt like aliens in a strange land.

Whenever they came, however, each group of immigrants had to define what it meant to be both “Lutheran” and “American” in this new world. For some, familiar and comforting ties of European language and culture served as that way of definition, and in some areas, these languages held on into the 20th century. Some felt that music and liturgy were the primary ways to maintain their Lutheran identity. Others emphasized different theological emphases. Many Lutherans lived out their theology, for example, through a form of Lutheranism called Pietism, which emphasized that the gospel calls us to live out our faith in works of love toward the neighbor and in right and moral living through a “religion of the heart.” Other Lutherans stressed a form of Lutheranism called Confessionalism or Orthodoxy, which stressed the importance of affirming an intellectual belief system such as the Augsburg Confession in the “head.” Both Pietists and Orthodox could find support for their positions in the writings of Martin Luther.

It took a long time for the various “ethnic groups” within Lutheranism to coalesce. Disagreements between various understandings of identity have sometimes led to arguments and splits over the years. The merger of three large Lutheran bodies—the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC)—brought all of these different self-understandings about identity into the “new” ELCA in 1988. The question of “what does it mean to be a Lutheran in this time and place” is still asked—and still answered—by each generation anew, helping Lutheranism in North America remain vibrant and faithful.

## KEY WORDS

**Confessionalism or Orthodoxy:** an understanding of Lutheranism that emphasizes the importance of holding right beliefs to guard one against error or doubt

**Pietism:** an understanding of Lutheranism that stresses the importance of Christian living, Scripture reading, and prayer

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Exodus 23:9 | Leviticus 19:33-34 | Deuteronomy 6:6-7 | Romans 3:28

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Martin Luther never visited the United States of course, but he did know of the New World. He was nine years old when Christopher Columbus discovered America, and news of the discovery spread across Europe rapidly. Luther wrote about the importance of both “right belief” and “right living” in some of his works: “Bad doctrine is a thousand times more harmful than a bad life,” he wrote once, emphasizing the importance of paying attention to what one believes. On the other hand, he also wrote that “Experience alone makes a theologian,” pointing out that one cannot rely only on theoretical knowledge in living the Christian life.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What is your “Lutheranism of origin?” Do your Lutheran roots extend back to times of early settlement or have you more recently come to the Lutheran church?
- + If someone asked you, “What’s a Lutheran?” how would you answer? What does “being Lutheran” mean to you? How do you define it?
- + What is something about Lutheranism you particularly appreciate? What speaks to you?
- + Lutherans arrived in the New World speaking many different languages: German, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish, to name a few. They often held onto these languages for decades as cherished reminders of home and family. How can the immigrant experience of our ancestors inform our understanding of immigrants to this country today?
- + What can we learn from the past? How can we make decisions about what we should preserve from our past experience (whether that be language, culture, or a particular tradition) and what we should lovingly let go?

## WEEK 34: Lutherans and the Roman Catholic Church Today

BY THE REV. DR. C. PIERSON SHAW (NC SYNOD, LUTHERAN ECUMENICAL INTER-RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATIVE NETWORK)

## TOPIC SUMMARY

This session offers a brief glance at dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics which seek an end to historical differences. The dialogue partners have been in conversation together for more than fifty years. On January 25, 1959 Pope John XXIII called for a new Ecumenical Council, recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as the Twenty-first Ecumenical Council. While Lutherans only recognize the first Seven Councils as Ecumenical, the Second Vatican Council would be like no other Council before it. Christian traditions from around the world, including the Orthodox and many Protestant denominations were invited to send international representatives to observe the proceedings in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. Observers were granted the best view of the proceedings while those engaged in actual deliberations had to strain to see others to their left or right.

In November 1964, the Council released "The Decree on Ecumenism" entitled: "The Restoration of Unity" or *Unitatis redintegratio*. The document almost immediately led Roman Catholic Bishops and teaching theologians to begin conversations with other Christians around the world. Over the past fifty years, over fifty sessions of official dialogue between US Lutherans and Roman Catholics have led to twelve rounds of dialogues, issuing very promising statements seeking to overcome the 500 years of division.

In the US, Lutheran and Roman Catholics reached substantial agreement with *The Church and Justification* in 1983; *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries* in 2004; and *The Hope for Eternal Life* in 2010. Together these dialogues tackled half a millennium's misunderstanding, reaching new common agreement, while noting remaining differences. Dialogue partners discussed such matters as how documents in the Lutheran Confessions do not always speak the same way about God's justifying grace in Jesus Christ; the teaching role of bishops and the Pope; what happens when we die; and even whether the forgiveness of sins might compel a Christian to make restitution for the harm caused to one's neighbor. The more than fifty years of dialogue recently led to the release of *Declaration on the Way* looking at remaining differences and formally asking the Pontifical Council of Promoting Christian Unity if there is sufficient agreement to permit Eucharistic sharing.

Two documents internationally are significant: the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) and *From Conflict to Communion*. The JDDJ sought substantial agreement on the main cause of division in the 16<sup>th</sup> century between the reformers in Wittenberg, Germany and the Church of Rome. Prior to final agreement on October 31, 1999, the document hit a snag. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in Rome had serious questions as to whether JDDJ had offered substantial agreement on the teaching on Justification. The then Prefect of the CDF, Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) met with Lutherans to seek clarity. Presently, as together we prepare to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's posting of the "Ninety-five Theses," *From Conflict to Communion* invites Roman Catholics and Lutherans to reflect on our commonalities and continue to seek to overcome our differences.

## KEY WORDS

**Church catholic:** from the Greek words *kata holos* meaning “with the whole” or “according to the whole.” The term Church catholic therefore means the universal Church.

**Evangelical:** from the Greek word *euangelos*, meaning one who proclaims good news. Therefore evangelical means keeping and proclaiming the Gospel or the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.

**Ecumenical Council:** a Council of leaders and bishops from all over the world. While there have been Twenty-one Councils that are often called Ecumenical Councils, Lutherans only count the first seven since Orthodox Christians have not been full participants in Councils with the Church of the West since the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.

**Indulgence:** a papal grant for a release from a time of punishment and purgation in Purgatory. It is for sins committed after absolution. Their abuse and sale became widespread in the late Middle Ages.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Isaiah 10:11-12 | Ephesians 4:4-5 | Matthew 18:20

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther vehemently sought to call the Church to reform. He sought to engage Roman Catholic leaders including the Pope in discussion so that the Gospel might be rightly preached and the Sacraments might be rightly administered for the sake of all people for whom Christ had died. Luther however, was not seeking to start a new denomination. Rather, Luther sought to correct abuses in the Roman Catholic Church, including the sale of a special Indulgence on the Eve of All Saints Day. The Indulgence was said to grant forgiveness of all sins committed after Confession, and could even be bought for the dead that they might be released from Purgatory. The crisis led Luther on October 31, 1517 to post his famous “Ninety-five Theses,” in which he sought to debate certain matters, which he considered as abuses in the Church. Ten months after he posted his “Ninety-five Theses,” he sought to defend and clarify what he had said in the printed *Explanation*. In it he even said, “I listen to the pope as pope, that is, when he speaks in and according to the canons, or when he makes a decision in accordance with a general council.” Luther sought to inspire a movement within the Church which would remain catholic, but also evangelical.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + How does Luther’s exhortation “to make the sign of the cross in the morning when you rise and remember your Baptism daily” help us to think about God’s justifying grace as ongoing, and even a grace offered daily?
- + Given some of the strong language which we have heard which Luther used about the Pope of his day, do any of those characterizations apply to Roman Catholic Popes in the last 50 years?
- + Would it be helpful to members of your group to look at what Lutherans and Roman Catholics together say that we believe happens when we die and what we say together that we believe about salvation offered to us in Christ?
- + Beyond God’s grace which has reconciled us through faith in Jesus Christ, does God also grant us the gift of Christ himself to us that we may lead righteous and Godly lives?
- + What do we mean when we use Luther’s phrase that “we are the same time, saint and sinner?”
- + What are the commonalities which the Lutheran Tradition and the Roman Catholic Church share?
- + What are differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Tradition which you find confusing and upon which you would appreciate some clarity or at least an explanation?
- + Could you invite a Roman Catholic priest or deacon to help answer some of your questions?

## WEEK 35: The Work and Reach of the ELCA Today

BY REV. DR. LEONARD BOLICK (BISHOP EMERITUS, NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

In the ELCA Constitution, we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this church are to be carried out under His rule and authority. There are well over 20,000 different denominations around the world. Our ELCA is a member of the Lutheran World Federation which is a global communion of 145 denominations in the Lutheran tradition, representing over 72 million Christians in 98 countries. The core values of LWF are dignity and justice; compassion and commitment; respect for diversity; inclusion and participation; transparency and accountability.

The ELCA believes that we are set free by God's grace through faith and since we don't have to earn God's love, we are free to share God's love as God calls us to serve in our particular context. We serve with joy and thanksgiving. We gather for worship and carry God's work into the world. We often say "God's Work, Our Hands." The ELCA ministry is carried out in congregations, synods (how congregations work together, doing things we could not do individually), churchwide or national office located in Chicago and institutions/ agencies, such as universities/seminaries, camps, social service organizations. It is amazing what happens in and through the ELCA. We are blood brothers and sisters bound together by the blood of our Lord Jesus and we gather at the table of God to receive Him. I like the fact that this church tries to bring people in, not keep people out.

This church has a very special relationship with seven other denominations. We are in full communion with six different denominations (unique in the Christian faith). This means we speak well of each other, work together where appropriate, discuss challenging issues and exchange pastors. (That means a synod can call a Lutheran pastor to serve in another tradition.) Those six denominations are United Methodist, Episcopal, Moravian, United Church of Christ, Reformed, and Presbyterian USA. The bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the ELCA have established a covenant calling each other brothers and sisters and seeking ways to work and worship together. I believe this is the first and only formal relationship between a historic black and historic white denomination. Many synods have a formal relationship with the Roman Catholic Diocese which calls for working together, such is true in the North Carolina Synod. It is very significant that in a world of diversity, we can lift up what we have in common!

The ELCA has eight seminaries, 26 colleges/universities, over 200 campus ministry sites (13 in NC), and over 160 military chaplains. The ELCA is one of the largest denominations in the United States and the churchwide assembly gathers every three years to make decisions related to our life together. While there are well over 22,000 different denominations on the planet, the ELCA focuses on what God has done in Christ, his suffering, death and resurrection to set us free from sin, death and the devil. We are then free to reach out to the neighbor, the friend, and the world.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Galatians 5:1 | Psalm 133:1 | Galatians 3:28

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Martin Luther's view of the Church is that of a gathering, assembly, community and fellowship where saints/sinners are under the Word of God to baptize, gather at the table to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, call/ordain pastors, pray/praise/offer thanks, exercise power of the keys (John20::23). Luther's understanding of the church is reflected in the ELCA's Constitution (Chapters 2-4) and the NC Synod's Constitution (Chapters 4-6).

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What do you like most about the ELCA?
- + How are you or your congregation connected to your synod? To the ELCA? To institutions or agencies (Lenoir-Rhyne University, Southern Seminary, Lutheridge and Lutherock, Agapé and Kure Beach camps, Lutheran Services Carolinas)?
- + Are there other full-communion or AMEZ or Roman Catholic congregations near you? Are there opportunities to work with other denominations where we are in full communion or where there is a covenant? Any ideas or thoughts about possibilities?
- + If you were asked to describe the ELCA, what would you say? What does it mean to be *Evangelical*, *Lutheran*, and *Church* in America?
- + Think of a person you know who is outside the church. Is there a particular theology or ministry outreach that you think would speak to him/her or that you believe he/she needs to hear?



## WEEK 36: The Legacy of the Reformation

BY REV. DR. BILL TREXLER (FORMER BISHOP OF THE FLORIDA-BAHAMAS SYNOD)

## TOPIC SUMMARY

As we approach the end of our study of the Reformation, how might we summarize major gifts Lutherans bring to today's table? Last Reformation Sunday during the children's message, I gave each child a small medal. On one side were these words in Latin: *sola scriptura, sola fides, and sola gratia*. On the opposite side of the medal were the same words in English: scripture alone, faith alone, and grace alone. As weeks passed, a number of adults requested a medal, and much later someone proudly showed me his key ring displaying the medal. These three *solas* embrace three key reformation emphases. Each is as valid today as it was in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Sola scriptura* (scripture alone) emphasizes the importance of scripture. Prior to Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German, the language of his people, the scriptures were unavailable to the common folk. With this gift came the ability for the masses to evaluate church doctrine for themselves. Doctrines and church tradition could now be measured against scripture. Today our congregation constitutions reflect the authority of scripture over tradition: "This congregation accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life."

*Sola fides* (faith alone) proclaims that we are *justified* or made right with God by faith rather than through good works. Rather than being the means for justification, good works become the fruit or the evidence of salvation. This Reformation principle stands at the doctrinal center for much of Christianity today as testified by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification signed in Augsburg, Germany in 1999.

*Sola gratia* (grace alone) asserts that it is the grace of God—fully unmerited—that brings salvation. There is nothing a person can do to make oneself right with God. Righteousness is the nature of God alone. It is God in Christ's righteousness which covers the sinner, and it is God's Holy Spirit rather than any action on the part of the recipient that empowers salvation.

To these three primary gifts included in the Reformation legacy, I would add a fourth: the importance of continuing reform (*reformanda*). Creation is ongoing as God continues to form and reform the world, including the church. A pivotal question then becomes, "What is God's preferred future for the church?" In the challenging lyrics of Pratt Green's hymn, *The Church of Christ in every age must keep on rising from the dead*.

Today these four elements of the Reformation Legacy contribute to the ecumenical dialogues and agreements Lutherans have with Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Moravians, churches of the Reformed Tradition, Methodists, and African Methodist Episcopal traditions. Theological and liturgical reforms increasingly reflect what we hold in common rather than emphasize that which divides.

## KEY WORDS

**Normative:** relating to an ideal way of doing something

**Ecumenism:** the visible unity of Christian churches in some form

**Grace:** the unmerited love and mercy of God

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

John 20:30-31 | Romans 10:17 | Ephesians 2:8-9 | 2 Corinthians 5:17

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, famed professor, Reformation scholar, and Luther biographer Heiko Oberman wrote, “The means employed both to persecute and defend the Reformation have left deep, indelible scars. But joy for the renewal and grief over the schism obstruct access to Luther as he saw himself and his task. He never set himself up as healer of the Church and never regarded the renewal of the Church as his task. Effective resistance to the Reformation would neither have surprised nor dissuaded him.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What gifts do Lutherans emphasize in today’s ecumenical conversations?
- + Are all changes good? Why...or why not?
- + What needs reforming in your congregation?
- + Where is God in all this?
- + What needs to change in your life for scripture to be normative?
- + Why are good works important in a Christian’s life?

## WEEK 37: Synod Companions—the Costa Rican Synod

BY MR. BOB JOHNSON (CHAIR, NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD COMPANION SYNOD TASK FORCE)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

The North Carolina Synod has been in a companion synod relationship with the Lutheran Church in Costa Rica (ILCO) since 2005. ILCO is a relatively small church with ten communities of faith. In addition to these communities, ILCO does outreach to the large indigenous population (eight tribes), the urban poor, and to the large (and growing) population of Nicaraguan immigrants and refugees.

The ELCA's approach to mission is what is often called an "accompaniment model." That is, we believe that we are called to *be with* one another, to hold hands with our brothers and sisters from diverse walks of life, and from other parts of the globe.

In keeping with the ELCA's accompaniment model and as a result of this relationship folks from the North Carolina Synod regularly travel to Costa Rica. We do not go to *fix* anything. We are there to develop, promote, and continue in relationship. We are simply walking together faithfully with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our teams go to walk with the people of Costa Rica in their daily lives, both in and out of the church. We don't go to build something or baptize a given number of people. We allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit and by the people of ILCO.

One of the most important things we have learned through this relationship is how much alike we really are. The church in Costa Rica faces the same problems our churches face in NC: poverty, challenges of immigration, environmental concerns, domestic violence, and social inequality. One of the most difficult parts of working with our teams in Costa Rica is coming home. People always want to know what we did or what we built. But what we did and what we built are intangibles. We spent time with children and with the elderly; we prayed with our brothers and sisters; we learned a little Spanish and we taught a little English. Working with a companion synod is more about changing our perspective when we return home than it is changing anything there. We return home recognizing our inter-connectedness and the messiness of global politics in a new way. And we come back wanting to foster involvement in and with our local Latino neighbors. The companion synod relationship offers us a new way to see the world.

## **BIBLE CONNECTIONS**

Colossians 2:6-7a | John 13:34-35 | 2 Corinthians 5:16-19 | Galatians 4:27-28

## **WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?**

“We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and the neighbor,” said Luther in his important writing, “Freedom of a Christian.” “He lives in Christ through faith, and in his neighbor through love.”

## **DISCUSSION STARTERS**

- + Would you be interested in an accompaniment mission trip to Costa Rica? Why or Why not?
- + Would you be interested in having a missionary from Costa Rica visit in your community? Why or why not?
- + How is the accompaniment model of missions different from the traditional model of going and building churches?
- + What do you think the greatest benefit of working with our companion synod would be for you as an individual? As a congregation?
- + Does the possibility of coming back changed excite or scare you? Why or why not?

## WEEK 38: North Carolina Ecumenical Partners

BY THE REV. DR. C. PIERSON SHAW (NC SYNOD, LUTHERAN ECUMENICAL INTER-RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATIVE NETWORK)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

This session offers a look at Lutheran engagement with other religions and other Christians. Constitutionally, each of the ELCA's 65 Synodical Bishops serve as the Synod's Ecumenical Officer with the Presiding Bishop serving as the ELCA's Ecumenical Officer. Yet each Bishop appoints a Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-religious Network (LEIRN) representative who assists the Synod's Baptized and the bishop to live out the *ELCA's Vision on Ecumenism*. The ELCA has been involved in interreligious dialogue with other descendants of Abraham, namely Islam and Judaism. In faithfulness to Scripture, and out of the conviction that God calls all peoples, the ELCA seeks to extend hospitality to others of different religions, that together all peoples may strive for peace and justice in the world in which we live.

The ELCA also engages in ecumenical dialogue and ecumenical agreements in faithfulness to Scripture and the conviction that Christians are called to end the impediments to visible Christian unity. Since its formation in 1988, the ELCA has been involved in dialogue and has approved separate full communion relationships with the Episcopal Church USA, The Moravian Church in America, and the United Methodist Church. The ELCA also approved a common full communion agreement with the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America. This latter agreement involved the three other denominations at their request due to an already existing joint full communion agreement between them. In addition, the ELCA entered into an agreed "Statement of Mission" with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) which was implemented at a summit at Hood Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina. Along with the full communion agreement with the Moravian Church, the agreement with the AMEZ came to fruition in North Carolina.

Bilateral dialogue represents another type of relationship, as the ELCA actively converses with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), the Christian Church Disciples of Christ, the Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA), the Orthodox Church in the United States, and the Roman Catholic Church. These dialogues often have resulted in agreements concerning matters of teaching or the healing of memories. Through dialogue, the ELCA and Lutherans worldwide have asked the MCUSA, and Mennonites globally, for forgiveness for persecutions against Mennonites and other Anabaptist traditions during the Reformation. Finally, dialogue with the Orthodox Church has borne the most fruit at the international level.

In North Carolina all ELCA members are a part of the NC Council of Churches. The ELCA is one of the 143 member Churches of the Lutheran World Federation, the National Council Churches of Christ USA, and the World Council of Churches. Such conciliar relationships seek to foster visible unity and common witness. The ELCA is also a part of Christian Churches Together and Churches Uniting in Christ which seek closer relationships among Christian traditions in the United States.

Through all of these types of relationships, the North Carolina Synod and the ELCA seek to be faithful to that for which Jesus prayed in the night of his betrayal, and for visible Christian unity made possible through his cross.

## KEY WORDS

**Ecumenical:** from the Greek word *oikoumenikos*, or *oikoumenē* meaning “the whole (inhabited) earth.” It came to refer to the worldwide Church and commonly refers to the whole of a body of churches that are together promoting or tending toward visible Christian unity.

**Church catholic:** from the Greek words *kata holos* meaning “with the whole” or “according to the whole.” The term Church catholic therefore means the universal Church.

**Bilateral dialogue:** as the name implies, this is a type of ecumenical dialogue as entered into by two dialogue partners.

**Conciliar relationships:** a type of relationship involving several Christian traditions. Some such as the Councils of Churches are bilateral relationships for the purpose of fostering among member bodies visible unity and public witness and justice. Other groups seek to foster closer ties among several Christian traditions.

**Full communion:** when two denominations develop a relationship based on a common confessing of the Christian faith and a mutual recognition of Baptism and sharing of the Lord’s Supper. This does not mean the two denominations merge; rather, in reaching agreements, denominations also respect differences. These denominations worship together, may exchange clergy and also share a commitment to evangelism, witness and service in the world.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Genesis 12:1-3 | Psalm 24 | Ephesians 2:13-20 | John 17:6-16

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Martin Luther offers inspiration for the ELCA’s Ecumenical vision in the “Large Catechism” as he explained how the Holy Spirit makes the people of God holy “[t]hrough the Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” Luther says that Christians have “a unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.” It was Luther’s conviction that God works through the whole Church throughout the world. In Luther’s day the “Christian church” included the Orthodox Churches of the East and the Roman Catholic Church. Thus for Luther his vision of the whole Church was that she was called to be ecumenical, evangelical, and catholic, so that the hearts might be led to grasp the Word of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + Since there were numerous reformers and reform movements in the 16th century, why might it have been important for the Lutherans to dialogue with other reform movements?
- + Since the Augsburg Confession was a document which invited the Roman Catholic Church into dialogue by identifying areas of agreement and then the areas of dispute, how might this document with the other Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord inspire and assist Lutherans in ecumenical dialogue?
- + How do Genesis 12 and Psalm 24 compel us to be involved in interreligious dialogue?
- + How do Ephesians 2 and John 17 compel us to be involved in ecumenical dialogue?
- + While there is a Scriptural basis for both, might it be easy for some to confuse the different intentions of interreligious dialogue on the one hand and ecumenical dialogue on the other?
- + Could your local community benefit from learning more about how Lutherans in cooperation with other denominations might find the results of some of the interreligious dialogues helpful?

## WEEK 39: Lutheran Social Services

BY MR. TED GOINS (PRESIDENT, LUTHERAN SERVICES CAROLINAS)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Lutheran Services Carolinas is a ministry of the North Carolina and South Carolina Synods, providing health and human services where the need is greatest: adoptions, foster care, developmental disabilities, mental illness, homeless veterans, disasters, refugee and migrant services, assisted living, nursing homes, senior housing and home-based services. LSC serves many of the last and least in our society, and depends on inadequate government funding and generous donors to fulfill its vital mission: “Empowered by Christ, we walk together with all we serve.”

LSC stands on the shoulders of many Christian servants, including all our shoulders. LSC is the affiliation of Lutheran Services for the Aging, founded in 1960, and Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas, founded in 1976. The story does not start there.

Lutheran Services for the Aging was birthed from the Lowman Lutheran Home in White Rock, SC, which was founded over 100 years ago. Lutheran Family Services was birthed from the Lutheran Children’s Home in Salem, Virginia, which is over 125 years old. The story does not start there.

The first followers of Jesus Christ were instructed to “love our neighbor as ourselves,” and to care for the “widow and orphan.” In the United States, especially at the end of the Civil War, Lutherans started founding orphanages and other social services to literally care for widows and orphans from the war. Today, there are over 300 Lutheran social services organizations in the United States serving one in fifty Americans, providing over \$21 billion in services annually! LSC alone will provide over \$120 million in services to Carolinians just this year! Most of the 300 Lutheran organizations are members of the largest network of its kind called Lutheran Services in America.

Every Lutheran in the North and South Carolina Synods is serving each time LSC wipes a tear, cares for an elder, counsels, cooks a meal, combs hair, bathes, laughs and loves. As society changes and, today, polarizes, the world begs for a stronger social safety net. Through LSC, every Lutheran in the Carolinas is part of that safety net.

## **BIBLE CONNECTIONS**

Micah 6:8 | Matthew 25:31-46 | John 10:10 | 1 John 3:18

## **WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?**

Luther wrote, “Because of it [faith], you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone,...”

In 1519, Martin Luther advocated for the creation of local common chests, or community chests, to serve the poor, etc.

## **DISCUSSION STARTERS**

- + What services do we Lutherans provide through Lutheran Services Carolinas?
- + Why did we Lutherans found Lutheran Services Carolinas?
- + Who should care for those in society who can't care for themselves?
- + How many Lutheran social ministry organizations are there in the United States? How does that number compare to the size of the Lutheran church in the United States?
- + What is Lutheran Services in America?
- + The North Carolina Synod is to LSC as a parent is to a child. What does that mean to you?
- + What is LSC's mission statement? What are the important points of the mission statement? Why is the mission important?
- + LSC's vision statement is John 10:10. What would that look like for a person in each service provided by LSC?



## WEEK 40: Refugees, Immigration, and Lutherans

BY MR. TED GOINS (PRESIDENT, LUTHERAN SERVICES CAROLINAS)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

First, let's understand whom we are talking about. A refugee is someone who has had to flee persecution or death in his/her home country. An immigrant is someone who chooses to leave his/her home country, usually for economic reasons or to be with family. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services has been resettling refugees from around the world into the United States for 76 years. LIRS is the second largest resettlement organization in the United States, resettling over ten thousand refugees in 2015, and has resettled over 400,000 refugees in its 76-year history. LIRS has resettled people of many religions from all over the world. Refugees most recently come from Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Congo, and Somalia. Countries of origin change with the sad political crises of war, civil war, etc.

Welcoming the stranger has been part of the church and the Church since Jesus Christ said to "love your neighbor as yourself." And long before that, the Old Testament spoke of care for the alien or stranger. Lutherans have always taken those commands literally. LIRS and its network have worked tirelessly to Stand for Welcome.

LIRS was founded to serve primarily Lutherans being displaced by events leading up to WWII, but were really called to action at the end of WWII to resettle displaced persons from Germany, Austria, and Italy. One third of the displaced persons were Lutheran. Over the years the number of Lutherans needing resettlement dwindled as the need to serve God's other children skyrocketed.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services works through approximately twenty affiliate organizations on the ground around the country to provide direct services to refugees. Lutheran Services Carolinas is the LIRS affiliate organization for the Carolinas. LSC resettled 342 refugees into the Carolinas in 2015, and has resettled over ten thousand refugees since 1979.

The congregations of the North Carolina Synod have been very supportive from the very beginning of the program in 1979 when Vietnamese refugees were being resettled after the Vietnam War. Many of the refugees were guides, interpreters, and supporters of the United States and would have been killed had they not fled. The same thing is happening with Iraqi and Afghan refugees today.

Refugee resettlement is complex. Refugees may be coming with the clothes on their back, and may speak little or no English. It is LSC's task to meet their every need: pick up at the airport; have a furnished apartment/house ready for their arrival; provide food, clothing, toiletries; arrange transportation; arrange English and cultural orientation classes; assist in job skills and job search; enroll children in school.... Close your eyes and imagine opening your eyes in a strange country where you don't even speak the language! Thank God for the North Carolina Synod, LIRS, and LSC!

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Deuteronomy 26:5 | Matthew 5:10-11 | Matthew 25:31-46 | Luke 4:16-21 | Romans 12:13 | Hebrews 13:1-2 | Mark 12:31

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Martin Luther preached the Christmas Day, 1521, sermon on Luke 2—Mary and Joseph’s difficulty in finding lodging in Bethlehem. Luther said, “Had you [the congregation] been at Bethlehem you would have paid as little attention to Christ as they did...But now, you beat the air and do not recognize the Lord in your neighbor, you do not do to him as he has done for you.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What is a refugee?
- + What is the definition of an immigrant?
- + Where are the current political hotspots in the world, which is where the next wave of refugees will come from?
- + Have you ever heard of the refugee resettlement work of LIRS or other resettlement agencies in the past, and what have you heard?
- + How many people has LIRS resettled in the last 76 years? Where did they come from?
- + What has to be done for a refugee when they arrive? (Some refugees are frightened to ride the escalator at the airport; they’ve never seen one before! Culture shock!)
- + What would you do if you had to relocate to a foreign country tomorrow, and with a different language? What would you want from an LIRS?

## WEEK 41: Toward Reformation 1000...

BY DR. WAYNE POWELL (PRESIDENT, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

The Reformation of 500 years ago changed the world, and it changed the way we came to know God. The Reformation of the next 500 years will require us to reconcile the truths that we now possess about the world with the gospel that was given to us two millennia previously. It will allow us to know God in ways we could never have perceived in the past.

Today, we know that we on this planet are not alone. We are not the center of the universe as Luther thought, but rather a tiny speck in a massive galaxy, a galaxy that is one of billions of such celestial entities. We also know that there are billions of planets throughout the universe and statistically millions of these either sustain life or have in the past or will in the future, depending on the status of their evolution. It is impossible to deny this even though our theology would be much simpler if we could. It would be nice to think the sole purpose of the universe is for humans to live on this planet, but that is not the truth. We can wonder if our minuscule role in this universe means we are not worthy of God's attention, or instead we can conclude that God is far grander than we once knew. God's love must be incredible for that love to be able to reach each and every one of us.

Luther denounced Copernicus as a heretic for stating ever so carefully that the earth revolved around the sun. Luther was wrong; Copernicus was right. We cannot afford this mistake made by Luther.

In the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin discovered that we did not arrive here in the literal way described in Genesis. Darwin lost his faith after coming to this realization. We must do otherwise and celebrate the beauty of creation through the evolutionary process, a process that continues today. Understanding evolution only serves to help us know the "mind of God", as Einstein once described it. Our reforming of the Church needs to accept this truth and recognize that it only provides more insight into the majesty of God.

In biblical times homosexual acts were condemned along with numerous other practices that are widely accepted today. Today, we know that various sexual orientations are not aberrant behaviors but rather part of the diverse characteristics God has given to us. With this knowledge, we can learn more about how to love all of God's people in ways we never knew before.

The development of science does not run contrary to religion. Rather, it allows us the opportunity to come to know God through the truths of the world in which we live. The reforming of our Church during the next 500 years will be driven by our learning about the mind of God and putting our scriptures into the context of this knowledge with the full understanding that it is God who is asking us to learn.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

John 1:3 | Psalm 96:11-12 | Psalm 19:1

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

In his commentary on Genesis, Luther argued for faith and possibility. He writes, “Likewise the mathematicians have concluded that there were a definite number of spheres, not that it is necessary to be so, but because one cannot teach anything definitely about such things unless one distinguishes the spheres thus, on account of the variety of their motions, about which one can teach nothing without such imagination, if I may so name it. For teachers and professors of these sciences or theories say: we give examples, not because they are in every detail correct, but in order that no one may teach differently concerning those subjects. Therefore it would be the height of folly to despise and ridicule such things as some do, because it is not so sure that it could not be different, for they serve to the end that good arts and sciences may be taught, and that is sufficient.” Luther’s words are an echo of another of his famous (purported) quotes: “How dare you not know what can be known?”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + A legacy of the Reformation is that the church is always reforming. What does it mean to continue reforming in the face of scientific advances?
- + Does the possibility of life on other planets in other galaxies challenge your faith? Why or why not?
- + Is our contemporary scientific understanding of evolution counter to your understanding of God as creator? Why or why not?
- + As science continues to learn more about the nature of human sexuality, it suggests that the presumed gender binary (male is male, female is female, and there is no variation from this model) is not consistent with scientific knowledge or the lived experience of many people. How does this affect the way the church might address questions of gender and sexuality within the church?

WEEK 42: Toward Reformation 1000...

BY THE REV. DR. CLAY SCHMIT (PROVOST, LENOIR-RHYNE UNIVERSITY/LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SOUTHERN SEMINARY)

TOPIC SUMMARY

For the past 500 years, the Lutheran movement has had a profound influence on the world and on the Christian faith. Will that impact continue in the centuries to come? It will if we stay committed to Christ and to the clear proclamation of his gospel. To do so means that we will be *evangelical*. This word has become very common and is often overused, and misused. It comes from the New Testament word that simply means “good news.” It does not mean fundamentalist (those who read the Bible as if it were a science book); it does not mean right-wing fanatic. In its purest sense, it refers to Christians who boldly and clearly talk about the good news of Jesus’ love.

Are Lutherans evangelical? Well, Martin Luther could be seen as the first evangelical leader in the church because he sought to restore proclamation of the gospel to the practice of faith in his day. The movement that flowed from his early reforming work is not called Lutheranism everywhere. In Germany, it is called the *Evangelische Kirche* (Evangelical Church). We call our church the *Evangelical* Lutheran Church in America, and that is an important distinction. Though we may at times forget it, we ELCA people *are* evangelical in our preaching and teaching.

Why does this matter for the future? Because, in spite of the decline of the mainline church in North America, the Christian church is growing faster today in the world than at any other time in its 2,000 year history. The amazing thing is that the only places where it is growing are the places in the world where the proclamation is completely evangelical. People respond to the good news about Christ, no matter where they are in the world. For example, most people understand the island nation of Indonesia to be a highly populated Muslim country. However, there are more Lutherans in Indonesia (about 11 million) than in North America and their number is *growing*. The evangelical proclamation of the good news is still winning souls for Christ.

In the coming decades and centuries, the churches that will grow and maintain impact will be those that stay centered on Christ. This does not mean that we ignore issues such as social justice, economic fairness, global climate change, and human trafficking. These are things that Jesus cares very deeply about and calls us to address both in our theology and in our action. Yet, our response to these things flows out of our love for Christ. And, our action in the world is empowered by the Spirit of Christ. When human goodness becomes disconnected from the power of Christ at work in the world, then we cease to be evangelical; we become dependent upon our own human resources.

Will the Lutheran movement continue for another 500 years? Yes, so long as we remain in Christ and true to his call for us to proclaim the gospel to all generations.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Mark 16:15 | Matthew 18:19-20 | John 21

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

Luther disliked the derogatory label “Lutheran” that critics gave him and Reformation followers. He preferred “Evangelical,” emphasizing the scriptural heart of “good news.” Johann Maier von Eck, defender of Roman Catholicism during the Reformation, coined the term “Lutheran,” intended to be pejorative. Though their relationship began friendly, relations between Luther and Eck soured at the Leipzig Debate in 1519, where Luther’s teachings were debated.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + The word evangelical is used to mean many things. What are some of the meanings that have become common? Do you identify with any of those meanings? Do you consider yourself to be an evangelical Christian?
- + What have you learned about the amazing growth of the church across the globe? Which are the churches or denominations that seem to be growing most quickly? What might we learn from those whose churches are growing?
- + Lutherans once sent missionaries to many parts of Asia, Africa, and South America. Where is the mission field today?
- + Do you think that Martin Luther would recognize the ELCA today as a church that has followed his movement?
- + One of the responsibilities that Lutherans have always embraced is the need for constant reformation. Are there things in our church today that need to be reformed? Are there things within your own congregation that might need to be reformed?

## WEEK 43: Toward Reformation 1000...

BY THE REV. DR. TIM SMITH (BISHOP OF THE NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD)

### TOPIC SUMMARY

Regardless of where the Church of Christ is 500 years from now, history teaches us that it will be a foundationally different time. The late Phyllis Tickle, among others, notes that “In the religious sphere, many people have observed that these kind of changes seem to happen every 500 years—a period of upheaval followed by a period of settling down, then codification, and then upheaval again because we do not like to be codified. For western Christianity, the Protestant, or Great Reformation was about five hundred years ago. Five hundred before that you hit the Great Schism, when the church divided between east and west. Five hundred years earlier you have Pope Gregory the Great, who helped bring the church out of the dark ages.”

Clearly, the Church today is in a period of rapid and substantial change, or “Emergence,” as Tickle and others have referred to it. Culture is dependent on and trustful toward institutions less and less. As people shop online, watch TV and do just about everything else “On Demand,” the emerging future of Church seems to be less geared toward institutional dispensation of anything, including the very grace of God, including the core definition of what belongs to the Church; namely, the Word and the Sacraments. In this current Reformation into the “Emerging Church,” God is experienced and assured not so much from top-down structures but from personal relationship, dialogue, and more subjective experiences.

I do believe that what we see happening in ELCA and in the diminishing of mainline denominations and their structures is evidence that the Emerging Church is indeed taking hold and will define Reformation 500. My own view of history isn’t linear, but more of a pendulum that swings, and what I suspect we will see in Reformation 1000, (approaching in 2517) might be a return to more structure and centralization of what we call “Church.”

My hope and vision would include less splitting apart as in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and more coming together in an ecumenical movement that could present a united front for the Gospel in the world. If the core concerns of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the Gospel addressed were “sin, death, and the power of the devil” and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century target is more the realities of injustice and the search for meaning and belonging, I can imagine that in the 26<sup>th</sup> century the void into which the Gospel might most profoundly speak would be the very prospect, given population growth, war, and pollution, of survival of the planet and the human race. The polarizations that are straining the church, politics, and the very planet will give way, with the Church’s help, to an understanding of the connectedness and interdependence of all things.

## KEY WORDS

**Emerging Church:** A late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century movement within the Christian faith that emphasizes the developing (not static) and decentralized nature of the Church which emerges less from top-down structures, dogmas, and decrees and more from conversation and commitment to ongoing dialogue. An assumption is that old structures and institutions can no longer resonate within “postmodern” society, which itself is a reaction against institutionalism. To that extent, the Emerging Church is unapologetically a deconstructionist rethinking of Church and faith in general, but still with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus at its core.

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

Isaiah 43:19 | 2 Corinthians 5:17 | Revelation 21:1-5 | John 17:20-26

## WHERE DOES LUTHER STAND?

This session bears noting something Luther did NOT say about the future and the prospect of global destruction. I even bought little souvenirs from the Wittenberg Souvenir Shop with this written on them, but in the dozens of volumes of Luther’s Works, it is nowhere to be found: “If I believed the world were to end tomorrow, I would still plant a tree today.” (*Word & World, Volume 25, Number 4, Fall 2005*)

Luther did say, implying that the future is in God’s hands but always changing, that “This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + If Emerging Church proponents are right, what do you suppose this could mean for the futures of congregations, synods, and national denominations as most of us have known them? What feelings, hopes, dreams, and fears might this evoke in you?
- + What do you think would be the most realistic vision of Church in 2517? The most hopeful? What are the greatest obstacles to your most hopeful vision?
- + As technology continues to advance at light speed and ethics and theology advance at a snail’s pace, how will the Church address the questions of “Just because we CAN do it, SHOULD we do it?” (Think of, for example, the cloning of a human being, or a halting of the aging process through genetic manipulation or stem cell replacement.)
- + Since Jesus prayed for unity, what does unity look like? In an increasingly subjective, bottom-up Church and culture, how might the traditional and more top-down Church theology and structure embrace a future in such a way that might keep Church from losing relevance altogether?



WEEK 44: Toward Reformation 1000...

BY THE REV. ELIZABETH EATON (PRESIDING BISHOP OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA)

TOPIC SUMMARY

The 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. What will the church look like? What will the world look like? What shall have been the effect of 1,000 years of the Lutheran movement? Of course, this assumes that the Lord will not return in glory during the next 500 years—slightly more likely than a Cleveland sports franchise winning a championship. I have no idea what the church or the world will look like. I don't know if we will gather primarily in buildings or in virtual reality. It is possible we may not all be on the same planet. I can, however, describe my hope for the Lutheran movement as part of the greater church 500 years from now and it is precisely the hope that I have for the Lutheran movement as part of the greater today.

Martin Luther once wrote, "All our experience with history should teach us, when we look back, how badly human wisdom is betrayed when it relies on itself." This is not our church; it is Christ's church. Whenever the church has forgotten that, we have strayed. Of course God has given us the gifts of intellect and imagination. Of course planning is good. But it can never be our work alone. Two thousand years ago, St. Paul cautioned the church in Corinth, "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'". (I Cor. 1:18-19) My hope is that now, and 500 years from now, individually and collectively we will seek to have the mind of Christ.

Perhaps in 500 years all of the divisions in the church will be healed and all the baptized will sing praise to the Lamb together. And, though there might no longer be a denomination called "Lutheran", I can see the need for the clear and persistent witness to the Gospel and the restless impulse to reform that is part of our DNA. And here is the Gospel, "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...For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:3&8) Our status is not determined by race or gender or wealth or our effort. It has been given to us by God through the reconciling work of Christ. And now, released from sin, death and the devil, we are free to serve our neighbor.

We still have work to do. In North America the Lutheran Church still falls short of the marvelous diversity in our communities, much less the vision of heaven described in Revelation 7:9. We can become satisfied with the church the way it is, instead of a living thing, always being made new. I pray God will use God's Lutheran children as salt and leaven. In the meantime, I take comfort from Luther's words, "I know not the way God leads me, but well do I know my Guide."

## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

1 Cor. 1:18-19 | Ephesians 2:3-8 | Revelation 7:9

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- + What does it mean to remember that the church belongs to Christ? How do we recognize when we have forgotten this?
- + Many scholars have said we are now in a post-denominational age. Do you agree? Are different denominations a good thing or a sinful thing?
- + Can you imagine a world in which we are one church, undivided? What would this look like? Would it make a difference in the world?
- + The ELCA is among the *least* racially diverse communities of faith in the United States. Why is this? What are we missing (if anything) because we are predominantly white? What can and/or should we do about this?
- + Does the claim that our status is not determined by race or gender or wealth or our effort ring true to your experience? Why or why not?