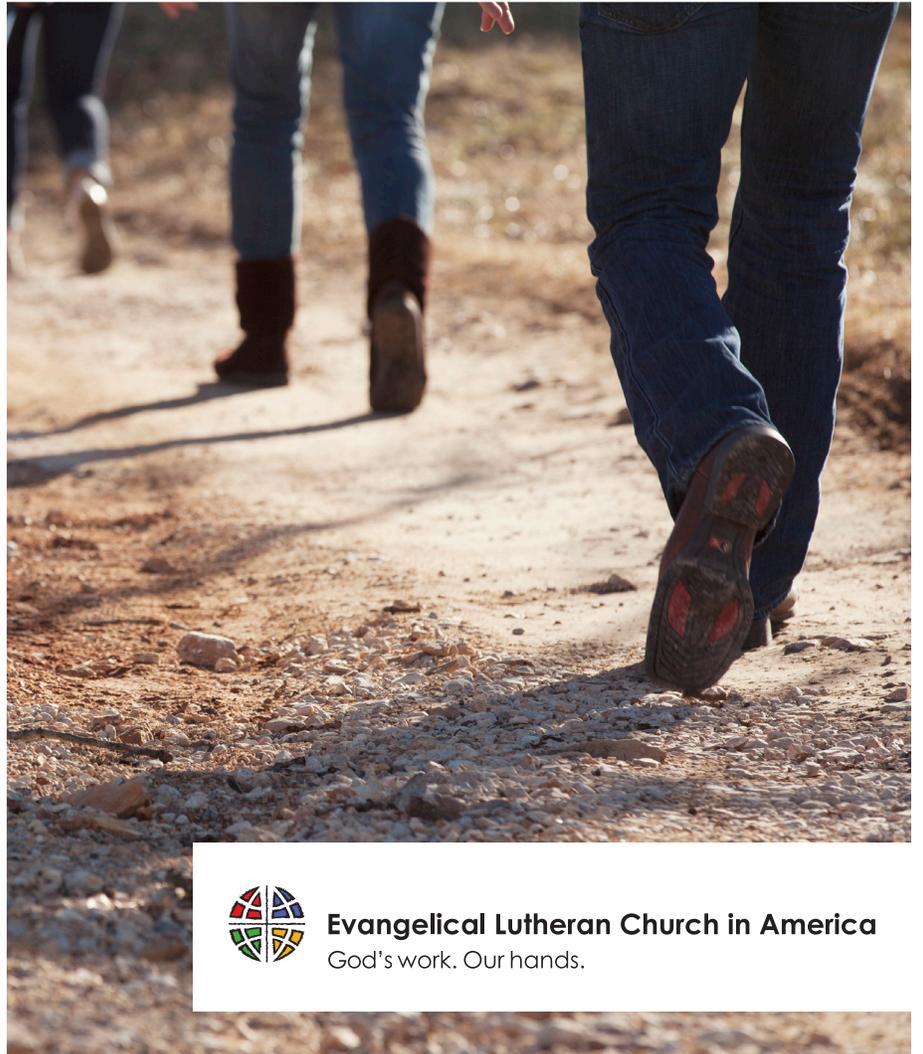
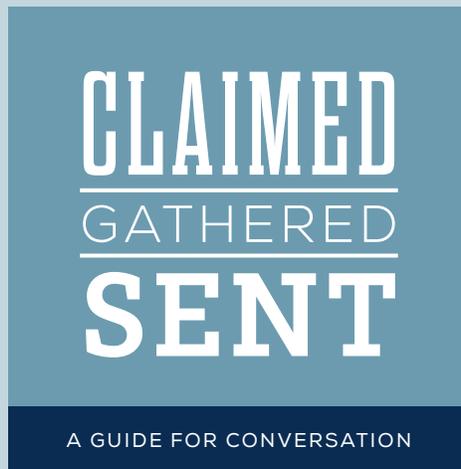


# CLAIMED GATHERED SENT

A GUIDE FOR CONVERSATION



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



**We are eager to hear your feedback on your group's experience with this resource.**

**Please send insights, stories and future plans to [Faith@elca.org](mailto:Faith@elca.org).**

- How has your understanding of how you are church, Lutheran, together and for the sake of the world deepened?
- Have you planned a new ministry or begun to think of an existing ministry in a new way?
- What is your identity as an ELCA congregation?
- What came from these conversations that you want to share with your neighbors in your community and the greater Lutheran church?

## INTRODUCTION

Does being the church matter? If it does, why and how do we as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) make a difference in the world?

Our presiding bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, is working with a task force to reflect on the nature and purpose of the church, especially in relation to our global and ecumenical commitments to other church bodies. The review has prompted this group to ask you – leaders, members and friends of ELCA congregations – what you think about this question: **By being church together, what can the ELCA uniquely offer to the world?**

Your answers to this question have implications for many aspects of God's work through the hands of ELCA members. For example:

- How do you see God at work in your congregation?
- What is God doing in your community and the world through your congregation?
- What does God's work mean for your discernment and decisions together?  
For those of the ELCA as a whole?
- What does God's work mean for your service to your community and the world?  
For the service of the ELCA in all its expressions?

Presiding Bishop Eaton will ask the same questions of the young people attending the 2015 ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit.

**The bishop recently wrote, "We are church first. All of our work flows from this."<sup>1</sup> In the spirit of the Reformation you are invited to consider, "What does this mean?"**

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

**Claimed, Gathered, Sent: A Guide for Conversation includes this leader guide and five handouts, each outlining a process for conversation. The first four handouts focus on one of the emphases Presiding Bishop Eaton has identified for the ELCA:**

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

The fifth session turns to the ELCA's relationship with its **global and ecumenical partners**, particularly The Lutheran World Federation.

The goals of this guide are:

- To invite reflection, conversation and discernment about what being the church means today.
- To strengthen the mission and ministry of congregations and the ELCA as a whole by going back to our spiritual roots.

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth A. Eaton, "Getting to what really matters," *The Lutheran*, January 2014, [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=11792](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=11792).

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE (CONTINUED)

Presiding Bishop Eaton and the sponsoring task force hope that participants will identify issues and questions for further exploration. The experience promises to change you and other conversation participants. For example, these conversations might:

- Help you grow in your understanding of how being church, Lutheran and together, as well as church for the sake of others, applies to your life and your congregation.
- Deepen your awareness and appreciation for the ELCA's relationship with other members of the global church.
- Foster excitement about your vocations in daily life, your callings to God-centered, neighbor-directed service.
- Assist you in seeking to live out your callings in daily life more faithfully, perhaps in new arenas.
- Enable you to envision ways your congregation and other ministry partners worship God, nurture your members and reach out in witness and service to the world.

## USING THIS GUIDE

### **Assumptions**

Underlying this conversation guide are four assumptions:

- God is at work in participants and this process.
- This process is faithful to Scripture and Lutheran theology.
- Conversation itself is the work of the church.
- This guide invites reflection, conversation and discernment – not “correct answers.”

### **Audiences**

Claimed, Gathered, Sent: A Guide for Conversation provides guidance for conversation in groups such as these:

- Adult and youth, both members and friends of congregations and other ministry settings
- Staff of congregations and other ministry settings
- Clergy study groups and other gatherings
- Synod assemblies (plenary sessions, workshops).

### **Conversation settings**

Conversations can be held in a wide variety of settings, including:

- Sunday or midweek education forums or Bible study groups
- Lenten Sunday or midweek worship or study
- Confirmation classes
- Formal and informal small-groups

- Retreats for congregational leaders or other groups
- Congregational or other ministry staff meetings

This guide can also be used for individual learning and discernment. Those who prepare newsletter articles or blogs might also explore these themes.

### **Materials needed**

- Copies of the conversation guide, one per participant
- Paper and pens or pencils for small-group activities
- Newsprint sheets and markers for recording large-group responses

For sessions when video will be used:

- Web access to download the videos that will be used in two sessions
  - Session 3: "[We Are Church Together](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zEi8p1ZwNI&feature=youtu.be)" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zEi8p1ZwNI&feature=youtu.be>)
  - Session 5: "[Augusta Victoria Hospital 2008](http://lwfjerusalem.org/news/videos/)" (<http://lwfjerusalem.org/news/videos/>)
- Computer with video-streaming capacity
- Projection equipment (if needed)

### **Conversation format**

Included in this resource are guides, presented in reproducible handouts, for five focused conversations each organized as follows (with suggested timeframes). Explanations for each section of the conversations are provided below.

GETTING STARTED	10 MINUTES
HERE'S WHAT	10 MINUTES
SO WHAT?	10 MINUTES
NOW WHAT?	10 MINUTES
WRAP-UP AND BLESSING	5 MINUTES

- Tell participants how much time they will have for each segment.
- Notice the two types of material in the conversation guides: content in regular type and instructions in italics.
- Prepare for each conversation by reading through the content, so you can summarize it for the group or invite volunteers to summarize the material for the large group or their small group.
- Keep in mind that group members will have a copy of the material.
- Remind participants to practice respectful listening, allowing one person at a time to speak and seeking to understand others' perspectives.



## GETTING STARTED

In the first gathering, briefly introduce the origins and plan for this five-part conversation. Every week identify the emphasis that will be the focus of the conversation. As needed to orient new participants, review the purpose and overall plan.

From the beginning, encourage participation in the conversation by inviting the group to sing one of the suggested hymns or another appropriate hymn or song.

Ask a volunteer to read the Bible passage and another to offer a prayer.

Each session includes an activity to help participants discover how the theme relates to their own experience. Follow the instructions provided in the guide.



## HERE'S WHAT

Invite participants to reflect on several core texts of our faith – Scripture, the Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as the ELCA constitution and other contemporary sources that support the theme. Some of the sessions also include a video clip participants can view and reflect on. These materials are the starting point of the conversation. *"Here's what this is about."*



## SO WHAT?

When Martin Luther wrote *The Small Catechism*, he explored each element by answering the question, "What does this mean?"

Participants are encouraged to dig deeper into the theme by asking, "What does this (the "Here's What") mean?" Variations on this question include:

- Why is this important or relevant?
- What difference does this make – for individuals, congregations, synods and the ELCA as a whole, even for God's whole church throughout time and around the world?

Other forms of these questions are provided in the guide.



## NOW WHAT?

**According to Luke 24:13-35, the day of Jesus' resurrection, two of Jesus' followers discovered late in the day that their rabbi had walked with them on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, opened the Scriptures to them and broken bread with them. He was not dead; he had risen indeed! "Were not our hearts burning within us?" they asked one another. And then they immediately walked the six miles in the dark, back to Jerusalem, so they could find the 11 and tell them what they had experienced.**

Remembering what we have seen – who we are (again, "Here's What") and why it is important ("So What?"), what are we going to do about that? Now What? The guide asks group members to think about the implications of their conversation. What happens next? What do we do with this information, given our thoughts and feelings about its importance? Or, how, then, shall we live? Again, specific questions are suggested.



## WRAP-UP AND BLESSING

Invite participants to summarize what central learnings, key insights or calls to action have caught their attention during the conversation. Questions such as the following can be helpful:

- What one or two ideas seem most important to you?
- What most surprised you?
- What would you like to talk about more?
- What will you take away from this conversation?

Offer a brief prayer for participants' faith journey, the congregation's ministry or other gifts or concerns that arose in the conversation. Change the way you pray from week to week to help participants stay alert to these appeals and thanksgiving. For example:

- Ask for a volunteer to offer a prayer.
- Offer an opening petition, ask group members to add their own petitions and then turn the group's concerns over to God with a closing sentence.
- Invite the group to pray in silence, framing the prayer with a simple spoken invocation and benediction.
- Use a classic blessing or prayer, such as the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi, found on page 87 of "Evangelical Lutheran Worship."



## FOR THE NEXT CONVERSATION

Some sessions end with a simple activity participants might enjoy doing before the next gathering. Point it out to group members, assuring them that it is optional.

### *Preparing to lead*

To lead a conversation, complete the following tasks:

- Familiarize yourself with the conversation guides.
- Review video segments that will be used.
- Choose settings or formats for the conversations in your congregation.
- Meet with other leaders who will facilitate conversations to review the process and conversation guides.
- Read some of the background material suggested in "For Further Reading."
- Before each conversation, test the web links and projection equipment to make sure the video segments will be easily seen and heard.

### *Hosting a Single Conversation*

If you want to have a single conversation in your congregation, consider these options.

## USE ONE SESSION

Pick one session and follow the guide for it. Consider session 3, “We Are Church Together,” or session 5, “What Difference Do We Make?”

## BUILD ON “HERE’S WHAT”

Copy and distribute the handout “Here’s What,” from all five sessions. When the group assembles, proceed as follows.

- *Here’s What:* Ask participants: What two or three ideas from this material seems most important to you?
- *So What?* Drawing on “Here’s What,” ask: Why is this important? What does this mean for us as individuals, for our congregation, the ELCA – and for all of us as we carry out our work in the world?
- *Now What?* Given the content explored in “Here’s What” and participants’ thoughts about the questions in “So What?” turn to the implications. Ask: What are we going to do about this? How might we respond?
- Open and close the session using any of the suggestions that appeal to you.

To encourage participation, form small groups for an initial round of conversation about each question. Then ask small groups to report back to the large group.

## INCLUDE A VIDEO IN SESSION 4

- Begin session 4 as indicated in the handout.
- Drop the “Getting Started” activity.
- Begin instead with the session’s “Here’s What,” a reading and reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Watch the video “[Augusta Victoria Hospital 2008](http://twfjerusalem.org/news/videos/)” (<http://twfjerusalem.org/news/videos/>) as framed in “Here’s What” for session 5.
- Return to session 4 and follow the guide for the remainder of the session.
- Note that in the “So What?” section, participants will need to identify a neighbor whom they think is significant.

## REPLACE THE VIDEO IN SESSION 5

In “Here’s What,” replace the video “Augusta Victoria Hospital 2008” with “We Are Church Together” and the reflection questions provided for it in session 3.

## FOR FURTHER READING

### Background on Lutheran Teaching

- *Lutheranism 101* by Kit Kleinhans, found at [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=5895](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=5895).
- Fryer, Kelly. *Reclaiming the "L" Word: Renewing the Church from Its Lutheran Core*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
- Marty, Martin. *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007.
- Kreider, Eugene C. *Study of Luther's Small Catechism*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991.
- Skrade, Kristofer, and James Satter. *The Lutheran Handbook: A Field Guide to Church Stuff, Everyday Stuff, and the Bible*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.
- Skrade, Kristofer. *The Lutheran Handbook II: A Field Guide to Church Stuff, Everyday Stuff, and the Bible*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007.

### Background on The Lutheran World Federation

- The federation's website, [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)
- "The Lutheran World Federation: A Communion of Churches" ([www.ELCA.org/Resources/Global-Mission](http://www.ELCA.org/Resources/Global-Mission))
- Accompaniment: A Shared Model of Mission" ([www.ELCA.org/Resources/Global-Mission](http://www.ELCA.org/Resources/Global-Mission))

Barger, Rick. *A New and Right Spirit: Creating an Authentic Church in a Consumer Culture*. Herndon, Va: The Alban Institute, 2005.

Bass, Diana Butler. *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Nessan, Craig L. *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Peterson, Cheryl M. *Who Is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the 21st Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

Smith, C. Christopher, John Pattison, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*. Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 2014.



## KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

"[You are] ... God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

– 1 Peter 2:9

## SUGGESTED HYMNS



"God Is Here!" (ELW 526)  
"Built on a Rock" (ELW 652)



## GETTING STARTED

*In the large group, respond to the prompts below.*

What does it mean to belong to Christ in whom you've been baptized? What's special or unique about your congregation? How do you describe your congregation to people who are not familiar with it? Think about aspects such as these:

- How you have seen God working in your lives and through your lives
- Your church roots
- Pastors, musicians, staff and lay leaders who have played a significant role
- Worship, prayer and other spiritual practices
- The location
- Relationships with neighbors near and far
- Ministries your congregation especially values or feels called to carry out
- Ways pastors and members have supported and participated in synodical or churchwide ministries



## HERE'S WHAT

Your congregation is indeed unique. Yet the church is universal, and your congregation is one part of the much larger church and connected to other faith communities. But how is the larger church formed?

Martin Luther teaches us how the church comes to be in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, one of the ELCA's three historic statements of our faith. The Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth."<sup>1</sup> God has created the church as a gift to the world. It is much more than a human institution. In Christ, we are joined, saved and set free to serve one another.

How do we recognize the church? In the words of the Nicene Creed, another statement of our faith, Christians confess that the church is "one, holy, catholic and apostolic." These terms are called "marks of the church."

- The church is "one" because it is joined together by Jesus Christ, united in its relationship with and witness to the one God (John 17:20-23).
- "Holy" means "set apart." The church is set apart to carry out God's purposes in the world, reconciling the world to God (2 Corinthians 5:19).
- When we say the church is "catholic," we confess that it is "universal." It reaches across time and space and is not divided by denomination, nation, race, gender or other human factors (Ephesians 2:19-22).
- The "apostolic church" is rooted in the preaching and the witness of Jesus' apostles. "Apostle" means "messenger," reminding us that the church is sent to carry the message of good news of Jesus to all the world (Mark 16:15).

*As a large group, review the list of descriptors you created during "Getting Started." Mark with an O those that show the world how your congregation is one. Mark with an H those that demonstrate it is holy, with a C those that express how it is catholic, and with an A those that confirm it is apostolic.*

Form a small group, and share your thoughts about the following questions:

- What mark seems most meaningful to you?
- What does it mean for you?
- How would you tell someone who does not go to church what is the church?

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000), p. 355.



### SO WHAT?

Now that you've talked about what is the church, explore how it fulfills its purpose.

*In your small group, take turns reading aloud the following passages.*

- The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly.<sup>2</sup>
- Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)
- "The church is ... not an institution, an organization, or a building, but a community of relationships where people's selves are with God and with one another, bound by love... In our world, these relationships extend beyond other human beings and God. We are not only related to other people, but we are in community with all of creation."<sup>3</sup>
- "At the center of our life together is worship and at the center of our worship is the crucified and risen Christ. When we gather for worship we turn our gaze away from ourselves to the source of our life and hope and salvation. When we gather for worship we are encountered by the living God in Scripture, proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments. God meets us and transforms us."<sup>4</sup>

*Which do you think best explains why the church exists? Mark that item and tell the members of your group what draws you to it.*



### NOW WHAT?

*In the large group, offer your thoughts about the implications of the ideas you have raised.*

- In what way is Jesus the center of your congregation?
- How might your understanding of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic affect your participation in your congregation?

Think of one activity or ministry in your congregation that is important to you. How could it better reflect what uniquely being the church, in the broadest sense, means?

<sup>2</sup> Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: Harper One, 2012), 195.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth A. Eaton, "Getting to what really matters," *The Lutheran*, January 2014, [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=11792](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=11792).



## **WRAP-UP AND BLESSING**

*In the large group, review the main points you covered today. Respond to this question:*

Reflecting on your conversation today, what does "church" mean?

*Close today's conversation with a prayer or blessing.*



## **FOR THE NEXT CONVERSATION**

*If you like, for the next conversation, bring a photo, certificate or other memento of your baptism, confirmation or another experience among Lutherans that is meaningful to you.*



### KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

– Ephesians 2:8

### SUGGESTED HYMNS

"Amazing Grace" (ELW 779)

"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (ELW 503-505)



### GETTING STARTED

*Form small groups. On the timeline below, note the year when you experienced any of the following events that apply to you:*

- You were baptized.
- You were confirmed.
- You became a Lutheran.
- You became involved in your current congregation.
- You had some other significant encounter in a Lutheran congregation.



*In your group, share your photo or other memento, if you brought one. Then briefly respond to these questions:*

- What is your first memory of a Lutheran church?
- What would you say if someone asked you, "What does it mean to be Lutheran?"



## HERE'S WHAT



The Lutheran Confessions teach that God freely and graciously creates a trusting relationship between us and Jesus. "Human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins."<sup>1</sup> In the words of Lutheran scholar Martin Marty, God's grace is "the generous outpouring of all that is good, all that we need, issued from the very heart of God, with no strings attached."<sup>2</sup> Central to our understanding of what God is doing among us are these truths:

- God claims us in Christ at the same time as saint and sinner.
- The word of God comes to us as both law and gospel – both the law's judging condemnation and the gospel's life-giving promise.
- The Holy Spirit gathers us through word and sacrament.

These teachings, or doctrines, all depend on the little word "and." Along with others about the nature of God, forgiveness, salvation, loving God and neighbor, mercy and justice, and other concepts, these teachings capture the core principles of Scripture as a whole. Individual passages in the Bible express these certainties.

*Working alone, read the Bible passages listed below and note in the margin which teaching each conveys. (A passage might support more than one principle.)*

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17)

"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7)

"Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law." (Galatians 2:16)

*Note any additional Bible passages or teachings you have heard that you think help explain what is distinctive about Lutherans.*

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000), p. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2007), p. 79.



### SO WHAT?

Lutheran churches have their roots in a movement, led by a monk and Bible scholar named Martin Luther, which began in Europe about 500 years ago. Emigrants and missionaries from Europe established congregations in America and other places in the world. In the 1800s, North American Lutherans began to organize as church bodies. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is the result of a series of mergers among these groups over the course of about a century.

*In the small groups formed for Getting Started, reflect together on the following questions:*

- Referring to the Bible passages and additional ideas you noted above, which best communicates for you what "Lutheran" means?
- How does the passage or idea make a difference in your daily life?
- Does this teaching give you hope? If so, how?



### NOW WHAT?

Through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, we are free of the burden of making ourselves acceptable to God. The cross of Christ and the living Christ assure us that God's final word for us is life and freedom in Christ. Lutherans confidently and enthusiastically claim this promise: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1). But how does this claim affect our faith journeys as individuals, a congregation and members of the church universal? Through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, we have a truly living Lord who meets us, forgives us and calls us to follow and in that we find our freedom.

*Reflecting on your own, complete the following sentence stems. Consider especially practices of worship, prayer, silence, generous giving, Scripture study, service to God and works of justice and compassion for your neighbor.*

- Because I am set free in Jesus Christ, I know that ...
- Because I am set free in Jesus Christ, my relationships will be ...
- Because I am set free in Jesus Christ, I will serve my neighbor by ...
- Because we are set free in Jesus Christ, our congregation is ...
- Because we are set free in Jesus Christ, all Christians are ...

*Share your insights with the large group.*



## **WRAP-UP AND BLESSING**

*In the large group, review the main points you covered today. Respond to the following question:*

What does being Lutheran say about you, this congregation or the church?

*Close the conversation with a prayer or blessing.*



## **FOR THE NEXT CONVERSATION**

*When have you done something with others that you could not have done on your own? Perhaps you participated in an outdoor adventure, carried out a service project or solved a problem at home, at work or school or in your congregation. Bring an object that symbolizes the experience for you.*



### KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

– 1 Corinthians 12:27

### SUGGESTED HYMNS

"We Are All One in Christ" (ELW 643)  
"Blest Be the Tie That Binds" (ELW 656)



### GETTING STARTED

When have you made something happen on a team that you could not have done on your own? Perhaps you participated in an outdoor adventure, carried out a service project or solved a problem at home, at work or school, or in your congregation.

*Form small groups, and briefly tell your companions about a time when you were part of an effective team. If you brought an object that symbolizes the effort, tell your group why you chose it.*

*After you have shared your stories, offer your ideas about this question:*

How would your experience have been different if you had tried to do it by yourself?



## HERE'S WHAT

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12:4-5). How does that image of "one body with many members" happen in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?

*As a large group, watch the video "We Are Church Together" ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zEi8p1ZwNI&feature=youtu\\_gdata](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zEi8p1ZwNI&feature=youtu_gdata)), shown at the 2014 ELCA synod assemblies. Note words, phrases or stories that capture for you the meaning of the statement, "We are church together."*

*After viewing the video, take one minute to write your response to this question:*

What word, phrase or story from the video most clearly or powerfully says to you, "We are one body with many members; we are church together"?



## SO WHAT?

In the Apostles' Creed, we say we believe in "the communion of saints." *Communion of saints* is another name for the church. As the communion of saints, we are bound together by our shared commitment to God's mission: "to love, save, bless, and free all of creation from the power of sin."<sup>1</sup> Yes, this is God's mission, but God invites us to spread the good news about what God is up to. That's our central purpose as the church. That is what makes us different from other socially conscious, kindhearted, generous, morally upright, compassionate efforts in the world.

In the ELCA, no individual congregation or synod can carry out God's mission for the world alone. ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton observed in the video:

There is no way that the churchwide organization or synod offices can be with the saints and be present in the communities where our churches are planted. The local congregation does that. But there is no way that the local congregation by itself can run camps, train leaders, engage in disaster response or accompany global companions. That is the work we do together as synods, agencies, colleges, seminaries and the churchwide organization.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rolf A. Jacobson, ed., *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2008), 117.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth A. Eaton, "A place called Lutheran," *The Lutheran*, November 2013, [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=11705](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=11705).



(continued)

### SO WHAT?

In the video you watched a few minutes ago, you also heard her say:

When our brothers and sisters in Detroit do God's work, they are doing it on our behalf, because we can't be there. And when you engage in God's work wherever you live, you are doing it on behalf of all God's children everywhere. In Christ, we are truly members one of another. In this marvelous and grace-filled way, we are church together.

*Form small groups for the following discussion, drawing on what you know of the ELCA.*

- Describe examples of God's people working together to serve others in word and deed.
- How did working together make the community more effective?



### NOW WHAT?

*In the large group, offer your ideas about the following questions.*

- The video described a wonderful partnership between a rural and an urban congregation. Which of your congregation's ministries could be multiplied by teaming up with another individual or group in the ELCA?
- Where do you see examples of "church together" in the synodical, churchwide and global ministries?
- How might you or your congregation support the ministry of other individuals or groups in the ELCA or The Lutheran World Federation?

To be church we have to be together – as congregations and as the ELCA. Part of being church together is being able to disagree but still be together. Being church together when we disagree can be challenging. But if people leave the church, they lose the community and the community loses them.

*In the large group, share your thoughts about the following questions.*

- How is being church together different from a secular club or organization?
- What can we learn from coming together to worship God and to serve our neighbor that helps us stay together as church when that feels difficult?



## **WRAP-UP AND BLESSING**

*In the large group, review the main points you covered today.*

*Respond to this question:*

What one or two ideas that you heard today seem most important to you?

*Consider closing this part of the conversation with the prayer Presiding Bishop Eaton offered at the end of the video you viewed today.*

Good and gracious God, you've created a marvelously diverse, sometimes complex world, and people who thought they had nothing in common realize that in you, we are all one body. So thank you for the marvelous ways you've surprised us here. And thank you that we realize that, yes, we can give, but grace is something that we all need to receive. Bless our work and our ministry, bless our joy and our trying things new, knowing that, as we walk with you, we might stumble, but you won't let us fall. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.



## **FOR THE NEXT CONVERSATION**

*We are called by God to serve God and our neighbors – family, friends, coworkers – people throughout our community and around the world and yes, even our enemies. Sketch a map with your congregation in the center showing what lies within two blocks, or a quarter mile, in each direction.*



### KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

– Luke 10:27

### SUGGESTED HYMNS



"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (ELW 708)  
"Will You Let Me Be Your Servant" (ELW 659)



### GETTING STARTED

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America relates with:

- 26 colleges and universities
- 8 seminaries
- 140 campus ministries
- Lutheran Services in America
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
- ELCA World Hunger
- Lutheran Disaster Response

We are called by God to serve God and our neighbors – family, friends, coworkers – people throughout our community and around the world, and yes, even our enemies. Who are your congregation's immediate neighbors?

*Form small groups. In your group, draw a map on a sheet of newsprint with your congregation in the center and the streets or roads two blocks, or a quarter mile, in each direction. Using the map you sketched during the week, or from memory, fill in your congregation's neighbors.*

*Which neighbors on the map does someone in your congregation or your community as a whole have connections? Add notes to the map indicating your relationships.*



## HERE'S WHAT

Jesus taught that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). In the gospel of Luke, a man challenged Jesus' teaching, asking, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered the man by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (Matthew 30-35).

*Invite four people to read the parable as indicated below:*

Reader 1: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

Reader 2: Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

Reader 3: But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

Reader 4: The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

*Form small groups and respond to these questions:*

- Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?
- Who are your neighbors – as an individual, as a congregation, synod and churchwide organization? Make a list you can refer to later.
- How does your congregation heal and serve your community?
- How do your neighbors heal and serve your church?



### SO WHAT?

*When we love our neighbor, we are church "for the sake of the world." In your small group, ask for someone to read aloud the following passages. Underline the words or phrases in each that suggest ways Christians can love their neighbors.*

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:13-14)

"From faith there flows a love and joy in the Lord. From love there proceeds a joyful, willing and free mind that serves the neighbor and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss."<sup>1</sup>

"The good that flowed from Christ flows into us ... The good we receive from Christ flows from us toward those who have need of it. As a result, I should lay before God my faith and righteousness so that they may cover and intercede for the sins of my neighbor... This is true and sincere love and the rule of a Christian life... as Christians we live in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love. Through faith we are caught up beyond ourselves into God. Likewise, through love we descend beneath ourselves through love to serve our neighbor. As Christians we always remain in God and in God's love."<sup>2</sup>

"The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world." (ELCA Constitution 4.01)

"We have experienced God's extravagant love in Jesus. We want others to know that love too. That is what motivates our evangelism and our work to make the abundant life promised by Jesus a reality for the most vulnerable."<sup>3</sup>

*Working alone and keeping in mind the words you underlined above, review the list of neighbors your group developed in "Here's What." Think of an individual or group in your congregation's neighborhood whom you don't already know. Spend two minutes writing your thoughts about these questions:*

- How might an individual, this congregation or even the whole ELCA love this neighbor?
- How could this neighbor enrich the life of the church and community?
- What does "for the sake of the world" mean?

<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther, *The Freedom of A Christian*, tr. Mark Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), p. 83

<sup>2</sup>Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth A. Eaton, "A place called Lutheran," *The Lutheran*, November 2013, [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=11705](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=11705).



## **NOW WHAT?**

*Think of an activity in which you, your congregation, synod or the churchwide organization invests time, money and other resources. In the large group, respond to these questions.*

- In what ways is the activity for the sake of the world?
- How could this purpose – “for the sake of the world” – be given even greater emphasis?
- How could you partner with another part of the ELCA community, such as your synod or a social ministry organization to accomplish more than your congregation could do alone?



## **WRAP-UP AND BLESSING**

*In the large group, review the main points you covered today. Respond to this question:*

**What did you hear today  
that you want to think  
about further?**

*Offer a prayer petition about a neighbor who is important to you.*



### KEY BIBLE PASSAGE

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

– Acts 1:8



### SUGGESTED HYMNS

"Ubi caritas et amor" ("Where True Charity and Love Abide") (ELW 642)  
"In Christ There Is No East or West" (ELW 650)



### GETTING STARTED

*Complete the following quiz.*

- In 2013, how many members did the ELCA have?**
  - 1.2 million
  - 2.5 million
  - 250 thousand
  - 3.9 million
- How many different languages in which liturgies are conducted by ELCA congregations, including English?**
  - 47
  - 7
  - 53
  - 87
- How many Lutheran churches in the world are members of The Lutheran World Federation?**
  - 12
  - 78
  - 144
  - 196

- 4. About how many people worldwide are members of Lutheran churches?**
- a. 70 million
  - b. 15 million
  - c. 45 million
  - d. 1.5 billion
- 5. How many Lutherans live on each continent? Draw a line from the name of the continent to the correct number.**
- |                  |             |
|------------------|-------------|
| a. Europe        | 1.1 million |
| b. Africa        | 13 million  |
| c. North America | 36 million  |
| d. Asia          | 7.3 million |
| e. Latin America | 8.4 million |
- 6. On which continent were The Lutheran World Federation member churches growing the fastest in 2010?**
- a. Europe
  - b. Africa
  - c. North America
  - d. Asia
  - e. Latin America
- 7. How many people does Lutheran Services in America serve each year?**
- a. 500 thousand
  - b. 2 million
  - c. 5.3 million
  - d. 6 million

**ANSWER KEY**

- 1. d;** By comparison, the United Methodist Church is the largest mainline Protestant church in the United States with 8.3 million members. The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has about 2.3 million members. The Presbyterian Church USA has 1.7 million members and the Episcopal Church has 1.9 million members.
- 2. a**
- 3. c**
- 4. a**
- 5. a,** 36 million; **b,** 13 million; **c,** 8.4 million; **d,** 7.3 million; **e,** 1.1 million
- 6. b;** In 2010, churches in Africa added more than 1.2 million members. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is the largest Lutheran World Federation member church on the continent with more than 5 million members.
- 7. d;** Lutheran Services in America serves 1 in 50 Americans. Over the course of the year, someone is helped every 5.26 seconds.<sup>1</sup>

*After all participants have completed the quiz, review the answers provided and talk about what surprised you.*

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.lutheranservices.org/about\\_lutheran\\_social\\_ministry](http://www.lutheranservices.org/about_lutheran_social_ministry)



### HERE'S WHAT

Many Lutherans in North America do not realize that Lutherans worship, learn and serve throughout the world. The quiz you just took demonstrates that the Lutheran reach is wide. Sometimes the ELCA extends that reach by working with Christians of other denominations referred to as "ecumenical partners." Often we collaborate with other Lutherans.

The Lutheran World Federation is a communion that helps Lutherans pool resources to love our neighbors worldwide. Its 144 member churches represent about 70 million people in 79 countries. The ELCA is the communion's only member church from the United States. Through the communion, Lutherans:

- Sing, share and celebrate the good news
- Pray for the needs of the world
- Share our concerns as churches
- Learn from one another
- Discuss, strategize and work for the healing of the world

Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem is an inspiring example of The Lutheran World Federation's service work.

*In the large group, view the seven-minute video "Augusta Victoria Hospital 2008" (<http://lwfjerusalem.org/news/videos/>). The link for the video is at the bottom of the page.*

In the large group, offer your thoughts about these questions:

- What surprised you?
- What does the work of The Lutheran World Federation say about Lutherans?



Augusta Victoria Hospital



photos: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land



## SO WHAT?

Augusta Victoria Hospital primarily services Palestinian refugees – of all faiths. Supported by communion members such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, it demonstrates that working together Lutherans can achieve things on a scale and scope that we could never do alone. Our Lutheran sisters and brothers in 79 countries are the Lutheran church where we cannot possibly be there ourselves, they are church for us and we for them as we all bear witness to the Lord.

We might think the role of the ELCA among our partner churches, including those in The Lutheran World Federation, is primarily that “we” offer a helping hand to “them.” However, ELCA mission is rooted in the concept of “accompaniment.” Accompaniment literally means “to take as a companion” and a companion is “one who eats with another” or “shares bread.” Accompaniment is characterized by interdependence and mutual respect. The image is drawn from the story of Jesus’ walk with two companions on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). It reminds us that as we walk with each other on our journeys, the presence of God is revealed to us.

One of the ways ELCA members can practice accompaniment is by participating in companion synod relationships. Through this program, The Lutheran World Federation member churches connect with ELCA synods and congregations. Each synod has at least one international church companion. Companion churches and ELCA synods nurture and strengthen one another through prayer, study, communication, exchange of visitors and sharing of resources.

*Form small groups. Think of a situation – in your family, at work or school, in your congregation or community, at home or abroad – in which you set out to help someone else and ended up feeling like you were changed by the experience. Briefly share what happened.*

*Drawing on the story you just told, the video about Augusta Victoria Hospital and the information provided above about The Lutheran World Federation and the companion synod program, share your responses to these questions:*

- How might ELCA members, congregations, synods and the churchwide organization be changed by our relationships with communion member churches and companion synods?
- How might these changes challenge us?
- How might these changes strengthen our relationships with one another?  
With God?



## **NOW WHAT?**

*All of us – members of ELCA congregations, synods and the churchwide organization; members of Lutheran World Federation bodies; indeed, the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” – are members of the whole body of Christ. In your small group, listen to a volunteer read this Bible passage:*

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good .... For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 12-13)

*Now share your responses to the following questions:*

- Reflecting on your conversation throughout the five sessions, what does “church” mean to you?
- In what ways are you part of the community of church?
- How does being church transcend a set of activities and embody who we are in relation to each other and Christ?



## **WRAP-UP AND BLESSING**

*In the large group, review the main points you covered today. Then respond to this question:*

**What difference do we make  
as the body of Christ –  
as the church together?**

*Offer a prayer of thanks for “the church,” whatever that means to you, however that is important for you.*



**CLAIMED**  
GATHERED  
**SENT**

A GUIDE FOR CONVERSATION



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