

**Spring 2021
Faith Groups Study
and Devotional**



Guidelines for Faith Groups Discussions

Each session is designed for about one and a half hours, but let the flow of the conversation determine how long each one lasts.

The Bible texts and devotions are provided so that participants may read them before their Faith Group meets each week. They may also be read together at the beginning of each meeting.

We encourage each Faith Group to begin and end each session with prayer. Invite participants to lead or join in the prayers as they feel able to do so.

Each week, look back to how God has been working in your life in light of the previous Faith Group discussion.

Be gracious and supportive of one another in your Faith Group. Remember to keep any personal information that may be shared confidential.

God will be present as you meet! "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." – Matthew 18:20

"The House and Family of God"

By Tim Piehl

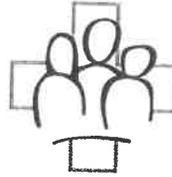
(Based on Psalm 122:1)

Why do you go to church? Are you excited to go? These are common questions that we all find ourselves reflecting on from time to time.

Growing up, I never had a great connection with church. We attended church every week, but attending church was all that it felt like-checking off a box of something that needed to be done. At the time, I was unable to put my finger on what it was about the church experience that was missing for me. While attending college, I finally found what was lacking. I thoroughly enjoyed my religion classes and found myself debating theology with my friends. The learning aspect of church life is very important to me. When we moved back to Hutch, we attended other churches before selecting Faith. Even after one service, we saw a noticeable attention given to learning.

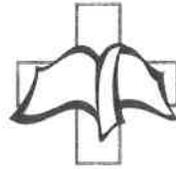
Though the Psalmist meant "temple" at the time, the word "house" was used. A house is somewhere that is warm, inviting, and meaningful. People in your "household" are comforting, familiar and family. During COVID, many of us became used to virtual church. Even when hearing the Word, something was missing. The family aspect was missing. An empty house does not feel like a home. Praising the Lord with his family, in his house, is refreshing and uplifting. It fills us with enough of God's Word to hold us over for another week.

Dear Lord God, thank you for giving us your word and providing us with the resources to build your house. Please speed us to recovery from COVID so we can all gather in Your house and continue to learn from Your Word. Please help guide and instill wisdom in our pastors to continue to lead us in Your ways. Amen.



Sharing... Do you enjoy being outside? If so, what is your favorite outdoor activity? If you don't enjoy being outside, please share your favorite indoor activity.

1. Worship services are the heart and _____ of Christianity.
2. Most of the design elements have a theological _____.
3. The word "chancel" comes from the same root as the word _____.
4. So where the Baptismal font should never be, is tucked away or _____.
5. Faith Lutheran Church has two places for _____ the Word.
6. The colors of the paraments are also symbolic:
 - Purple is the color of _____, but also repentance and suffering.
 - White symbolizes purity, _____, triumph.
 - Blue is considered the color of _____.
 - Green is considered the color of life, _____, and creation.
 - Red symbolizes _____ (Holy Spirit).
 - Bare or black is used as a sign of _____ and desolation.
7. In other words, worship traditions are important, but are not _____.



Growing...

1. What one word first comes to mind when you think of worship services? Why?
2. What is your favorite space for a worship service? What about it appeals to you?
3. Did you find anything about the layout of the church surprising, striking or puzzling?
4. Why do you think the Church has paid so much attention to the *colors* of the paraments?
5. Recall the meaning of *adiaphora*. Which parts of a worship service would you classify as *adiaphora*? Which ones would you deem essential?



Serving... Invite someone to worship or a Bible Study this week.

"God's Gracious Gift"

By Virginia Brodd

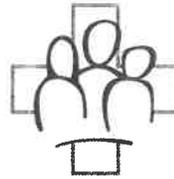
(Based on Ephesians 1:3, 7)

When I was growing up, my parents shared the discipline in our family. I certainly felt I received the most correction, but along with that I also came to appreciate being forgiven the most. After acknowledging my error, it was forgiven and forgotten.

I think of God the Father as being the part of the Trinity who does the rule setting and the enforcing of those rules. But He is also the one who sent Jesus to earth to save us from our lives filled with sin. Not once or twice does He forgive us, but over and over and over again. What an amazing gift of grace that is!

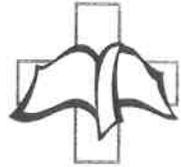
A few years ago, a Bible study was offered describing the different parts of a traditional Sunday morning church service. We were asked to name our favorite part of the service and even though one certainly appreciates the kids' sermon (and of course, the big sermon) and enjoys singing those precious hymns, the portion of the service where the pastor announces to the congregation that our sins are forgiven seems the most special. What an amazing gift we are given - over and over and over again, our sins are forgiven and forgotten.

Lord, thank you for your gift of forgiveness and grace. Amen.



Sharing...What is your favorite thing to do by yourself?

1. Announcements make known ways in which our worship extends beyond the service—leading to _____, _____, and _____.
2. There are some liturgical _____ that don't do anything before the invocation.
3. The word liturgy comes from the Greek word that means " _____ " or "works of the people."
4. Liturgy is not something beautiful we do for God, but something beautiful God does for us and among us. Public worship is neither our work nor our possession...it is _____ God's work.
5. At Faith Lutheran, depending on which service you attend, you are experiencing a different liturgical _____ of worship, but the same liturgical elements.
6. It is only appropriate, then, that we begin our worship by invoking the name under which:
We _____!
We are _____!
We are _____!
7. Our service then usually proceeds to a time for _____ and _____.
8. Kyrie, in Greek, means " _____ "
- 9.. Kyrie eleison means, "Lord, _____."



Growing...

1. How do you like to prepare for worship? What is your favorite thing about your worship space?
2. How is the liturgy of the service God's work? How is every service liturgical?
3. Think about the corporate confessional prayer we confess on Sunday morning:
"We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name."
What part of that prayer sticks out to you?

What does the prayer teach us theologically?
4. Where does the authority to forgive sins come from and who has that authority?
5. How does the beginning of the worship service prepare you for the rest of the service?



Serving...Pick up something for the Blessing Box this week.

"The Impact of Words"

By Orville Moe

(Based on Romans 10:17)

The first historic lectionary comes to us from a document credited to Jerome, in A.D. 471. Having the name of Jerome attached to it made this document influential on its own, but when it was included in the "*Leonine Sacramentary*" it became a standard text for the Western Christian Churches.

Three hundred years later, Charlemagne decided to standardize liturgical practices in his domain, and a revised version was prepared. This was a monumental step in church history, since it standardized worship in the Western Catholic Church and put everyone west of the Carpathians literally on the same page.

Other changes have been made over the centuries in an ongoing attempt to present a relevant Word to Christian congregations and to have the Word serve as the standard with which to measure the preached words.

The traditional way that most people are influenced is by hearing the voice of spoken words in our common language. Even though most Christians can read today, much of what we know and learn comes through hearing. A Sunday School teacher, pastor or others speaking the message of the Good News likely had much to do with our embracing the Christian faith.

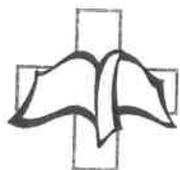
My personal recollection of the kind and thoughtful words of a camp counselor, at a summer camp when I was in my teens, had a significant impact on my personal understanding of the significance of God reaching out to an unworthy sinner, like me, to offer the gift of salvation and peace.

Gracious God, as we listen to your Word, fill us with faith. Amen.



Sharing... If money and time were no object, what would you be doing right now?

1. So what do we make of this central activity of the church and the kind of _____ relationship with it?
2. In other words, the way that the Holy Spirit _____ us is through preaching.
3. We often refer to preaching as proclamation or _____ the Gospel.
4. Preaching declares God's justifying _____ for you.
5. Reading from the Bible is equally _____ in any worship service.
6. The lectionary has _____ years' worth of readings.
7. John doesn't get its own _____, because he marches to his own drummer.
8. **The lectionary has many strengths:**
 - It takes the congregation through the _____ Gospel every year.
 - It shows how the whole Bible is _____ from creation to the new creation.
 - It forces pastors to preach on _____ texts that we might prefer to ignore.
 - It keeps us from using _____ or easy texts over and over again.
9. For Lutherans, the main task in preaching is the proper distinction of _____.
10. The Gospel then proclaims God's solution-- _____, freedom, and reconciliation.



Growing...

1. Do you generally find sermons to be inspiring, fascinating, confusing, boring or ... ?

2. Are you surprised that the *Augsburg Confession* links the Holy Spirit's work so closely to preaching? Why or why not?

3. What difference does it make to think of preaching as address or proclamation, rather than as a lecture, advice or information?

4. What do you think is most valuable about the lectionary? What is not helpful for you?

5. Review how God's Word addresses us as Law and Gospel. Why is that distinction so vital? Can you recall a time when you clearly heard either one addressed to you?



Serving...Offer a word of encouragement to those with whom you come in contact this week and include them in your daily prayers.

Weekly Devotion Session 4 “The Sacraments”

“Sealed with the Cross of Christ”

By Claire Woelfel

(Based on Romans 6:3-4)

“In the beginning of creation, the Spirit breathed upon the waters.” (Genesis 1:2)

In the celebration of Holy Baptism, a person is immersed with water. This is a symbol of dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ. We are sealed with the cross of Christ forever. It is a permanent spiritual mark. We belong to God.

As humans, we are all born sinners. Baptism washes away the original sin and personal sin with which we are all born and frees us from our sins. We become members of the Church and the Body of Christ.

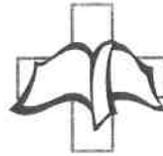
St. Paul wrote about the change that takes place in a baptized person in Romans 6:3-4. Paul explained that in baptism, Christians are united with the death of Jesus; they are in a sense buried with him. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. United with Christ, believers also rise from the dead to live in newness of life.

Dear Lord, we thank you for your unending love, that we have become sons and daughters of a heavenly Father. Thank you for your constant goodness, mercy and blessings poured upon us and for freeing us from our sins. Renew and refresh our hearts and minds each day and give us hope and vision for a future. Help us to pour out your hope and redemption into a broken world. In Jesus name, Amen.



Sharing...Sweet, salty or sour and what is your favorite treat?

1. Worship is about God _____ to us!
2. God's Word _____ you!
3. We are a Word and _____ church.
4. Baptism is an _____ sacrament.
5. Most important—"I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the _____, and of the Holy Spirit."
6. Vital pieces of communion—"This is my _____ . . ." "This cup is the new Testament in my _____."
7. As Lutherans, we believe that Christ is _____ present in the sacraments.
8. It is the **Lord's** Supper—Christ is both the _____ and the _____.



Growing...

1. What is a gift that you have received from a loved one that really made you feel loved?
2. What do you know about your baptism? When, where, sponsors...?
3. How would you respond to someone pressuring you to be re-baptized?
4. What is your favorite way to receive Holy Communion?
5. Some congregations only serve communion a few times a year, while others insist that it must be every week at every service. How would you respond to both extreme positions?
6. What are the most memorable baptism or communion experiences you have seen or been a part of?



Serving...Give a small gift or card to someone this week...just because.

Weekly Devotion Session 5 “Believe, Pray, Give”

“How Do We Respond?”

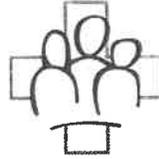
By Roxanna Boe

(Based on Hebrews 4:15-16)

Throughout the current pandemic that we are all living through, there have been many ways of dealing with it. Some have reacted with denial; it just doesn't exist. Some have tried to quarantine and follow the many guidelines that have been outlined for us: wear a mask, social distancing, don't gather in crowds, and wash hands long and often! I found myself in the latter group. Rather than feel isolated during this time, I found the last year an opportunity not only to stay connected to Faith Lutheran on-line with daily devotions, Bible studies, and worship, but it was also a chance for me to spend more time in personal Bible reading and prayer. As we read in verse 16 of Hebrews 4, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace...” Yes, what a joy! I started where our Monday morning Bible study left off in Jeremiah and read through the Old Testament with the help of a study Bible. Then I read through the New Testament twice using first the NRSV and then the old RSV with study guide helps, followed by a daily Psalm, and chapter from Proverbs. Hebrews 4:16 continues to encourage us “that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.” The Lord's mercy and grace are always there in abundance for us! A daily prayer list helped me focus on the needs of my five children, spouses, twelve grandchildren, friends, and members of our Faith family.

Alone? No, I did not feel alone because we all have access to the immediate presence of God. When we come to Him, He is always there ready to minister to our daily needs.

Lord Jesus, even in difficult times, you have promised to be and are with us. May our response reflect that promise. Amen.



Sharing...What is your earliest childhood memory?

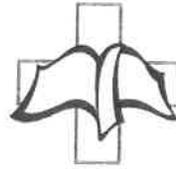
1. Responding to the Gospel is _____ important.
2. Creed comes from the Latin word _____, which means "I believe."
3. **Lutherans confess three great ecumenical creeds:**

The oldest is the _____ Creed.

The _____ Creed was developed in the 4th century.

On Holy Trinity Sunday we use the third ecumenical creed. It is called the _____ Creed.

4. Not that money in of itself is evil, but _____ it, trusting it, finding our security and hope in it, that is the root of all kinds of evil.
5. Offerings express our gratitude, trust in God, commitment to Christ's mission and wariness of _____.

**Growing...**

1. Why is it so vital to keep the "direction" of theology and worship right? What happens when it gets reversed?
2. Do you think of the creeds teaching you as you confess them? What have you learned from confessing any of the three ecumenical creeds?
3. Do you find praying to be easy and natural or more difficult and challenging?
4. Have you thought of prayer as a gift? What does it mean for us that Almighty God is not only willing to hear our prayers, but commands us to pray?
5. How would you make the case that it is *vitaly important* that the church is "always asking for money"?

**Serving...** Increase your giving to church this week, even if it's just a dollar.

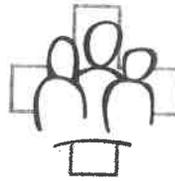
“Until All Creation Sings”

By Austin Willhite

(Based on Psalm 96:1-2)

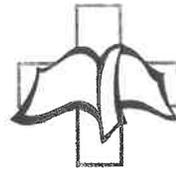
As a music leader, I often invite people to participate in song. However, the responses are not always positive: “Oh, I can’t sing,” “You don’t want my voice,” and my personal favorite, “My singing would clear the room!” We often assume anything harmonious must come from a well-practiced and talented musician, but the Psalmist here suggests otherwise, exclaiming that all the earth shall sing a new song. This is not limited to the capabilities of the human voice, but instead involves the sounds of all creation. Everything from whistling birds to the coos of a newborn baby is music to God’s ear. This “new song” that the Psalmist talks about is the news of our eternal life in Christ. By receiving the gift of everlasting salvation through the power of Jesus’ victory over sin and death, it is only right that we proclaim this truth and bless God’s name. As Christians, we are to sing of his salvation every day, until all the earth sings this new song. So, lift your voice and join with creation by singing God’s name!

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of music that surrounds us in all creation. Thank you for the gift of our eternal life through the death of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us join in the new song and let it be heard by every ear on earth. Unite our voices and give us the courage to proclaim your name until all creation sings! Amen.



Sharing... What "old person" things do you do?

1. You might not know that, second only to its theological emphasis, is the foundational Lutheran emphasis on _____.
2. Next to the Word of God, music deserves the _____ praise.
3. Whether it's an occasion of praise or lament, weeping or joy, there is a song to _____ it.
4. There is no one _____ way to sing in worship.



Growing...

1. What is your favorite hymn?
What is your favorite contemporary praise song?
2. What are some good things about traditional worship music?
3. What are some good things about contemporary worship music?
4. Why does music, next to theology, deserve the highest praise?
5. How have you seen and heard church music change in your lifetime?
How has it stayed the same?
6. How does worship music create joy and drive out the devil?
7. For you, what role does music play in worship?



Serving....Ask God to show you one way to serve another person this week and follow through.

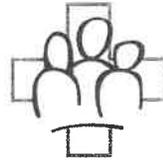
"Earning our Way?"

By Payton Eastman

(Based on Romans 12:1-2)

So often, we Christians can become confused and begin to think that we can earn salvation through works, when in fact we cannot do anything to earn God's grace and salvation. We are saved by grace through our FAITH. With this fault in mind, Paul's writing about being a living sacrifice can easily be misunderstood. While we are called to offer our lives (and bodies) as a living sacrifice, this is done in order to please our God, but does not earn us salvation. We have been bought with an immeasurable price: the blood of the Son of God himself. It is only right that we would live our lives in complete service and devotion to the One who saved us. Paul tells us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." This reminds us courageously to reject whatever we see in the world that does not line up with the Gospel, instead of conforming to those ideas. Additionally, we must realize that true change must first occur within our hearts and minds, through prayer and time in God's word.

Lord, we thank you for Paul's reminder to live as a "living sacrifice." Thank you for giving us the perfect example of how to live, in Jesus Christ. We pray that you will help each of us devote our lives to you and boldly share the faith of Jesus Christ with everyone we encounter, through our words and deeds. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen!



Sharing...What is the most embarrassing moment from your teen years?

1. It's the Holy Spirit who draws us out of the world _____ worship. Then having enlightened and sanctified us with God's gifts of grace. The Holy Spirit _____ us back out into the world.
2. Even as we worship God, He _____ us with the divine gifts of grace.
3. We serve others through all of our _____ or callings.
4. Serving the Lord is not _____ part of life; it's all of life.
5. Christians have always _____ to treasure the experience of worship.
6. What really motivates worship is seeing how it connects to and inspires, shapes and fulfills all the _____.



Growing....

1. It might seem rude for a host to tell his or her guests, "O.K., we're done. Get going!" Why is it actually good news for Christians to hear that at the end of a worship service?
2. Does Martin Luther's teaching of the Two Kingdoms or Two Reigns of God change your perception of your daily activities? Does it change your view of culture or society?
3. How does the declaration that we are at peace with God enhance the call to serve and the joy of doing so?
4. In light of the Lutheran understanding of vocation, can you think of times when you realized only after the fact that God had used you to serve someone?
5. How do you see the rhythm of weekly worship shaping what you do the rest of the week?



Serving...Each week we hear, "Go in peace and serve the Lord!" Look for a way to serve the Lord this week.

NOTES



FAITH

GROUPS

BUILDING
FAITH
TOGETHER

- Sharing
- Growing
- Serving