

Come and Grow with Us



New Member
BASICS



LEADER GUIDE

Come and Grow with Us



NEW MEMBER BASICS LEADER GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics*. This guide is directed to you, the leader. How exciting to have the opportunity to lead new member classes! Whether you are a pastor or a lay leader, the information in this manual will help you to care for and guide those persons who are thinking about joining your congregation. Your leadership will offer the opportunity for people to grow in their faith and to see the ways the church fulfills its task of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. They will also have the opportunity to begin making new friends with others joining the church.

WHO WILL COME?

The process outlined in the leader guide and the material in the participant book are directed toward those persons wishing to become members of a Lutheran congregation, particularly one that is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). *Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics* is intended to help people from a variety of church experiences—people who have already been a part of or have grown up in a Lutheran congregation; people who have been a member of another denomination; or people who have had little church background, perhaps not ever belonging to any church.

Many people joining the church today look forward to being a part of a community of faith that offers opportunities for friendships, as well as spiritual guidance and understandings which begin with the very basics. *Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics* is a six-part study that begins by inviting the participants to “Come to Belong” and to explore who God is. Not only are participants introduced to basic understandings of the Christian church, but they learn the ways the local congregation supports members and how the congregation ministers in the world. Participants also gain an understanding of what is expected of them as new members.

As new members explore the meaning of

the two sacraments and God’s promises, they “Come to a Deeper Understanding,” moving toward an awareness that helps them to “Come to Grow” through prayer, Bible study, and conversation with God.

Exploring the importance of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving as part of Lutheran worship not only invites but also creates a desire for participants to “Come to Worship.” Discovering and using gifts, both money and talents, are the focus as God’s people “Come to Share.” As forgiven people free through God’s love to care, to serve, and to love, participants explore and test ways to reach out to those not involved in a church. They discover that as people of God, it is a joy to “Come to Tell.”

Participants’ understandings can grow in a variety of ways as they move from one session to another. Those who have been longtime church members will find the information a clear, concise review. Others will appreciate starting with and building on the basics. All participants will want to get to know the unique characteristics of your congregation. Small-group sharing provides the opportunity to form new and healthy relationships. Every session gives participants the chance to meet some of the leaders of your congregation.

FROM ORIENTATION TO INCORPORATION

New member orientation is a key part of a congregation’s evangelism strategy and incorporation process. *Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics* is based on a new member incorporation strategy introduced in *Make New Members Active Members: Strategies for Incorporating New Members*, by Patricia Haller (Augsburg Fortress, 1995). The process followed in this leader guide assists new members as they prepare to join your congregation. The process allows an easy transition into the congregation, giving new members basic doctrinal and practical help as they become involved in the congregation. Because of the emphasis on relationship-building, *Come and*

Grow with Us will work best with groups of four or more people.

Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics is intended to help persons seeking membership in the congregation

- to grow in their understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of a Lutheran congregation;
- to see themselves as a part of the church and live out that identity through active involvement in congregational ministry;
- to build relationships with other people joining your congregation.

As you lead participants through the process, offer the challenge and the expectation that those attending the sessions might make a commitment to continue to grow in their discipleship even after joining the church. Discipleship is a lifelong walk and your final new member session is really the beginning and not the end.

To help achieve this goal, you might offer small groups for new members to become part of. As your orientation process draws to a close and these prospective members join the church, invite them to continue to meet in a small group for four to six weeks.

CUSTOMIZING THE PROCESS

This leader guide is written as six sessions that can be easily adapted to other time frames. Session components may be organized in a variety of ways to suit your congregational schedule and that of those attending.

Six one-hour sessions

- Gathering: ten minutes
- Exploring: twenty minutes
- Experiencing: twenty minutes
- Going: ten minutes

Each session in the leader guide is structured around four components: “Gathering,” “Exploring,” “Experiencing,” and “Going.” Each component builds on the previous one. “Gathering” brings the participants together with an opening prayer and icebreaker activity.

In “Exploring,” participants examine the basics of the Christian faith through leader

presentation, small-group sharing, and review and discussion of the participant book. For example, the Bible, the creeds, and Lutheran practices are introduced and explored.

“Experiencing” gives participants a taste of the congregation’s uniqueness and programming. Other congregation leaders and members can be called on to help participants begin to focus on ways that they will become involved. Several options are provided. You can select the ones that best suit your group’s needs, interests, and schedule.

“Going” provides time for review and prayer. The approach to prayer builds on the previous session to help participants become more comfortable with prayer. “Going” also identifies reading and tasks to be completed by participants in preparation for the next session.

Add breaks and light refreshments as you desire. For the sixty-minute sessions, you might wish to have refreshments available as participants arrive and throughout the session, or they might be offered at the end of the sessions. Refreshment time is a good time for relationship building.

For the first session, you may choose to make “Gathering” fifteen minutes as you take more time for group building activities and to distribute materials. To compensate you could shorten another component, such as “Going.” In some sessions, you may decide to make “Exploring” thirty minutes to allow a longer time for discussion. In such a case you might then choose only one “Experiencing” option.

Note: For the above times to work, you will need to be very prompt in bringing small group sharing to a close after five minutes. Visiting presenters (see “Experiencing”) will also need to be instructed about time constraints.

Instead of six one-hour sessions, you might offer three ninety-minute sessions or a one-day seminar or retreat (four to six hours).

Three ninety-minute sessions In order to have three ninety-minute sessions, combine the sessions as follows:

Session 1: “Come to Belong” and “Come to a Deeper Understanding.”

Session 2: “Come to Grow” and “Come to Worship.”

Session 3: “Come to Share” and “Come to Tell.”

Consider this plan for timing and use of session components:

Gathering: ten minutes

Exploring: forty minutes

Experiencing: thirty minutes

Going: ten minutes

For “Gathering,” choose one prayer and one icebreaker activity from one of the two sessions. For example, for your first session you might use the prayer from “Come to Belong” and the icebreaker from “Come to a Deeper Understanding.”

For “Exploring,” aim to cover all the material from both sessions in forty minutes.

For “Experiencing,” choose from the options to fill thirty minutes.

For “Going,” use “Session Summary” from both sessions and select one of the two closing prayers. Remember to cover “For Next Time” from both sessions.

One-day seminar For this option, combine the “Exploring” and “Experiencing” components from the six sessions into three one-hour modules. Begin the day with “Gathering” and end it with “Going.”

Gathering: twenty minutes

Module 1: “Come to Belong” and “Come to a Deeper Understanding”

Exploring: forty minutes

Experiencing: twenty minutes

Break: ten minutes

Module 2: “Come to Grow” and “Come to Worship”

Exploring: forty minutes

Experiencing: twenty minutes

Break: ten minutes

Module 3: “Come to Share” and “Come to Tell”

Exploring: forty minutes

Experiencing: twenty minutes

Going: twenty minutes

For “Gathering,” use the prayer from “Come to Belong.” Do both icebreaker activities from “Come to Belong” and “Come to a Deeper Understanding.”

For “Exploring” in each module, aim to cover all the combined material in forty minutes.

For “Experiencing,” choose from the options provided in both sessions to fill twenty minutes.

For “Going” use “Session Summary” from all six sessions. Use the closing prayer from “Come to Tell.” You might use other “Going” prayers from other sessions before the break times.

If you choose to follow this one-day seminar time frame, you will need to allow time within the module for completing the spiritual gifts assessment and member record forms that your congregation uses. Or you might send these to participants to complete in advance of the seminar.

The one-day seminar option has some drawbacks. Achieving the relationship-building objective will be more difficult. Also, participants may be reluctant to share openly in small groups.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

This leader guide provides the process for your new member orientation sessions. You and each prospective new member will need a participant book, *Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics* (Augsburg Fortress, code 23-2331), which provides much of the content to be examined during “Exploring.” The participant book is a valuable aid in teaching basic concepts and will be a useful reference for participants long after the sessions are over. The leader guide and participant book work together to assist those attending to learn about discipleship and the Lutheran faith.

Encourage participants to use the Bible. Give directions to help them do so and look for additional ways to relate the passages to their life. Ask them to bring Bibles to every session. Have extras available for people who

COME AND GROW WITH US

don't have one of their own or who forget to bring theirs. You might give Bibles as a gift to all new members on the day they join the congregation.

Create a new member notebook or packet that you may personalize according to the needs of your congregation. You might include

- your congregation's annual report,
- a church directory,
- forms for personal information for congregational record keeping,
- a pledge card,
- a time and talent survey,
- information about various ministries,
- a listing of congregation council members,
- the congregation's mission statement or other items that speak of the uniqueness of your congregation,
- information about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
- a magnet, pen, or window decal with a personalized imprint about your congregation.

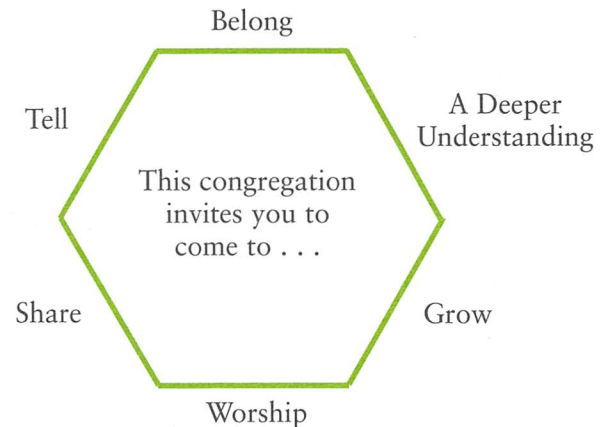
You will need the materials listed below for every class.

- Chalkboard, newsprint, or overhead projector
- Chalk or markers
- Name tags
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles
- Participant books
- New member packets

Note that the first page of each session in the leader guide identifies additional materials needed for that particular session.

Review available spiritual gifts assessment tools and select one to use with Session 5: "Come to Share." Two to consider are *Opening Your Spiritual Gifts* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, code 69-7255) and *Discovering the Gifts of the People* (Augsburg Fortress, 23-2327). Both can be ordered by calling Augsburg Fortress, Publishers at 800-328-4648. You will need to order one copy for each new member and you might include it in the New Member Packet.

As you lead participants from one session topic to another, you might find it helpful to use the diagram below. The diagram suggests a wholistic way of understanding church membership, using the six *Come and Grow with Us* topics.



LEADER PREPARATION

Before the orientation process begins, read through the entire leader guide and participant book to become familiar with their content. Then as you prepare for each session, read the leader guide and participant book material that you plan to cover in that session.

Note that the beginning of each session includes biblical-historical background and session objectives. The biblical-historical material serves as background for participant book content. The list of objectives keeps the purpose of the sessions at the forefront and correlates with the brief summary at the beginning and end of each session, which reinforce the learning.

As you prepare to lead the orientation process, read Acts 2. Note that it was God who brought the church into being. God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the people. The believers gathered in close fellowship and shared their belongings. Every day they continued to meet as a group in the temple. They had their meals together, eating the food with glad and humble hearts, praised God, and

enjoyed the good will of all the people. “And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47b).

Your congregation is entrusted with teaching and leading others into this fellowship. That includes those with different backgrounds and traditions. Your message is the same as in Acts 2, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). It is a welcoming and joyful message to offer new people among you.

And perhaps as a leader teaching these truths, you too will hear in the Scriptures your opportunity to model discipleship—to worship, pray, study God’s word, and share Holy Communion. As you lead each session, pray for the Spirit’s guidance in your preparation and for those whom you teach. “And day by day the Lord” will help you more readily hear and answer questions, offer information, and

be sensitive to the needs of those who come.

As you lead, create an awareness of the need for prayer in the participants’ daily lives. In simple ways you can create opportunities for participants to begin to feel comfortable praying, either quietly to themselves or aloud in the group.

Here is a prayer to use as you begin planning:

Precious Lord, you have called me to guide and lead your people. Thank you for that honor. Now be with me as I prepare and plan each session. Remind me to be gentle, loving, caring, and patient, modeling your love. Fill me and the participants with your Holy Spirit. May all that we do be to your glory. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

May God bless you and guide you as you plan these sessions. May God’s spirit fill you as you guide God’s people along the path of discipleship.

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- Pray for God’s spirit to be with you as you prepare and lead.
- Send a letter of invitation to all prospective participants three weeks before date of first session.
- At least three consecutive weeks before first session, put announcements in the Sunday bulletin inviting people to attend the sessions and listing dates and time.
- Arrange for child care.
- Plan light refreshments.
- Recruit visiting presenters for the various options under the “Experiencing” component of each session. Provide them with presentation ideas from the leader guide.
- Gather information for the new member packet.
- Make follow-up phone calls one week before sessions as a reminder of sessions.



SESSION ONE

come to belong

This first gathering focuses on what it means to be a part of this congregation and the larger church. What makes the church, Christian disciples, and especially this congregation unique?

BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The writers of the Old Testament described the Israelites as “God’s chosen people.” As descendants of Abraham, God blessed them so that they could be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:2). The writer of 1 Peter reminds Christians that through Christ we too have been chosen by God so that others may be blessed through us.

The earliest Christians lived and worshiped not as individuals, but in community. Many of them shared their possessions with each other (Acts 2:44-47).

In order to distinguish themselves from those who practiced other religions, first-century Christians used basic creeds to define their beliefs. The simple statement “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9), one of the first of these creeds, affirmed their faith that the particular person Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah, the risen Son of God. The early Christian converts were asked to recite these creeds immediately before they were baptized. In the Lutheran church today, the congregation recites the creed before a baptism.

Christian creeds have also functioned to correct false teachings. Heretical Christian sects, many of which denied either the humanity or full divinity of Jesus, abounded in the early church. Creedal statements sought to rectify these heretical beliefs.

Persisting controversies about the nature of Christ resulted in the development of the Nicene Creed (named for a church council which met in the city of Nicea in A.D. 325.). The earliest exact text of the Apostles’ Creed dates from approximately A.D. 400, though it is clearly based on earlier creeds. Both of these creeds affirm Christians’ belief in the Trinity, echoing Jesus’ baptismal commission recorded in Matthew 28:19.

Contemporary Lutherans, like many Christians, continue to recite one of the creeds during their regular Sunday gathering as a reminder of why we have gathered together as God’s chosen people.

OBJECTIVES

In this session participants will

- learn the basic definition of the church and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ;
- explore with other members their connection to the body of Christ and the life of discipleship;
- begin to identify ways they already live as disciples in the congregation and community and to discover new avenues for growth;
- build relationships with other prospective members.

PREPARATION

- Decide between the options under “Experiencing” on pages 10-11.
- Invite the congregation president or another leader to present information about the congregation. For presentation suggestions, show the presenter a copy of the leader guide. See page 11.
- Write the icebreaker activity (found under “Gathering”) on newsprint or a chalkboard.
- Arrange chairs so participants will be able to see the leader and, if possible, each other. Try a half-circle arrangement.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Your congregation’s mission statement, annual report, and a list of congregation council members from the new member packet.

For a listing of materials needed in each session, see page 6 of “Introduction.”

GATHERING

WELCOME

Build a climate of welcome each time you meet. You will model acceptance, love, and comfort as you welcome each person. Your hospitality reflects the love of the church.

At this first session as you welcome participants, give them a name tag, a participant book, and a new member packet.

PRAYER

Once the group has gathered, begin the session with prayer. Use this one or create one of your own.

Let us ask God to be present as we begin our steps toward church membership and discipleship.

Gracious Lord, it is good to be here to share the story of your church and of your great love for us. As we study and reflect on your word, we ask you to guide, lead, and enrich our time together. We look forward to knowing you in a deeper way and getting to know one another. We dedicate the study to your glory. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Identify the materials participants will need for each session.

Bible Tell participants that the Bible will be

used in each session. They may bring their own or you may provide them.

Participant book Introduce and distribute the participant book, *Come and Grow With Us: New Member Basics*, to be used in the sessions. Tell participants that they will use the material in each session. Suggest to them that reading material between sessions will make the learnings richer. Direct participants to take a moment to leaf through the book now. Call attention to the various information: Bible passage, material on Christian and Lutheran understandings, illustrations. Point out the space at the end of each session for participant notes.

New member packet Identify the new member packet. Suggest that participants take time at home to look over the materials in the packet. Ask participants to bring it to each session.

ICEBREAKER

Have participants say their name and three things about themselves that others won't know. If the group is large (more than twelve people), divide them into small groups of four for this activity. They can remain in the small groups for the next activity.

EXPLORING

what about this church?

Divide participants into groups of four. If you wish, they may stay in the same groups from the icebreaker activity. Instruct the small groups to have each person describe a time when they felt like a needed part of a group, like they belonged, and what they are expecting from your church community. Allow five minutes for this discussion.

Gather the whole group again. Ask participants to look up 1 Peter 2:9 in their Bibles (give instruction as to where 1 Peter is), or

read the same passage printed in their participant books (page 4). You may read the verse or you may choose a reader. If you select someone, make sure the person will be comfortable reading aloud.

Next, introduce "What About This Church?" (page 4 in the participant book). Read aloud or review the main points under "A Supportive Community" and "A Believing Community."

With the group's input, list on newsprint, chalkboard, or overhead transparencies key characteristics of the church (*God's chosen*

people; a royal priesthood; called; forgiven; live in the light; gather regularly; baptize; commune; proclaim God's mighty acts and word; support each other; created, gathered, healed, and saved by God; praise God, confess faith in the Triune God).

one god—three persons

The Christian community confesses faith in a triune God: one God, three persons. Next read aloud or review the points under “Our Father: The Creator Who Cares,” “Jesus: Our Suffering Savior,” “Jesus: Bringer of New Life,” and “The Spirit: Giver of Faith” (pages 5-8 in the participant book).

Have participants pair up with the person next to them and identify a surprise, new insight, or helpful reminder from this material about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The marks of discipleship

Bring everyone back to one large group. Ask those who are willing to answer the questions “What do I expect of church membership?” and “How is the church and church membership the same as and different from other organizations I belong to?” List responses on newsprint.

Now relate this list to what the Lutheran church says it means to be a disciple, a follow-

er of Jesus. Have the whole group look at the “The Marks of Discipleship” (page 8 in the participant book) while you read it aloud. This definition is based on the Affirmation of Baptism service in *Lutheran Book of Worship*, page 201.

Ask the group to compare what you have read to their list. How is it the same? How is it different? Ask if there are other items that might be added to the list, including the items listed below.

Healthy church membership, or discipleship, means that I

- seek to live for Jesus as Lord of my life;
- worship regularly;
- pray and study God's word;
- seek to use my gifts and talents in serving in the church, the community, the world;
- give my monetary gifts so that ministry can take place;
- serve and love others in their need;
- share my faith with others and invite them to come and hear the story for themselves;
- become involved in various areas of the church's life;
- use my gifts of love and care in the community and in the world.

Explain that during the course of this new-member orientation process, the group will further explore these marks of discipleship.

EXPERIENCING

DISCIPLESHIP IN ACTION

Choose from the following three options, allowing ten minutes total.

Testimony Invite a member of your congregation to talk about what it means to live as a disciple of Christ. Ask that person to share the joy and richness, and also the struggles, of being a disciple.

Small groups Divide participants into groups of four to discuss the question: “Given where I am in my faith journey, how can this community help me develop as a disciple?”

Congregational opportunities Share some specific ways your congregation builds relationships among members, such as education opportunities for adults, youth, and children, small groups, fellowship events, various worship opportunities, men's and women's groups, service projects, being part of a committee or task group, and so on.

BELONGING TO THIS CONGREGATION

Choose from the following two options. Allow ten minutes.

Congregation's mission Have the president of your congregation or another designated leader make a presentation regarding the congregation's organization for mission. You might have your annual report available as a reference. The following might be reviewed:

1. Mission statement (found in the new member packet). Point out how the statement shows your congregation's purpose, offers a vision for the congregation's ministry, and helps to set the goals for ministry.

2. Organization

- Democratic. All members vote on ministry goals, concerns, and budget at the annual congregational meeting.
- Congregation council. The main governing body meets for regular business of the congregation as well as makes recommendations for the congregation's annual meeting.
- Committees. Working committees report their activities to the congregation council. Committees plan and perform program ministries drawn from the mission statement and work within an approved budget.

3. Staff. Identify the various staff members and their areas of ministry.

Expectations of members Share the congregation's expectations of members. For example: frequent worship, stewardship of both money and gifts, participation in adult study groups or small friendship groups for continued spiritual growth.

In sharing expectations, remind members that belonging to a church is different than belonging to other organizations.

The church is the body of Christ called to reach out to tell the story of Jesus. When we believe in Christ, we respond with a commitment and that commitment will not only help the church in its task, but also bless those making the commitment. If we disconnect our car from its battery, the car ceases to function. When we are not connected to our Lord through the community of faith, prayer, and study, we too cease to be effective as God's witnesses.

GOING

SESSION SUMMARY

Review these points:

“What” these prospective members are joining is a unique community that praises God, baptizes, communes, and shares God's word as we serve and love one another.

The Christian church's creeds share the “Who” we know and the “What” we believe. We are a community that believes in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit—three persons in one, called the Triune God.

We love others because God first loved us. As a community that supports one another, we are reminded

- to thank God for each person here and for this new fellowship group;
- to pray for one another while we are apart;
- to go home, to go to work, to go into the

world, and in the going to model God's gracious love to everyone.

PRAYER

Ask the group to stand in a circle. They may hold hands if you feel that is appropriate. You as leader say a brief prayer such as:

Gracious God, thank you for our time together. Be with each of us until our next gathering time. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

CREED

Along with or in place of a closing prayer, say the Apostles' Creed together. Refer to the participant book (page 7).

FOR NEXT TIME

Encourage participants to read pages 9-13 in the participant book called “Come to A Deeper Understanding.”



SESSION TWO

Come to a Deeper Understanding

This session focuses on Lutheran beginnings and distinct understandings. Those walking the path of discipleship hear God's demands, but also God's promises. When we gather with others around the table and at the baptismal font, we celebrate the gift of God's grace.

BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Martin Luther treasured Paul's letter to the Romans because it so boldly pronounced God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. As a devout young man, Luther struggled with his inability to live free from sin. With a great sense of relief he "discovered" Paul's reminder that all have sinned and yet through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Christians are justified because of God's grace (Romans 3:22-25).

Luther clung to Paul's words when he made his highly publicized statement (the Ninety-Five Theses) against the church's sale of indulgences, which he believed obscured the scriptural witness to God's graceful interaction with humans. Luther's actions led to his eventual excommunication from the Roman Catholic church.

Throughout his life, Luther initiated a number of worship, social, and educational reforms. He was a prolific writer, and his translation of the Scriptures into the German language was inspired by his desire that the Word of God should be easily accessible to all Christians. Luther's concern about the poor level of religious education among Christian families led him to publish the Small and Large Catechisms. These works continue to serve as sources of learning in Lutheran confirmation and adult study groups today. *The Book of Concord*, compiled after Luther's death, contains these and a number of Luther's and other reformers' significant writings.

Lutheranism spread from Germany throughout northern Europe and eventually to North America. Initially, Lutherans in North America were segregated by culture and language. Approximately twenty-one Lutheran church bodies exist in the United States today. They differ primarily on one issue: how to interpret the Bible. The results of those interpretations are seen in church polity such as women's ordination and ecumenical partnerships.

OBJECTIVES

In this session participants will

- learn about distinctive aspects of the Lutheran tradition—its understanding of law and gospel and its sacramental practices;
- explore with other members about God's presence and grace;
- identify ways they can receive and participate in the sacraments;
- continue building relationships with other members of the group.

PREPARATION

- Write icebreaker question on newsprint or chalkboard.
- Choose from the options under "Experiencing," pages 14-15.
- Invite guest presenters according to options chosen. Show them a copy of the leader guide for presentation suggestions.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Printed information about the ELCA from the new member packet.

For a listing of materials needed in each session, see page 6 of "Introduction."

GATHERING

WELCOME

Welcome the group back together. Be sure everyone has a name tag.

PRAYER

Begin the session with prayer. Use this one or create your own.

Gracious God, you have guided your church throughout history and richly blessed it. As it has grown, you have called leaders to carry forth your gospel. Be with us and fill us with your Spirit as we grow in becoming disciples in your church today. May all we do be to your glory. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

REVIEW

Share briefly the following summary of the previous session (from “What About This Church?” “One God—Three Persons,” and the “Marks of Discipleship,” pages 4-8 in the

participant book) and review the information discussed in the last session.

- God created us,
- Jesus died for us,
- The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of faith.
- As people of God whom God loves, we are called into ministry as disciples. We worship, pray, and study God’s word, as well as reach out to others.

ICEBREAKER

Have participants give their name and then answer the following questions: “Who and/or what brought you to this congregation?” “And what brought you back a second time?” (If the group is larger than twelve persons, divide into groups of four.)

List the answers on newsprint. Remember to pass the answers along to the evangelism committee.

EXPLORING

who are Lutherans?

Have the participants get into groups of four. Ask the small groups to have each person tell about a time when they felt they “missed the boat” in some life situation, and how that felt. (*For example, not getting a job, failing a test, being late for an interview, and so on.*) Allow five minutes for this discussion.

Gather the whole group and summarize that “missing the boat” often leaves us with a feeling of hopelessness and loss. Ask the group to look up Romans 3:22b-25a, either in the Bible or participant book (page 9). Ask for a volunteer to read the passage. (Give instruction as to where in the Bible Romans is found.)

Allow the whole group to respond to how this passage might relate to the earlier discussion about “missing the boat.” (*We have all missed the mark; we are all sinful; and thus*

we would live in hopelessness, but Christ hit the mark on our behalf.)

Emphasize that sin is more than failure or wrong actions; it is a state of being. Sin is about humans being human—forgetting that we are finite, mortal.

Next, introduce the main points under “Who are Lutherans?” including “Lutheran Beginnings” and “Events in Martin Luther’s Life” (pages 9-10 in the participant book).

Have pairs review “Grace: Free and Spontaneous” and “In God We Trust” (page 10 in the participant book) and list various items or characteristics that identify who Lutherans are.

Law and gospel

Introduce this section that begins on page 10 of the participant book. With the same partner as before, have participants review the

points under “Law and Gospel” including “What God Demands,” “What God Promises,” and “Doing Good: It’s All in the Timing” and add to their previous list the emphases and beliefs that identify Lutherans.

Have participants look at the illustrations on page 11 of the participant book. Ask them to consider how both law and gospel are gifts from God.

Gather the pairs into groups of four people and have them discuss briefly the following question: “When was the first time you realized that there was a God, or a time when God became real for you?” Allow participants to share briefly. Give them permission to “pass” if they are not comfortable answering.

Read or review the information under “Two Sacraments” (page 12 in the participant book). The discussion reminds us that God is real. And God knew that we needed to experience God in ways that are real. God gave the sacraments to remind us God is with us and loves us.

Note for participants that Lutherans practice two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion. Also explain that Lutherans baptize infants, because of our understanding of God’s grace, of God—not us—making our relationship with God right. Compare these practices to those of other Christian denomi-

nations. Invite participants from other church traditions to explain differences in practice that they know about.

members of the family

Read aloud or review the main points under “Members of the Family” (page 13 in the participant book). Have the whole group define “family” by its activities and benefits. Then see how those answers relate to being a part of a church family. For example, family members

- care for one another;
- share joy or pain with one another;
- have fun together;
- learn together;
- disagree and get angry, but still love each other;
- pray together;
- attend church together;
- eat together;
- give gifts to one another;
- celebrate together.

All of the above also relates to our being a part of the church family. God’s action makes us family. God adopted us. We share in the promise of salvation when we accept God’s call, which opens us to more calls and God’s gift of grace.

EXPERIENCING

DISCIPLESHIP IN ACTION

Choose from the following options. Allow five minutes for each one and combine them to make a ten-minute segment.

Testimony by a young person Invite a confirmand to share the following: “Thoughts I have when I receive communion.” (An alternative can be to ask a relatively new member to give a testimony.)

Testimony by an adult Invite a member of the worship committee to share “What baptism means to me.”

Small groups Instruct participants to gather in groups of three to four people. Ask each person to respond to one of the following questions:

1. Describe a baptism that was particularly meaningful to you—you might have participated as a member of the congregation, sponsor, parent, or person baptized. What made the experience meaningful to you?

2. How do you approach Communion? Explain your answer.

- a. Like I’m anticipating a celebration
- b. As a time to connect with others in my congregation

- c. With bowed head and on my knees
- d. As a time for introspection
- e. Other

Communion in this congregation Ask a communion assistant or worship committee member to present information on your congregation's communion practices. For example, when and how frequently communion is offered; the method of distribution—by intinction, common cup; whether both wine and grape juice are offered; the process around the altar; and so on. Allow for questions.

THIS CONGREGATION AND THE ELCA

Invite a congregation council member to lead the group in reviewing the following information about the ELCA. You might include similar printed information in the new member packet. Allow ten minutes for this review.

This congregation is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, often referred to as the ELCA. It is a 5.5 million member church body that came into being in 1988 when three Lutheran denominations, the Lutheran Church of America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) merged.

ELCA congregations are organized in geographical areas and are part of a synod. Sixty-five synods are organized into nine regions. Each synod has a bishop.

The synod council is similar to a congregation council. Its members are elected from nominees from among the churches making up the geographical areas of the synod.

Delegates from across the synods are elected to participate in the ELCA churchwide assembly at a ratio of 60% lay persons to 40% clergy. This gathering takes place every two years.

Nominees from across the church are elected for service on a churchwide council or other boards of the ELCA.

Congregations in a synod and synods in the ELCA offer cooperative programming and support so that a broader response to ministry opportunities can be offered.

Programs and resources are offered from both synods and the churchwide organization to congregations. Joining together they provide funding for a variety of worldwide ministries such as Lutheran World Relief, World Hunger Program, Lutheran Social Services, colleges and seminaries, hospitals, and outdoor ministries, to name just a few.

GOING

SESSION SUMMARY

Review these points:

God has freely given us the gifts of law and gospel, God's demands and God's promises. We freely respond with faith.

Through Baptism and Holy Communion, God acts in and among us and we respond.

As we go, we thank God for Martin Luther and other leaders who call the church to faithfulness. Knowing that we live in grace means that we go celebrating the risen Savior.

PRAYER

Direct the group to stand in a circle and hold hands for the closing prayer. Ask each person to say, "Loving Creator, this is (first

name). Today I discovered _____. Thank you." The person to the right goes next.

You as leader begin the prayer and end it "in Jesus' name we pray, Amen." Instruct participants that if they do not wish to pray aloud, they simply squeeze the hand of the person on their right and pray in their heart. The prayers continue around the circle.

FOR NEXT TIME

Encourage participants to read "Come to Grow" in the participant book. Also encourage them to read the annual report in the new member packet to discover other information pertaining to leadership in their new church.



SESSION THREE

come to grow

Our deepest longings can be expressed by speaking with God in prayer. They can be met by hearing God's love story written to us in the Bible. This session explores the importance of time spent in prayer and Bible study in order for us to grow in faith and discipleship.

BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This session's biblical text highlights our call to pray. Paul encourages the Philippians to place their worries in God's hands. Many biblical texts witness to the importance of prayer. In the Old Testament, Abraham pleads with God to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of the righteous ones (Genesis 18:22-33). Hannah calls on God to give her a son (1 Samuel 1:11). The psalms record the prayers of the people of Israel, both their songs of thanksgiving and their cries of despair. In the New Testament, Jesus prays (Mark 6:46) and commands his followers to pray, even for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:44). Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, instructing them to be persistent (Luke 11:5-13).

Many authors, living at different times in history, wrote the sixty-six books we know as the Bible. The earliest texts record events that happened around 2000 B.C. The latest texts witness to life in the early church towards the end of the first century A.D. The writers of these books wanted to convey a specific message for the people of faith living at their time in history. To achieve this, writers used different styles of literature. These include historical narratives, poetry, letters, and gospels. Many scholars, pastors, and others who study the Bible use the historical-critical method. This method allows them to examine each passage in its original context, as much as possible, with its literary features and in light of its historical development. This process of studying the Bible is called exegesis.

The biblical authors wrote in their native languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. In later centuries, monks hand-copied all biblical texts. Only the very rich and those associated with churches and universities could access the Bible. Martin Luther was one of the first people to translate the Bible from its original languages. With the advent of the printing press in the sixteenth century and the new translations developed during the Reformation, ordinary people were able to read the Bible for the very first time.

OBJECTIVES

In this session participants will

- explore teachings about prayer and about the Bible;
- share insights with other members about growth in faith;
- identify congregational opportunities for growth in faith;
- continue to build relationships with other participants.

PREPARATION

- Decide between the options listed under "Experiencing" on pages 18-19.
- Invite visiting leaders for this session according to the option chosen and share suggestions from the leader guide.
- Write icebreaker activity on newsprint or chalkboard.
- Write questions for small groups (found under "Belonging to This Congregation") on newsprint or chalkboard.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Informational pamphlet or sheets on educational opportunities and fellowship opportunities if these are not already in the new member packet.

For a listing of materials needed in each session, see page 6 of "Introduction."

GATHERING

WELCOME

Welcome participants and once again make name tags available.

PRAYER

Begin the session with prayer. Invite one of the visiting leaders to open with prayer. They can use this one or create their own.

Dear Lord Jesus, we are grateful that we are here together and that we can call on you and know that you will hear us. How glad we are to be reminded of your love for us. Send

your Spirit to open our hearts and minds and bless us as we offer ourselves to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

ICEBREAKER

Have participants share their name and any nickname they were called when they were growing up. Have them tell how they got it and if they still have it. If they don't still have it, have them tell how they got rid of it. (If there are more than twelve participants, divide into groups of four to share.)

EXPLORING

nourishing faith

Summarize the material from the paragraph "Nourishing Faith" (page 14 in the participant book).

If participants aren't already divided into groups of four people, do so now. Ask them to think of a time when they were bursting with excitement and wanted to share that "good news" with someone else. Or have them think of a time when they were extremely disappointed and wanted to share with someone their disappointment.

Have participants talk about how the situation felt. Then have each one tell their small group

- who they shared their joy or concern with;
- why they chose that person;
- how it affected their relationship with the other person.

Next, ask participants to find Philippians 4:6-7 in their Bibles. Ask someone who will feel comfortable to read the passage aloud. Then ask participants to simply call out what parts of these verses on prayer seemed to jump out at them. (*Don't worry, pray and give thanks, make requests to God, receive peace, keep in faith in Jesus.*)

prayer: openness to surprise

Read aloud or review the main points under "Prayer: Openness to Surprise," including "How Shall We Pray?" "Direct Access," "Loving on Our Knees," and "The Gift of Conversation" (pages 14-16 in the participant book).

Ask participants to think of the previous conversation about sharing joys and concerns with a friend. Have them find and share with a partner

- the similarities of this kind of communication when it is God with whom we are communicating; and
- if they find a difference in sharing when it is God they are talking to.

Have the pairs make notes. Gather the group and list their major points on newsprint. (*For example: Communication builds the relationship; sharing worries relieves us of stress; confession of our shortcomings helps us grow and be able to start over; communication brings friend closer, the other person is accessible; time spent in conversation can affirm our faith and trust; communication is a gift of love; we thank the friend for caring and listening.*)

All of the above would also be true of God. Perhaps there would be more trust in telling God, who won't share the story with anyone.

Reading the Bible

Summarize the opening paragraphs of this section of the participant book (page 16): God speaks to us through the Bible. Reading or hearing it read is important—through it we open ourselves to God's spirit. Lutherans believe that Scripture is the norm for our faith and life.

Divide the participants into new teams of two to three people. Have each team take one of the following sections from the participant book (pages 16-18): "Love Letters from God," "The Story That Saves," and "Christ: The Loving Face of God." Each team reads its section and makes a report of the highlights to the rest of the participants.

From "Love Letters from God," be sure this point is made:

- Like books in a library, the books of the Bible emphasize different themes. Yet the one common theme is God's love for us and all creation.

Make these points from "The Story That Saves":

- Lutherans place much importance on the Bible because reading it allows us to experience the presence of God and leads us to follow the way of Jesus Christ.
- As a result of reading and experiencing Scripture, new understandings came to Martin Luther. The same can be true for us.
- As the text that contains the story of God's love for God's people, the Bible is the only story that saves.

Make these points from "Christ: The Loving Face of God":

- The loving face of God was first revealed in the Old Testament texts before Christ came. Now God's love is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word of God.
- The authority of the Bible begins and ends with Jesus Christ, the good news. The Word of God in the form of a book must be seen in its relation to Christ.
- To receive God, truth, and life, we turn to Christ and therefore to the Bible, the manger in which Christ lies.

EXPERIENCING

DISCIPLESHIP IN ACTION

Choose from the three following options. Allow five to ten minutes for each one.

Ways to grow in this congregation Ask the education committee chairperson to present information about educational and other growth opportunities in the congregation. Refer the presenter to the following ideas.

- Call attention to the new member packet. Speak about the different materials there that list Bible study opportunities and times, Sunday school classes and times for all ages, special educational or spiritual programs, vacation Bible school, confirmation classes, men's groups, women's groups, and other small groups in your congregation.

- Tell how the different programs can help members grow on their path of discipleship.
- Participants are invited not only to be a part of the events, but also to offer their gifts to serve in some of the areas as teachers and committee or task force members.
- If small groups for new members are offered following the new member orientation process, describe that opportunity—the meeting times, focus, and number of meetings.

Friendship opportunities Ask the fellowship (or congregational life) chairperson or representative to describe opportunities to grow through relationship-building. Share the following ideas with the presenter.

- Review items in the new member packet that call attention to friendship opportunities.
- Discuss the importance of coming to fellowship events to get to know other members and the importance of having fun and celebrating together. Such events might include time for refreshments before, after, or between Sunday worship services, congregational dinners, square dances, dine-around groups, and support groups.
- Invite participants to not only to be a part of the events, but also to offer their gifts to serve in some of the areas.

Small groups Have pairs look in the new member packet and find some ways that your congregation can help them grow in their communication with God. For example:

- Small group opportunities—members spend time in Bible study, prayer, relationship building, and ministry tasks
- Sponsors, shepherds, mentors, council members, other leaders, staff members to support and pray for them
- Prayer partners or prayer chain
- Sunday school classes and other educational opportunities
- Resources on prayer and spiritual growth

BELONGING TO THIS CONGREGATION

Allow ten minutes for this activity. Have participants gather into groups of four to discuss the following (write questions on newsprint for the group):

- What new insights have you gathered from this discussion on prayer and Bible reading?
- How can you put these insights into personal steps that will help you grow as a disciple?

Allow five minutes for discussion. Bring everyone back together and ask for volunteers to share their responses.

GOING

SESSION SUMMARY

Review these points:

We go in thanksgiving for new friends we are making. We go making an intentional commitment to pray in the coming week, especially for those who don't have a church or don't know about Jesus. We go committed to reading the Bible verses we have studied in our sessions thus far.

The Bible offers us an opportunity to see Christ at the center of creation and the opportunity to grow in our relationship with God. God urges us to pray; that communication allows us to share our joys and sorrows. The Bible tells us that when we ask we receive (Luke 11:5-13). We receive continually God's assurance of forgiveness, which allows us to live our lives in the world in joy and in peace.

PRAYER

Refer participants to the Lord's Prayer printed in the participant book (page 15). Gather in a circle. Explain that the group will say the Lord's Prayer together after you as leader pray the following prayer aloud.

Dear Lord, we thank you for bringing us together to study your word and to get to know one another and you. Hear us as we pray together the prayer you taught us. Our Father in heaven. . . .

FOR NEXT TIME

Ask if someone in the group would be willing to offer the opening prayer in the next session. Note the opening prayer printed on page 21, which could be read by the volunteer.

Have participants read the information in the participant book (pages 19-23), "Come to Worship."



SESSION FOUR

come to worship

This session examines the centerpoints of Lutheran worship. The baptismal font, the pulpit, and the Lord's table remind us of God's action for and among us. We are forgiven, redeemed, and blessed by God's presence.

BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This session's biblical text reflects Jesus' understanding of life in the kingdom of God: We are to gather together in remembrance of him (Luke 22:14-23). We baptize people into the community, the body of Christ. At the baptism of young children, parents and sponsors promise to bring them "to the services of God's house" (*LBW*, page 121). We assemble weekly, in the name of Jesus, to hear the Word and share the Lord's Supper. When we gather, we pray for each other and for the world. We also come together with the community for other ritual events in our lives: weddings and funerals.

The first Christians, many of whom were Jewish, modeled their worship on that of the synagogue. We still follow some of these traditions. Like worshipers in the synagogue, we listen to scripture readings and sermons. Also, the practice of praying our thanks to God before we make our requests comes from the Jewish tradition of prayer.

The Sunday service, or liturgy, follows the form of the earliest Christian worship. We assemble, hear the Word read and proclaimed, offer our prayers and our gifts to God, gather around the table for the meal, and then receive the benediction. This form parallels the experience of our brothers and sisters in other Christian denominations.

Much of our Sunday liturgy is rooted in biblical texts and in early Christian liturgical texts. The *kyrie* ("Lord, have mercy"), sung as part of the liturgy since the fourth century, echoes the cries of blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) and the Canaanite woman who pleads that Jesus heal her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28). When we sing "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life," as we stand to hear the Gospel text, we are repeating the words of Peter when he promised not to abandon Jesus (John 6:68). The benediction "The Lord bless you and keep you . . ." echoes the words that God instructed Aaron to use to bless the people of Israel (Numbers 6:22-26).

OBJECTIVES

In this session participants will

- explore basic understandings of worship and Lutheran liturgy, including its biblical bases;
- come to appreciate worship as a community experience, a response to God, and an important aspect of discipleship;
- identify opportunities to enhance their participation in corporate worship;
- continue to build relationships with other participants.

PREPARATION

- Choose between the options under "Experiencing" on page 22.
- Invite guest presenters and share presentation ideas from the leader guide.
- Print out words to "Jesus Loves Me," if you choose to sing it as a closing.
- Write icebreaker activity on newsprint or chalkboard.
- Arrange to meet in the worship area for part of your meeting time. See "Exploring," page 21.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- *LBW* for study and singing (one for every one or two people).
- Recent worship bulletin (one per person).
- Spiritual gifts assessment material for participants to fill out before Session 5.

For a listing of materials needed in each session, see page 6 of "Introduction."

GATHERING

WELCOME

Once again, offer a warm welcome to participants and have them wear their name tags.

PRAYER

Have the person who volunteered at the last session open with a brief prayer. (The volunteer may create a prayer or use this one.)

Dear God, we are glad to be here together. Send your Spirit to fill us and to help us continue to grow as disciples. Your Word teaches us the importance of worship and prayer in our lives. Guide us as we learn ways to enrich our worship life and remind us to remember those who don't have a place to worship. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

In addition to or instead of the prayer, sing hymn 564 from LBW, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow." It can be sung a cappella or with keyboard accompaniment.

ICEBREAKER

Have participants pair up with someone close to them and tell about something from this past week for which they are thankful, or something that was a challenge. Allow five minutes.

REVIEW

To review ask participants to state briefly what they learned in the last session. Be sure to touch on the following points:

- The Bible is like a library of books and love letters from God.
- The Lord's Prayer is a model prayer for us.
- Regular communication with God helps our relationship with God become stronger and our faith grow.
- This congregation offers a number of ways for us to grow through Bible study and fellowship.

EXPLORING

service centered on god

Divide into groups of four and have participants read or review "Service Centered on God" in the participant book (page 19). Ask group members to think back in the past year or two as they have worshiped and to remember a worship service that was especially meaningful for them. In their groups, have them discuss:

- What were the circumstances in their life at that time?
- What was happening in worship?
- Did this service affect their relationship with God? If so, how?

As a large group, ask participants to share any significant themes running through the group discussion.

Next, have participants open their Bibles to Matthew 18:20, or to their participant books

(page 19). Ask someone to read the scripture passages aloud and allow the full group to summarize the key thought of the verse. (*God is present—here with us!*)

In small groups of four again, ask participants to close their eyes and think about what a Christian worship area looks like. (Or if this group meets at your church, you might have the participants walk into the worship area.)

With their small groups, ask participants to describe the worship space they remember and then connect that to what they have just read in the participant book. For example, what things in the worship space represent community? What things indicate that worship is God-centered? What things represent the variety of ways we praise and pray to God? What things suggest the many ways people participate?

List the groups' ideas on newsprint if you wish.

font, table, pulpit

If the group is meeting in the worship area, move from pulpit to font to altar as you highlight the main points from “The Gospel Sounds Out,” “Baptism: God in Action,” and “The Lord’s Supper: Coming Together” in the participant book (pages 20-23). Have the whole group move from place to place with you.

If you are not able to meet in the worship area, set up three areas of your meeting space with items that represent pulpit (podium with parament), font (bowl of water, baptismal

napkin, baptismal candle), and altar (table with chalice, paten, and ciborium). Then have the whole group move from place to place as you highlight the main points from the participant book.

Ask someone to read aloud the Martin Luther quotation on page 22 in the participant book. Then distribute copies of a recent Sunday worship bulletin and have participants identify all the ways the Word was central to worship (*sermon, Bible readings, hymns, Holy Communion if it was served, Holy Baptism if one was performed*).

EXPERIENCING

DISCIPLESHIP IN ACTION

Choose from the following three options, allowing ten minutes total.

At the altar Invite a member of the altar guild to talk about the role of the altar in worship, describe the different paraments, show the communion vessels and their names (chalice, paten, and so on), and how these items can make worship meaningful for those present.

Worship experiences in this congregation Invite a member of the worship committee to share information about your congregation’s worship services. For example: times of services; different kinds of services that are offered; the various choirs and times they practice; the various people involved in the services: acolytes, crucifers, ushers, bell choirs and other musicians, readers or lectors, assisting ministers, communion assistants; other types of worship experiences that occur, such as dramas, puppet shows, pageants.

Small groups Divide participants into groups of four and ask them to discuss this question: “If I am sincere about being a disciple of Christ, how frequently should I worship? Why?”

BELONGING TO THIS CONGREGATION

Invite your music director to lead participants through a brief introduction to the liturgy as found in *LBW*. Allow ten minutes for this review. Share the following suggestions with the presenter.

Have participants look at *LBW* pages 56-76 (Setting One) as the director explains worship components from the kyrie to the benediction, and what the various components mean for those worshipping. Look at the varied, rich material offered in *LBW*, such as the church year calendar on page 9, the three-year cycle of lessons, pages 13-30, and the written prayers, pages 42-53.

If your congregation offers “contemporary,” “blended,” or “praise” worship, have the music director or a worship leader explain the philosophy behind it. Find out from participants if offering this type of service is a reason for their attending your congregation.

If your congregation doesn’t offer contemporary worship, you might play a tape of a contemporary service or of some contemporary songs. Ask for participants’ thoughts about the value and challenges of offering contemporary worship.

GOING

SESSION SUMMARY

Review the following points:

Worship is a community experience that centers on God. The focal points of our worship are the baptismal font, the communion table, and the pulpit. Everyone participates through praise, prayer, hearing God's word, offering gifts, and sharing the communion meal.

Lutheran worship is rich with biblical material and has its roots in Jewish and early Christian worship. At the same time it incorporates the music, prayers, and concerns of people today.

Regular worship is an important part of discipleship. In our faith journeys, we need the support of others. When we gather as the body of Christ, we also experience Christ's presence.

As we go, we think about inviting those we know who do not worship to come to experience God's peace.

PRAYER

Gather the group into one large circle. Have participants hold hands and go around the circle with each one saying, "*God, thank you for the blessings of worship. Thank you also for _____.*"

You or someone you choose can then close the prayer "*. . . in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*"

Another option is to have the group sing "Jesus Loves Me," which may be printed on newsprint, on overheads, or as a handout.

FOR NEXT TIME

Suggest that participants read "Come to Share" in the participant book (pages 24-28) before the next session.

Have them fill out the spiritual gifts assessment material and bring it to the next session.



SESSION FIVE

come to share

We have received the wonderful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. God has freely given us this gift and all that we have. This session focuses on our response to God's grace and explores the ways we can use our gifts to build God's kingdom.

BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Lutheran understanding of stewardship stems from our belief that we are justified (made right before God) by God's gracious act of love in Jesus' death and resurrection. We do nothing to deserve this. We can only receive it with faith. We do not serve others in order to please God and earn a place in heaven. Instead, we do good works in response to what God has done for us. As we live lives of service, we say thanks to God for all that God has given us.

This session's text from 1 Peter 4 encourages the readers to "serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." Stewardship refers to how we make use of the gifts that God has given to us: "our selves, our time, and our possessions" (*LBW*, page 67). Lutherans believe that God has gifted each of us in a unique way. Many biblical passages call Christians to use their unique gifts in service to God and others (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31).

We offer our selves and our time to God when we use our abilities to serve in our local congregations. We also offer our selves when we use our God-given gifts outside of the church: at work, in our homes, and in our community. As members of the Christian community, we are responsible to identify the gifts in others. Through us they may hear God's call.

Stewardship includes the offering of our money to God. Jesus frequently warned his followers about the dangers of gathering up riches on earth (Luke 12:13-21). Those who amass great wealth often love their money more than God. Jesus also called us to give what we have to feed and clothe others (Matthew 25:31-46). In doing this, we are serving Christ himself. We can respond to Christ's call to care for others by financially supporting the local, national, and world ministries of the church.

OBJECTIVES

- In this session participants will
- explore Lutheran understandings of stewardship and vocation as responsibility and response to God's gifts;
 - discover and appreciate their God-given gifts;
 - identify ways to use their gifts in ministry through the congregation and in the community;
 - continue to build relationships with other participants.

PREPARATION

- Choose options from "Experiencing" on pages 26-27.
- Invite guest presenters as needed and share suggestions from the leader guide.
- Print icebreaker activity on newsprint.
- Distribute the spiritual gifts identification forms to anyone who missed the last session.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Congregational time and talent forms (one per person).
- Pledge cards (one per household).
- Congregational statistical forms to be filled out for congregation record keeping (one per household).

For a listing of materials needed in each session, see page 6 of "Introduction."

GATHERING

WELCOME AND PRAYER

Offer a warm welcome. Make sure everyone has a name tag. Ask for a volunteer to lead the opening prayer. The volunteer may create his or her own or use the following:

Dear Lord Jesus, we invite you to be with us in this session as we talk about ourselves as wonders of your creation and the variety of gifts with which you have blessed us. Help us to grow in understanding and in recognizing opportunities to serve. In your gracious name we pray, Amen.

ICEBREAKER

Have participants pair up with another person. Participants tell their partner at least one special gift or talent they believe they have. The pairs will then introduce each other and tell what gift or talent the other person pos-

sesses by saying, “God blessed (name of person) with the gift of _____.”

If there are more than twelve people, break into groups of four for the activity.

REVIEW

Ask the group to list some key points they remember from the last session on worship:

- God is present with us in worship.
- Worship is God centered.
- Font, table, and pulpit are poles around which Lutherans worship.
- The emphasis is on the Word of God, which is expressed in many ways.
- The presence of the baptismal font reminds us that God acts in Baptism to adopt us and forgive us.
- God is present in Holy Communion reminding us of God’s love and forgiveness.

EXPLORING

on loan from god

As an introduction, identify the main points from this section on page 24 of the participant book.

Next, have participants pair up with a partner and share the information each discovered by completing the spiritual gifts assessment between sessions. Allow about five minutes.

Have pairs read 1 Peter 4:10-11a aloud, either from the Bible or from the participant book (page 24). In view of the previous conversation about the individual’s gifts, ask pairs to relate this verse to the gifts they discussed. *(Our gifts have been given so that we can serve others; God has given us the authority and strength to serve; we serve for God’s glorification.)*

Bring the group together and have those who are willing tell what they discovered about themselves. Were there any surprises?

we offer ourselves

Introduce this section by reviewing the main points on pages 24-25 in the participant book. Assign each participant a different section from pages 25-27 in the participant book, “Free to Care,” “Free to Serve,” or “Free to Love.” Have participants read their section and report on it, offering key points from the reading. Highlight the following points:

“Free to Care”: A steward is trusted to “take care of. . . .” As stewards of human relations we take care of people. Even though we sometimes fail, we entrust our efforts and our days to God.

“Free to Serve”: The ways of stewardship and service are as varied as the people doing them. In serving we show the person and ways of Christ in the world.

“Free to Love”: We see the world in a new way when we are free to love. We see Christ

in all the needs of people. The cross of Christ gives us power to love as Christ loved.

Many ministers

Review the material in this section, including “Unlimited Treasures” and “Sharing Christ’s Love” in the participant book (pages 27-28).

Have participants gather in teams of two and read the Mother Teresa quotation on page 27. Ask them to identify for each other how they used their hands “to, for, and with” Jesus the past few days or week—in the congregation, in their homes, at the workplace, and so on. Bring the whole group together and list all

the ways hands were in ministry. Connect these activities to the priesthood of all believers, the treasures of love and grace we have been given, and our call to be as Christ to our neighbors. Also highlight that the congregation is a community of hands and an avenue for ministry, although not the only one.

Ask them to discuss what they think the church can or should expect of members and the use of their gifts, and how the church can help members discover and use their gifts.

If the spiritual gifts assessment process you are using calls for collecting the information, gather the completed spiritual gifts assessments at this time and explain how this information will be used.

EXPERIENCING

DISCIPLESHIP IN ACTION

Choose from the following three options, allowing a total of ten minutes for the activity.

Testimony on financial stewardship

Ask a member to tell the group how he or she has grown as a steward and about the excitement and fulfillment of practicing good stewardship. The person might mention motivation, seeing needs, making a pledge and fulfilling it, raising his or her pledge each year and striving toward the tithe, pleasure received on giving and seeing ministry take place, personal fulfillment and growth.

Testimony on spiritual gifts Invite a member to speak to the group who feels their spiritual life has grown because of the opportunity to teach Sunday school, be a visitor, sing in the choir, or some other active ministry within the congregation. Have them tell the story of that fulfillment—how they felt at the beginning of the task, how they feel now, how they see that as God’s call to them, and how they have grown in their faith because of the joy of serving.

Small groups Have participants gather in groups of four and discuss the following: a time in church, the community, or at their job

when they used one of their gifts to serve or give (money or talent), and felt that they received more than they gave.

BELONGING TO THIS CHURCH

Choose from the following two options, allowing a total of ten minutes for the activity.

Time and talent survey If your congregation has a process for administering and following up on these surveys, give the surveys to participants. The survey can include a list of opportunities for people to participate in, a place to indicate the opportunities new members are interested in, and a place for them to record their name, address, and phone number. These opportunities represent the program ministry of the congregation, as well as options for community and synod ministry. Instruct participants, who have now completed the spiritual gifts assessment, to match gifts with tasks in the congregation.

If your congregation does not have a process in place for following up on time and talent surveys, you may instead make a simple list of various opportunities for participation in the congregation, community, or synod.

If you have a new member coordinator, a director of volunteer ministry, or a parish

coordinator in your congregation, that person might lead this activity. Ask that person to explain how lay people are matched, recruited, trained, supported, and nurtured in their tasks in this congregation.

Again, omit the form unless someone will follow up.

Financial gifts Have the stewardship chairperson or another designated leader offer information on giving gifts of money. For example, the chairperson can review related items from the new member packet—the annual report and budget, a pledge card, and so on. He or she might make the following points:

- One of the great joys of being a part of the church is to see one's gifts of money being translated into ministry.

- Stewardship of all our gifts is a goal we all have as Christ's disciples, and how we use our money needs to be at the heart of our plan.
- Proportionate (percentage of income) giving and a plan to periodically increase that apportionment help us grow as stewards and is part of God's plan.

Use the congregational budget to show the ministry of your congregation and how needs can be met through the giving of members. Share the vision of the congregation and how giving can help ministry take place.

Show the pledge card and explain how to complete it. Encourage each new member to fill this out and return it in an envelope (provide them) addressed to the appropriate person or committee in your congregation.

GOING

SESSION SUMMARY

Review these points:

We go grateful that God has brought us into ministry giving gifts to use for others.

We go as trustworthy stewards of all that we have and are.

We go encouraging others to share in the fulfillment that we are finding.

We go praying for one another.

PRAYER

Ask for a volunteer to lead the closing prayer or use the above summary as a litany with the leader reading one line, participants the other, and a volunteer closing the prayer.

FOR NEXT TIME

Encourage participants to read "Come to Tell" in the participant book (pages 29-32).

Remind them to fill out the forms to be used for church records and bring the forms to the final session.



SESSION SIX

come to tell

In this session participants will explore Jesus' commission to his followers and the baptismal call to share the message of God's grace with all people everywhere. As people respond to the message that we bear and as they come to our congregation for worship or other activities, we welcome them all even as God welcomes all of us.

BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jesus commands: "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The woman at the well told others about Jesus with joy and excitement (John 4). The disciples dedicated their lives to proclaiming the word (Acts 6:1-7). Paul, an evangelist, spoke of the need for preachers: "And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim [Christ]?" (Romans 10:14c). We too are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Many Christians hear Jesus' command to "make disciples" as a commission for pastors and church professionals. All members of the church promise "to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed" (*LBW*, page 201). Yes, we are called to serve. We are also called to speak of the One who has brought us out of sin and into new life. Some will be comfortable talking about their faith privately and even publicly; others will not. Through small group ministry, many can become more at ease with verbally sharing the faith. We proclaim the Word when we tell others that we attend church, include our guests in meal-time prayers, and comfort those in need.

The call to tell includes the call to invite and welcome others into the community of faith. The Bible clearly requires us to welcome others just as Christ has first welcomed us (Romans 15:7). In biblical times, the call to hospitality was a cultural requirement. According to the rule of desert hospitality, Abraham and Sarah had to welcome the three strangers into their tent (Genesis 18:1-15). Jesus welcomed those who were considered unclean by the Jewish people and thus outside the acceptable circle: prostitutes, Samaritans, and tax collectors. The early Christians also practiced hospitality, welcoming others for the sake of the gospel. When modern Christians speak of evangelism, we are talking about inviting and welcoming people into our congregations so that they may hear the good news and receive the gift of faith.

OBJECTIVES

In this session participants will

- examine teachings about discipleship and reaching others with the gospel;
- explore their own experiences with and excitement about the congregation which they might share with others;
- identify ways they can share the gospel with others;
- make a commitment to continue to build relationships with other members over the next several months.

PREPARATION

- Select from the options listed under "Experiencing" on pages 30-31.
- Invite guest presenters as appropriate and share presentation suggestions from the leader guide.
- Write icebreaker statements on newsprint or chalkboard.
- Write closing prayer on newsprint or chalkboard.
- Make copies of role play on page 32 and line up two people to read the parts.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Information about small group opportunities for those who want to make this commitment.

For a listing of materials needed in each session, see page 6 of "Introduction."

GATHERING

WELCOME

Welcome participants to this final session, acknowledging the growth that all have experienced—in their spiritual life, in learning more about this congregation, and in making new friendships. Invite everyone to wear a name tag.

PRAYER

You might lead the prayer for this last session. Use the following or create your own.

Gracious Lord, we have laughed together, shared our faith together, begun to seek to know you better. We commit to continue on the path of discipleship. Bless all persons here as they join this congregation. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

ICEBREAKER

Ask participants, one at a time, to stand

and say their name and then to tell (1) the biggest surprise they had from attending the sessions, and (2) who they might share that surprise with in days to come. If there are more than twelve in the group, divide participants into groups of four and have them remain seated for the activity.

SUMMARY

Ask the group what they remember from the last session. List their answers on newsprint if you wish.

- God uses us—our gifts of money, interests, and talents—to love others and build God's church.
- As called people of God, we have been entrusted to be good stewards of our gifts.
- Our faith and our relationship with God leads us to use our gifts to serve others.

EXPLORING

go therefore

If you haven't done so already, divide the participants into groups of four and have the groups talk about "a time when you had invited people (perhaps your boss) to come to visit you and you wanted to be sure they felt welcome while they were there." Have participants identify the ways they make people feel welcome in their homes. Write the compiled list on newsprint. *(For example, as hosts participants make sure guests have clear directions about how to find their home; clear walk ways so guests can get to the door; greet guests at the door with a smile and warm handshake and introduce them to others that are there; make sure the home is clean and temperature is comfortable; offer refreshments; show guests where the restroom is located; arrange for comfortable seating; give guests attention and invite them to come*

again; perhaps write a note afterwards to thank guests for having visited.)

Next summarize or read the key points from the section titled "Go Therefore" in the participant book (page 29). Have everyone look up Matthew 28:19-20 and ask a volunteer to read that verse to the group. Have the full group discuss what message they hear from the reading. Have them restate the message into a couple of sentences using their own words.

called into conversation

Have participants gather in pairs and read or review this section of the participant book (page 30). Ask them to discuss: Who has given them knowledge and confidence about the Christian faith? What did that person do that you would want to model as you talk with others about the faith?

everyone welcome

Review the information under this heading (pages 30-31 in the participant book). One sentence says, “When God is God, everyone is welcome.” Have the group explain that statement and decide who the word “everyone” refers to. Ask how the membership of your congregation reflects this idea of “everyone welcome” and if anyone seems to be missing.

Ask participants to form pairs again and spend a few minutes remembering each person’s first Sunday in this congregation. How were they greeted and how did they feel? What was and wasn’t helpful?

anything is possible

Have the pairs review the information under this heading on pages 31-32 in the participant book. Then as a whole group, refer to the earlier conversation about the steps taken to make guests in their homes feel comfortable.

Have the whole group look at that list again. Star the actions that participants identify as ones that would also help make people feel comfortable and welcome when they come to your congregation. *(All the items listed in the first activity under “Go Therefore” can be starred as ways to make people feel welcomed when they come to church.)*

Then add ideas that might pertain specifically to welcoming people to church, drawing on the first-hand experiences of participants. *(The worship service should be welcoming and warm as God’s love is welcoming; treat people as God’s loved ones; show guests where the nursery is; invite them to other church events; take them cookies (or bread or flowers) within twenty-four hours of their visit; give them a name tag; have trained people at entrances to look for guests and assist in making them comfortable; make sure ushers and greeters are welcoming and pleasant.)*

EXPERIENCING

DISCIPLESHIP IN ACTION

Choose either a combination of the “Discipleship in Action” options or “Belonging to this Congregation” to fill approximately twenty minutes.

Testimony Ask a member to share the story of how he or she came to your congregation. Perhaps it can be someone who came to church simply because a friend invited him or her and who now sees his or her life changed because of that invitation.

Small groups Have participants gather in groups of four and discuss answers to the following question. “As I continue my steps toward discipleship, what will help me continue to grow?” Bring small groups back together and discuss. *(Make sure the following are included: prayer; worship; Bible study; service; sharing gifts; caring for personal health and God’s world; caring for personal relationships;*

sharing the story of Christ with others as I have experienced it.)

Role play Ask for two volunteers, or the people you have asked ahead of time, to read the role play “Inviting a Friend to Church” (printed on page 32). Allow participants to talk about how this type of witnessing feels to them. How would they change it to make it more effective? Could they witness this way?

Faith-sharing opportunities Have participants look at the new member packet or other printed information to discover some avenues for sharing their faith. Possibilities include: Bible study and other small group sharing times, training courses for visiting members of the congregation; becoming a member of evangelism ministry; attending workshops; worshiping frequently; personal Bible study and prayer.

BELONGING TO THIS CONGREGATION

Outreach ministry panel Organize a panel with various people who are active in outreach ministry. Ask them to present the different and exciting ways the congregation reaches out to others. You may have one, two, three, or all of the following ministries represented on the panel. Select the ones that give the best picture of your congregation's outreach ministry.

- Social ministry. Offer information about various efforts such as hosting the Red Cross bloodmobile, work at a homeless shelter, helping with Meals on Wheels, offering alternative Christmas buying for members to purchase gifts for low-income people, participating in Interfaith Hospitality Network; providing emergency relief; visiting of the ill and shut-in.
- Evangelism ministry. Describe evangelism tasks such as Bring-a-Friend Sundays, community involvement that builds awareness of the congregation, Yellow Page ads,

“Come Home for Christmas/Easter” articles and ads in the newspaper, training of members to call on guests, shepherd teams, sponsor programs, encouraging all areas of ministry to think of caring for and inviting others.

- Youth ministry. Tell about experiences the youth have in sharing their faith through service and other deeds. For example, inviting friends to worship or youth group events, participating in service projects locally and around the country, planning and participating in youth services and events that encourage the telling of the good news of Jesus.
- Global ministry. Offer information about ministry that reaches beyond U.S. borders. In partnership with churches around the world we share the gospel by addressing people's spiritual, physical, and emotional needs (establishing schools, hospitals, churches, agricultural programs). As partners, we are blessed by the gifts of church around the world.

GOING

PREPARATION FOR JOINING

Give practical information about the day new members will be received into the congregation—time of the service, when during the service to come forward, where to meet before hand to receive name tags and have pictures taken, where and when to meet sponsors, where the new member reception will be held. Sponsors might be a part of this final session so they can meet the new members, or invite them to join the group for refreshments after the meeting.

Collect any forms at this time, such as pledge cards and congregational statistical forms, that will be used in record keeping for your congregation.

SMALL GROUP OPPORTUNITIES

If you plan to offer a small group experience that will follow the new member orientation process, describe the opportunity and

meeting times. Allow those who are interested to make a commitment to be a part of the continuing group for further enrichment and spiritual growth. Not all members will make the commitment to continue, though many will. Inform those who do not choose this option whether or not there will be future opportunities to participate in a small group.

SUMMARY OF ALL SESSIONS

Refer participants to “The Marks of Discipleship” (page 30 in the participant book) while you read it aloud. “Membership in this church and living as a disciple of Christ means that we participate with God's faithful people in hearing God's Word, sharing the Lord's Supper, proclaiming what God does for all people in Jesus Christ, and following Jesus' example, and working for justice and peace.”

Use these “Marks” as a framework for summing up all six sessions of *Come and*

Grow with Us. Briefly review the themes and goals of each session. Ask for any final questions or concerns.

Share the following as a closing statement:

We go into the world to share the wonderful story of our Savior and our Lord that all might know God's love.

We go inviting others we know to come with us to hear the good news of Christ.

PRAYER

Have participants make a circle and hold hands.

Go around the circle and have each one say: *Dear God, filled with the Holy Spirit, I will continue to be your disciple and will commit to _____* (for example, worship, share

faith, attend small group, pray, work in the church, community, world on your behalf, and so on).

Another option is to have participants gather in a circle holding hands and you as leader open the prayer: *Dear Jesus, we are gathered for our final time together. Hear our petitions. . . .* Then allow spontaneous prayers from those who have been together for the sessions.

You may add the following to either of the above prayers as a closing benediction: *Lord, we lift these petitions to you and thank you for hearing and blessing each of us. Let us go forth in Christ's name, desiring that all we do in our life will always glorify you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



INVITING A FRIEND TO CHURCH

ROLE PLAY FOR SESSION 6: COME TO TELL

SUE (SAM): Hi Joan (John). I called and you weren't home last night.

JOAN (JOHN): No, Sue, I was at a new member orientation at the church I've been attending.

SUE: Oh. You seem to have been busy a lot with that church lately. Are you getting to be a religious fanatic?

JOAN: *(Laughing)* No, I don't think so, but I have found this church to be a good experience. The pastor's sermons seem to relate to my life and my children are enjoying the Sunday school program. There are a lot of really nice people that I have met there too. And they have a lot of get-togethers.

SUE: I work all week and I like to sleep on Sunday morning and so I don't get around to church. But I have thought about taking the children to Sunday school.

JOAN: It took me awhile to make this decision too, but it is the best thing I ever did. I'm discovering more about who God is and I've

been kind of surprised by the grounding and meaning God gives my life. Now that I'm involved in church, I know what I was missing before.

SUE: Well, like I said, I like to sleep late and I'm not sure I'd know what to do if I went to church. . . . It's been so long.

JOAN: Yes, there is a little adjustment at the beginning, but after a couple of weeks I felt comfortable. People in this church are so friendly and really are eager to have you be a part of their activities and classes. I've been learning about the Lutheran faith. I'll tell you what, why don't you come with us next week and just see how you like it. We could go for lunch afterwards and maybe I could help answer questions about the service for you.

SUE: I'll think about it.

JOAN: Suppose I call you on Friday and that will give you time to think about going with us. Believe me Sue, if you say yes, you will be glad. Is it alright with you if I include you in my prayers this week?

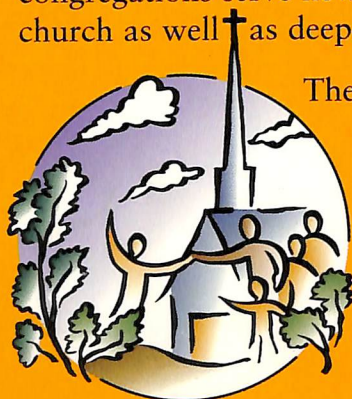
SUE: Sure, I would like that.

Come and Grow with Us

NEW MEMBER BASICS

Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics is designed to help your congregation welcome newcomers to your church community and orient them to the Lutheran faith. New members with little to no Christian background, as well as longtime Lutherans, can explore together the very basics of Lutheran understanding.

Created in a user-friendly format, *Come and Grow with Us: New Member Basics* will help congregations serve new members who want to develop a sense of community with their new church as well as deepen their personal relationship with God.



The participant book and leader guide explore six *new member basics*:

- come to belong
- come to a deeper understanding
- come to grow
- come to worship
- come to share
- come to tell

Martin E. Marty, participant book writer, is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. The author of many books and senior editor of *The Christian Century*, Marty served ten years as a Lutheran parish pastor.

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come and grow with us  NEW MEMBER BASICS
a must for growing congregations!

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