

# Come and Grow with Us



New Member  
BASICS



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## NEW MEMBER BASICS



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# come and grow with us!

When Jesus called Simon Peter, Andrew, Philip, and others to be his disciples, he said “Follow me” (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17; John 1:43). They followed Jesus by traveling with him as companions and friends, sharing meals, observing the Sabbath together, listening to his teaching, and joining him in responding to the physical and spiritual needs of those they met along the way. Ultimately, they witnessed his death and his resurrection.

This book explores the basics of what it means for us today to be disciples of Jesus Christ and members of the church, particularly the Lutheran church. For some readers the information found here will serve as an introduction; for others it will refresh past learning.

Six topics are covered. Each one explores particular dimensions of Christian discipleship and church membership—the distinct qualities and characteristics of belonging to the faith community and about Lutheran Christians; the importance of a growing relationship with God fostered by prayer, Bible study, and worship; and the ways we as individuals and in congregations live as Christ’s agents in our communities.

Make the most out of the material found here by reading this book on your own and then exploring it during your congregation’s new member orientation sessions or other study opportunities. *Come and Grow with Us* is an invitation to move further along the path to spiritual maturity, a way made meaningful by Jesus who is himself the Way.







## ONE

# come to belong

### 1 PETER 2:9

But you are a chosen race,  
a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
God's own people,  
in order that you may proclaim  
the mighty acts of him who  
called you out of darkness  
into his marvelous light.

## what about this church?

Those who belong to the Lutheran Christian community have some distinct qualities and characteristics. We are part of a community that equips members to live their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

### A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Lutherans are a community that assembles regularly to baptize, commune, and speak the word of God. We are a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens, speak a word of serious concern when we detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories.

We are part of a people created by the promises and work of God; we are part of God's covenant. God acted with gracious care and steadfast love to create and keep gathering and healing us. We were saved "as a people" and not as lonely seekers.

### A BELIEVING COMMUNITY

It has been pointed out that almost everything "the congregation" does, someone or something else can do: print a newsletter, have programs for the homeless, meet in conventions. What is unique with the believing community is that it praises God.

We confess our faith through creeds and statements designed to set forth distinctive Lutheran understanding about a gracious God. The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*,

which means “I believe.” In a way creeds say, “This is what we believe because we are Christians; you will never understand us if you do not hear us saying this.”

One could even go further and say that in the Christian church it is not what we know but who we know that matters. The quality of Christian life is not measured by seeing which people pass a final examination with the most knowledgeable answers to questions about the faith. God measures the quality of Christian life by our closeness to God’s way, to the love of Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The creeds basically outline and reinforce our trust in the Who or the One we know and in whom we believe. Believing in God is believing in a person—that is, someone who addresses us and is addressed by us.

## one god—Three persons

“I believe in God, the Father. . .

“I believe in Jesus Christ. . .

“I believe in the Holy Spirit. . .”

Thus begin the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed. They are also references to God called by the names Christians use: the Trinity, or the triune—the three-in-one—God. Such language holds together faith in one God alone and in three “persons”—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **OUR FATHER: THE CREATOR WHO CARES**

What matters about God is being the Maker or Creator of heaven and earth. According to Lutheran understandings, creation can mean two things. First, God made things out of nothing. This theme points to the spontaneity of God, the love that looks for relation. God wanted something where there was nothing, and spoke, and it was. Second, creation means that God keeps on making things. The whole of the Bible talks frequently about this way of creating.

COME AND GROW WITH US



We are participants, under God and with God, in the continuing creation that we see in mothering and fathering, in small groups, in the work of artists and politicians, whenever we preserve and extend creation.

We see what kind of a God we are praising. God is a God who, while busy creating a universe, creating order out of chaos, cares enough to focus on us. This is the astonishing point: creation is all personalized; it is “for us.”



**JESUS: OUR SUFFERING SAVIOR**

Lutherans look at the wounds of Christ to learn what we need to know about how God acts toward us. Whenever we wish to think about what God does in Jesus, we know that a key element in the transaction is that Jesus is our representative. A holy God could not tolerate the way we spoil the world and our lives and God's way. In the Christian story, Jesus stands in our place and suffers all that the world and our sins could heap on him, to the point of death.

Jesus Christ did all this suffering and he died "that we may be his own." To belong to him means a surrender of whatever it is that keeps us from the ways of God. It does not mean that we have no personality or freedom. Indeed, now, we get to "serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." (quotes from Luther's Small Catechism).

**JESUS: BRINGER OF NEW LIFE**

Christians believe that in the rising again of Jesus, in the event we call Easter or the resurrection, something really happened. God worked something new in Jesus. He became present again, and remains so, Christians believe, when we are gathered in his name, when we celebrate his Supper, when his word is preached and believed. So we shall serve him forever, rising "just as he is risen from the dead and lives. . ." (Luther's Small Catechism).

**THE SPIRIT: GIVER OF FAITH**

The Holy Spirit enlightens us, makes us holy, keeps us in faith. Faith is a gift. It is the gracious act of God through and as the Holy Spirit. We do not get to claim faith as our own achievement. Bumper stickers and tracts today often claim or imply that it was "through my own understanding and effort" (Luther's Small Catechism) that I came to believe. In truth, we can by our own understanding or effort block the Holy Spirit, but if we have faith, it is a gift.

**THE APOSTLES' CREED**

I believe in God, the Father  
almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only  
Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power  
of the Holy Spirit and born of  
the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was  
buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right  
hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the  
living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

God through the Holy Spirit “abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*). Yesterday dare not haunt us, nor tomorrow. We are forgiven today, raised from the dead, given in eternal life, as we return to our baptism, repenting of our sins.

## The marks of discipleship

We respond as Christ’s disciples when we participate with God’s other faithful people in hearing God’s Word, sharing the Lord’s Supper, proclaiming what God does for all people in Jesus Christ, whose example we also follow. And we work for justice and peace.

## Notes about belonging

Use this space to make notes about what you have read, discussed, or heard presented.

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TWO

# come to a deeper understanding

## who are Lutherans?

The Christian church worldwide numbers 1.4 billion people, including all sorts of believers. Lutherans, for all our own varieties, are one sort of believer. We have distinctive ways of doing things and distinctive accents and angles of vision on beliefs we share with all Christians. Not eager to prove ourselves superior to other believers, we do find it important to have a grasp on these special approaches.

Lutherans are Protestants who are also catholic, which means part of the whole church. As Protestants, we continue the reformation begun in European churches in the 15th century. Being catholic, we believe that we are connected with all Christians who stress their ties to Christ's church everywhere and through the ages.

Lutheran Protestants would not have chosen the name Lutheran; it was acquired accidentally, often from early enemies. The name refers to Martin Luther, who came to renewed understanding of the good news almost five hundred years ago. Lutherans do not worship Martin Luther, but we do celebrate what God worked through him.

### LUTHERAN BEGINNINGS

Martin Luther was born in Germany in 1483 and died in 1546. He was a monk, a scholar, a professor of the Old Testament most of his life, a translator of the Bible, a preacher, a reformer, a husband, and a father.

### ROMANS 3:22b-25a

For there is no distinction,  
since all have sinned and fall  
short of the glory of God;  
they are now justified by his  
grace as a gift,  
through the redemption  
that is in Christ Jesus,  
whom God put forward as a  
sacrifice of atonement by his  
blood,  
effective through faith.



Luther felt—and Roman Catholic historians today would agree—that the church in Luther’s day often obscured the free and gracious interaction between God and people. At Wittenberg, for instance, where Luther lived and taught, people could buy rightness with God by giving money to the church relics displays. Or there were documents that people could purchase. These documents made for less punishment for themselves and others in the life to come.

### EVENTS IN MARTIN LUTHER’S LIFE

- 1483 Luther is born
- 1507 Celebrates his first Mass
- 1517 Posts the Ninety-Five Theses and spurs the Reformation
- 1520 Luther is excommunicated by the pope. Luther’s books are burned
- 1525 Marries Katherine von Bora
- 1527 Composes the hymn “A Mighty Fortress”
- 1529 Prepares the Small and Large Catechisms
- 1530 Luther directs Melancthon to write and present the Augsburg Confession (a statement of the Reformation’s beliefs)
- 1546 Luther dies

### GRACE: FREE AND SPONTANEOUS

The central insight of Lutheranism is that human interaction with God centers not in our achievement but in divine grace. God is not forced to give and we are not forced to receive. Luther insisted that God could be God only by acting freely and spontaneously, as one who shares love with people who cannot buy it or be forced to receive it or who do not deserve it. In turn, our response had to be like God’s: free, spontaneous, and loving.

### IN GOD WE TRUST

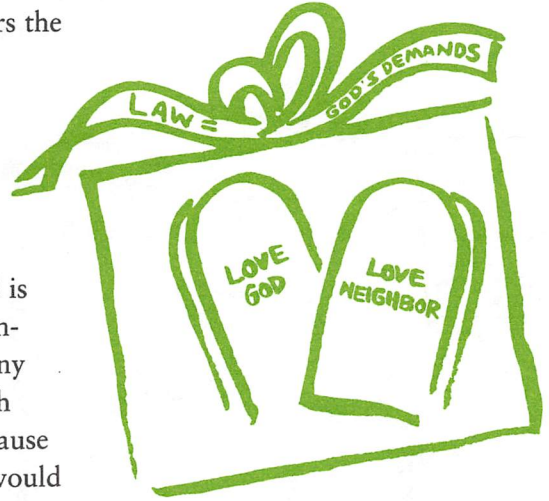
Faith, Luther thought, was obscured by the church of his day because people were so busy working, earning, and thinking their way into God’s favor. They could never satisfy their quest this way. There was another way—faith. For Luther and Lutherans this means chiefly a trust or confidence in the God who makes promises. God is a faithful God. The Bible is a story whose plot tells of this faithful God dealing with people. And people need to respond with trust.

## Law and gospel

The Lutheran understanding of God, Word, and Bible divides the message into law and gospel. In simplest terms, law represents the demands of God, and gospel is the promises of God.

### WHAT GOD DEMANDS

The law in the Bible is the set of words that does two things. It is first of all the way God orders the world, keeps the creation from being destroyed, and keeps chaos from overwhelming us. From its model we get human government and law. Second, in the believer's life, the law of God in the Bible drives home the point that the God of the Holy Word is holy and humans are not. It convinces sinners that they are sinners. It devastates any of us who thought we could be right with God on the basis of keeping the law, because it shows how impossible such an effort would be. It drives us to depend upon God who has another word, a word of grace, of good news, of forgiveness, of gospel.



### WHAT GOD PROMISES

Through the gospel, and not through human striving and achievement, we are made right with God. Through the gospel, all the benefits that come with Jesus are ours. We live by the power of the gospel, for the love of Christ controls us when we walk in it. When God looks at us through the spectacles of the gospel, God sees not us in our sins but us identified with Christ.



### DOING GOOD: IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

According to the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments, or Decalog, is the law given by God to Moses for the people of Israel. Jesus took the law and summarized it as loving God and loving neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39).

We are to do good works, but the timing is all-important. We are not to do them before we are made righteous by God, in order to draw God's attention and favor. The problem with

such an effort is that no matter how much we would do, it would never be enough. Instead, the good ways are to follow and to grow out of God's act to make us right and just and forgiven.

### TWO SACRAMENTS

The interaction always begins with God. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are good pictures of God's interaction with us, the way God calls and nourishes and the way we respond. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not only pictures; they are themselves the vehicles by which God does something in us and among us—means of grace.

Lutherans consider Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or Communion, as the only "sacraments." A sacrament to Lutherans means a sacred or holy act that God established. This means God commanded that it happen and connected a promise with it. A sacrament uses visible means like water, bread, and wine. These visible means are connected with the Word of God, which is always what gives faith and achieves God's effects.

Other Christian denominations define *sacrament* differently and may practice as many as seven sacraments. Still others practice none at all. But the vast majority of Christians are baptizers and communers.





## members of the family

We who are baptized and who celebrate the Lord's Supper are never alone. We find company with fellow believers, becoming part of a family. More important: salvation is "being right with God," becoming healthy and whole through the action of God in Christ. Salvation means being brought from the status of alien, the lost outsider, to adoption as a member of the family of God. Salvation stands for a move from saying "no," rejecting the call of God, to accepting that call, saying "yes." It means seeing our life made open to more calls by God and more gifts of grace.

## notes about understanding

Use this space to make notes about what you have read, discussed, or heard presented.

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## THREE

# come to grow

### PHILIPPIANS 4: 6-7

Do not worry about anything,  
but in everything by prayer and  
supplication with thanksgiving  
let your requests be made  
known to God.

And the peace of God, which  
surpasses all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your  
minds in Christ Jesus.

## Nourishing faith

It would be a serious mistake to picture Christian faith as only a set of urgings to do good or be good, to be busy activists. It is important for us believers to have our inner life nourished. We do this chiefly through speaking with God in prayer and hearing God speak to us in the divine Word, a word full of surprises.

## prayer: openness to surprise

Prayer seems to be an instinct of the human heart. It is hard to suppress prayer in times of great joy or terror.

Professor Donald Capps of Princeton Theological Seminary has a helpful image that voices the Lutheran tradition of prayer. We do not expect to have our will and way all the time. Nor do we resign ourselves to God's mysterious will, which seems rarely to match our desires. Instead, Capps urges that we think of prayer as a mode of communication between two who know each other well. They build up expectations for each other. They develop familiarity. And then they are open to surprises in one another.

## HOW SHALL WE PRAY?

Lutherans pray a good deal, even if not always as spontaneously as some other Christians. We refuse to get into arguments over the proper form. God does not need human eloquence to answer prayer. Impromptu prayer is not the only effective style. Nor is it more heartfelt, or more compelling.

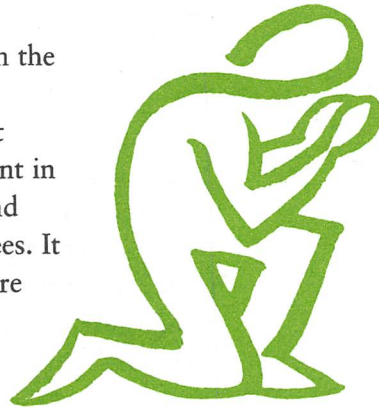
The Lord's Prayer is the model prayer. Jesus prays it when the disciples ask him how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4). In Christian communities, it is the most familiar, most prayed, and most used quotation from the whole Bible. Study of it helps us understand an approach to prayer, our response to grace.

## DIRECT ACCESS

In the life of prayer, Lutherans stress that people seek union with God on the human level. God is accessible to us precisely because God has revisited this world and remains present in it in the person of Jesus Christ. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, because through him we have open access to God.

## LOVING ON OUR KNEES

Intercessory prayer, or praying for others, in the congregation is the most characteristic prayer among Lutherans. It is the prayer we pray just before Holy Communion or at a climactic point in other services. Intercessory prayer is urgent and generous. It is loving our neighbor on our knees. It gives expression to the fact that all believers are priests, that all of us can approach God and pray for this person in military service, this college student, this sufferer. Then we commend the person to God's love which outlasts separation, illness, and even death.



## THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in  
heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive  
those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.



### **THE GIFT OF CONVERSATION**

Prayer is the real democratic act among all the things believers do. Prayer, talking with God, costs nothing, Jesus says. No matter who we are, where we are, or what our talents and needs are, Jesus' teachings insist that we are equally commanded and free to appear before God in prayer.

Prayer, then, is not a climbing, a striving, or an achievement. It is the acceptance of a gift, responding to a call, an enjoyment of conversation. It becomes a way of life.

## **Reading the Bible**

Lutherans believe God speaks to people through the Scriptures, and so we cherish personal Bible reading in addition to personal prayer.

Although it was first an oral tradition, Christian faith is now a "written tradition," which means it was and is handed down through people who read what was written. The written tradition is the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament, to which Christians have added the witness to Jesus in what we call the New Testament.

### **LOVE LETTERS FROM GOD**

The Bible is a library and not a book. The various books in the library stress different themes. We might also think of the Bible as a set of love letters from God. All comparisons have limits, but there are some good reasons to see the Bible as such a collection of love letters. Often enough it has God saying "I love you," for "God is love" is a frequent biblical assertion.

### THE STORY THAT SAVES

It is impossible to make too much of Martin Luther's and of Lutherans' devotion to the Bible, the ancient texts which we insist have to be the only source or norm for all Christian teaching. Luther made much of Scripture because reading and experiencing it was a means by which he came to a new understanding of grace; it would work similarly for others. The text, even a sacred, scriptural, inspired text, is an instrument, a means toward something else: toward "being saved," experiencing the presence of God, or redirecting one's life in the way of Jesus Christ.

Lutherans do not believe that the story that saves us is available outside the Bible. There is no other plot out there to learn about.

### CHRIST: THE LOVING FACE OF GOD

The story we discover through the Bible tells how God is a God of grace, writing love letters to us about a love that God shows us in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, before Jesus came into the world, this loving, gracious face of God was also shown; but now it is revealed decisively in the face and fact of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. The Bible, then, gets its authority from the gospel, the good news, which most emphatically gets called "the Holy Word of God."



Our understanding of the authority of the Bible has to begin and end with Jesus Christ, the Word of God. We can hear God speaking in the Old and New Testaments, and the climax of this speaking is Christ the Word. The Bible, the Word in the form of the book, must be seen in the light of the way it relates to Christ. Luther liked to say that the Bible is the manger in which Christ lies. We go to Christ the Word of God to receive God, truth, and life.

### notes about growing

Use this space to make notes about what you have read, discussed, or heard presented.

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## FOUR

# come to worship

## service centered on god

We live in a time when many people think it best to go on their spiritual journeys alone, in solitude, away from community. They may find something, but they will have missed important elements in the fulfillment of faith—the presence of supportive companions and the vivid experience of Christ.

Lutheran worship is God-centered. It is not human-centered. Of course, God cares about humans; enough to have made us and to have sent Jesus Christ to keep us. Of course, human experience and emotion are important. But God, not human emotions, is the subject of our prayers and hymns. We believe that things go best for us when we are on course with God and God's ways. We are less interested in philosophies of positive thinking or techniques for earthly success than in returning praise and thanks to our loving God.

Lutherans think of worship not as a pastor's performance but as people's service. Behind much liturgy—which means “the people's service” in the form of worship—is a kind of dance. We have our steps to make, as do our leaders. Everything is studied and still graceful. God works through our gestures as God works through our words; we are asked to yield our bodies, and here in worship is a chance to do just that.

### MATTHEW 18:20

For where two or three  
are gathered in my name,  
I am there among them.

## font, table, pulpit

The baptismal font is used once per life. The communion table is used frequently, perhaps weekly, for the Lord's Supper and whenever Christians gather to offer prayer to God. The pulpit may be pounded and its podium worn from constant use. Picture the three together—font, table, and pulpit—as poles around which Lutheran worship revolves.

### THE GOSPEL SOUNDS OUT

Lutherans and Lutheran worship place special emphasis on the Word of God. While the language of the service of worship, the liturgy, can be the language of any time and any place, all of it draws on a particular language: Everything in Lutheran worship must grow out of and reflect the Word, as we find it in the Bible.

Lutheran worship stresses preaching in the form of a sermon that addresses the needs of sinners and announces the loving activity of God. The Christ who is present where two or three are gathered, is present to faith through the sound waves which reach from heart to heart, voice to ear, mind to mind as the gospel sounds out.



**BAPTISM: GOD IN ACTION**

Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-4, Luke 3:1-22). In his resurrected life, claiming all authority, he was heard to send out his disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is “not simply plain water”—that would be magic—but water “used according to God’s command and connected with God’s word.”

Now, Baptism is not only a picture of God’s kind of action; it is God in action. Listen to Martin Luther: “It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe what he has promised”

(Luther’s Small Catechism). There must be belief for these benefits to be gained; otherwise, it would be magic.

But notice the verbs: God forgives, redeems, and gives. Baptism perfectly pictures God’s action. Luther explains how water can do such great things in a completely unsurprising way. Water by itself is only water, but with the Word it gives life.





This is the sum of the matter:  
Let everything be done so that  
the Word may have free course.  
We can spare everything except  
the Word. Again, we profit by  
nothing as much as by the Word.  
For the whole Scripture shows  
that the Word should have free  
course among Christians.

Martin Luther

The first gift of Baptism, the forgiveness of sins, is not an end in itself; it is a means. We are forgiven in order that we can live the free, responsible, and joyful life—in order that we can be saved everlastingly.

Lutherans, like many other Christians, baptize infants, believing that God works grace in them. As these children grow, the community of faith draws them into their own faith, and these children may, like the rest of the believing community, affirm their baptism and claim its promises. In fact, we believe that every day and in every act of serious return to God we are returning to our baptism. We come forth as new people, which means that we are born again—and again and again.

#### **THE LORD'S SUPPER: COMING TOGETHER**

The Lord's Supper observes the simple meal of Jesus with his disciples the night he was betrayed, the night before he died. Thus the Lord's Supper has us look backward to the story of Israel. Some gospel accounts see it as a Passover meal—it recalls how God “passed over” the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt that had blood smudged on them. God then delivered Israel, while Egypt experienced death (Exodus 11-14). But the Lord's Supper also has us look forward. Jesus says that he had longed to have this meal with the disciples—with us—and that he would have it again in his kingdom. It is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to be held in the life to come.

“Holy Communion is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and drink.” We receive “forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.” There is no magic. “Eating and drinking certainly do not do” this, but the words, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.” These words, along with the eating and drinking, are “the essential thing in

the sacrament.” We only have to believe the words, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.” As we believe, so we have, says Luther about the gifts of the Word of God (quotes from Luther’s Small Catechism).

The Lord’s Supper is often called Holy Communion, a coming-together of bread with body, wine with blood, God with creatures, and believers with one another. To realize through Communion that we are social human beings who share common miseries and joys is a benefit of this meal. It serves to lift us beyond ourselves.

## notes about worship

Use this space to make notes about what you have read, discussed, or heard presented.

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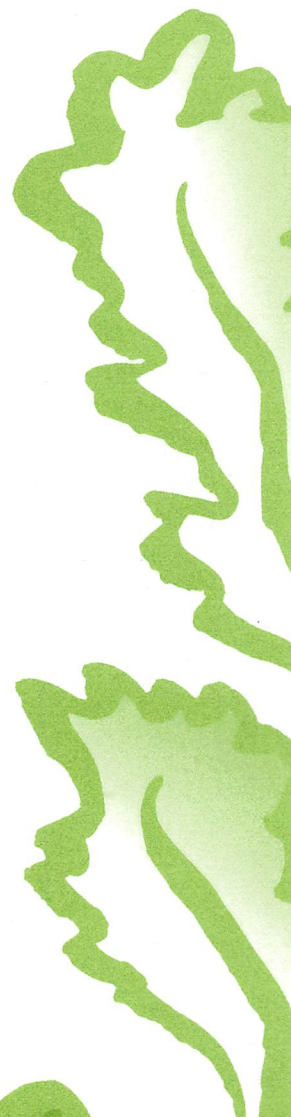
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## FIVE

# come to share

### 1 PETER 4:10-11a

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

## on loan from god

Lutherans believe that all of life and health, all possessions and capabilities are, in a sense, on loan from God the Creator. So we keep on learning—never rapidly enough, or profoundly enough—how to return on God’s investment in us.

Christians put their loan and their learning to work. We do not wait for a payoff in a life to come. We start realizing salvation here and now. Eternal life is a quality that breaks in already in the very midst of this world, as the writer of the Gospel of John repeatedly insists.

This means that the Christian faith does not exist just to snatch us away from this life and ship us off to some future life that alone is important. Rather it thrusts us back with eternal life into the midst of this earthly life.

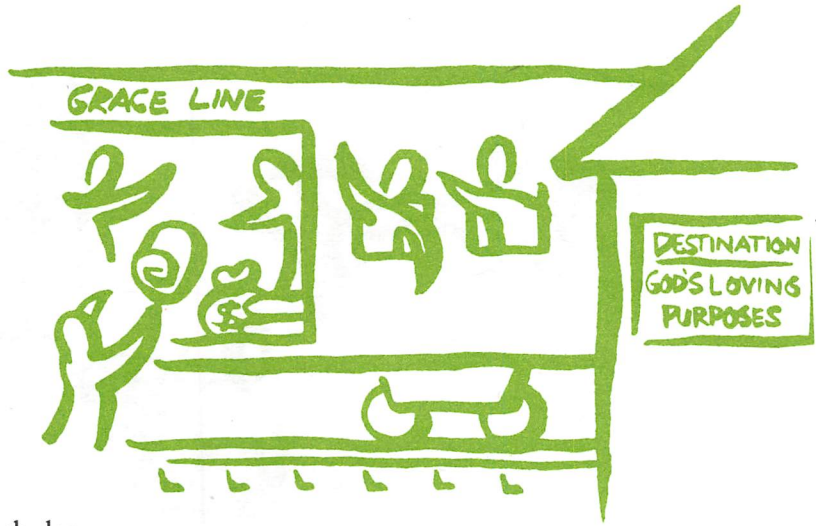
## we offer ourselves

There is a prayer that says “we offer with joy and thanksgiving what God has first given us—our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of God’s gracious love.”

We offer ourselves. That’s the point of it all. The money we give may help heat the place of worship, or pay for the Sunday bulletin or for a doctor in New Guinea or for a new congregation. We offer to make that possible. What is at stake, though,



is the offering of ourselves. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). We are not to step back and take a look at life and then open our pocketbooks. We are to toss our possessions on this moving train—and then keep up with it. We will soon learn that if we toss ourselves on it, we will find our hearts located at a new place: in the loving purposes of God.



When we offer ourselves, we give each day back to God. Some Christians make the sign of the cross at the start of each day; it is a part of praising God in private. This is the way we remember our baptism. It’s not a magic act, but a reminder. We are free for the day. We have no guilt about yesterday, no worry about tomorrow. God will give strength and grace for the day.

### FREE TO CARE

People today do not use the word *steward* much, but in the Bible it appears often. The steward is trusted to take care of property and business for someone else. Lutheran Christians make a great deal of the way we are to be stewards of creation. We are not to misuse resources. We are to be stewards of human relations. Our faith is measured not by how many nights a week we will return to keep the church lights on. It is measured by how we relate to parents or children, how we serve on hospital or zoning or school boards, how we transact business. We get to turn each day back to God in that way. If we succeed we will not become prideful, and if we fail we will not despair. Ours is a God-centered faith. We trust.



### FREE TO SERVE

Stewardship means filling out the church's calendar of doings and dealings. Some will rehearse in a choir, to offer praise in beautiful song. Others will make quilts for Lutheran World Relief or chaperone a youth group, visit worship guests or serve as trustees of church property. What is not on the calendar is just as important and revealing. The ways of obedience and love are as varied as the persons seeking to obey and love. We belong if we can turn back our persons and our ways to God. In doing so, we get to show forth the person and the ways of Christ in the world.

## FREE TO LOVE

The gospel message doesn't say "You have to love!" but "You are given the freedom to love." We get to love. We get to care. Instead of remaining self-seeking and self-centered beings, we are liberated. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ comes into our hearts. We begin to see the world in a new light. We see Christ in the acts of love done in his name. We see Christ in the needs of the sick, the imprisoned, the lonely, the hungry, as he said we would and should (Matthew 25). We are not paralyzed by our need to make ourselves just and right before God. We are not busy winning merit badges and extra credit and silver stars or awards. We are free to see the cross of Christ as power for love and to act by that power.

## many ministers

Baptized Christians make up what Martin Luther called "a priesthood of all believers." All are ministers. Lay people, in teamwork with pastors, take initiative to help see that Christ is represented among us and in our communities.

Most often the church can go only where the laity can go. Lay people outnumber pastors three hundred to one. The laity are ministers in different places. They go to homes and parties, offices and factories and farms, unemployment offices and sickrooms.

## UNLIMITED TREASURES

Lutheran Christians believe that whoever we are, wherever and whenever we are, we are to be disciples of Christ. We are to grow in hearing and responding to the message of God. We believe that very rich treasures of grace have been given to us. We want to be good stewards. We also want to spend those treasures on others. Since these are treasures of love and grace, they will never run out, but will only grow as they are put to use.

You need only ask at night  
before you go to bed,  
"What did I do to Jesus today?  
What did I do for Jesus today?  
What did I do with Jesus today?"  
You have only to look at your  
hands. This is the best examina-  
tion of conscience.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

**SHARING CHRIST'S LOVE**

The whole of the Christian life becomes a life controlled by the love of Christ. Here the gospel comes into play. We get to be “as Christ” or “a Christ” to our neighbor. Whatever God does through Christ for the care of the neighbor, God entrusts us to carry on. We cannot rescue others; we are not perfect or innocent in our love and care. Jesus Christ was and is, so he stood in our place. For he is to live in our actions and we are to be channels of his love. That is how we are to live.

**Notes about sharing**

Use this space to make notes about what you have read, discussed, or heard presented.

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SIX

# come to tell

## go therefore

Some people think that being faithful means having a “philosophy of life,” a perfect set of ideas or demands by which to live. Others think that faithfulness means using the right patterns of discipline and ways of healing. But Christian faith is more about a person than about a philosophy, more about a way than about a set of ideas. Faith brings its gifts through a set of active verbs which Jesus lived and passed on: go, do, hear, preach, heal, taste, love, be, die, rise, hope.

Lutherans are “evangelical” and as forgiven people reach out to share the message of God’s grace. Evangelical refers to the good news, or gospel, of Jesus Christ. As sinners, we sometimes get caught up in ourselves as much as everyone else does. But we try to look beyond ourselves to bring the gospel to community life with people of other faiths and those of no faith. We welcome others to worship and work with us.

Most Lutherans believe that the Christian good news knows no racial, ethnic, economic, national, age, or gender-related boundaries. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is organized to give emphasis to its desire that men and women, European American and African American, Hispanic and Asian and all others, share equally in the benefits and tasks that go with Christian life.

### **MATTHEW 28:19-20**

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

## THE MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Participation 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, following Jesus' example, and working for justice and peace.

## called into conversation

Baptism as the forgiveness of sins does not make us into solitary saints or hermits. Forgiveness always occurs in the fellowship of creatures; the baptized person is a member of the people of God. We often hear that baptism is the act of ordination of the laity, and that a clergyperson is merely a set-aside, professional member of the laity (from the Greek word *laos*, meaning people). It is true that baptism is the charter for the universal priesthood of believers with its privilege and responsibility.

Christian conversation is an expression of this calling. Believers are commissioned by their baptisms to speak to each other and to an uncaring world about what God is doing. We adapt our message from the sanctuary into the world of work and parties. We carry the story beyond the congregation—we “pass it on.” We display the new life of God in Christ in our midst.

“Passing it on” is a key theme in Christian faith. The minute we have a childlike faith, we can pass it on by telling others “what makes us tick.” As we mature in faith, we can pass on more about it and more of it. Christian faith is not designed for Robinson Crusoes, alone on an island—though it sustains people who are lonely in prison or exile. Christian faith is designed for company. We get knowledge of it, and confidence for it, from others. We grow in knowledge of it, and confidence in it, when we tell others.



## everyone welcome

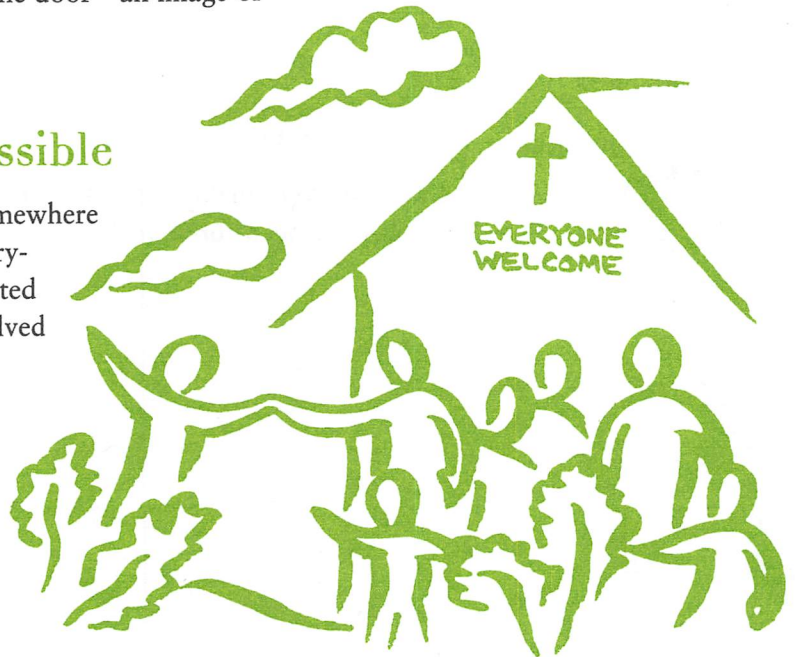
Philip S. Watson once wrote a book about Martin Luther's thought. He called it *Let God Be God*. We Lutherans at worship believe we are letting God be God in our praise. When God is God, then everyone is welcome, and the church is not a

club. When God is God, sinners are welcome, and the church is not a society of achievers. When God is God, inquirers are treated with respect, for God does not force anything on anyone. When God is God, the church is inviting: it sends out invitations in God's name and does what it can to make its worship and ways inviting.

If ours is an inviting church, we have to invite. A sign outside probably says "Everyone Welcome" or "All Are Invited." The people who put that sign there speak in the name of God who is the all-welcoming inviter. This God is our model. And so we open the door—an image of welcome.

## Anything is possible

Lutherans come from somewhere and would like to be everywhere. Lutherans originated as people who were involved with church reform in Scandinavia and Germany. Many Lutherans moved from northern Europe first and chiefly to northern North America, which seemed to be a second natural habitat. However we believe that our message of a God who forgives sinners is for everyone, so we have moved south from Europe and northern America into all the world. Today twenty-three percent of the Lutherans in the world live in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.



COME AND GROW WITH US

Lutherans are unfinished products though our forgiveness is complete. Aware of human weakness, imperfection, and mixed-up priorities, we are hopeful people. We respond to God's love by reaching out to others to tell and to demonstrate the good news of Jesus Christ. We believe that with God, anything is possible. We invite others who are not now active in Christian congregations to join us in the challenges which a trouble-filled world presents, and to rejoice with us in the promises with which a loving God greets us.

Notes about telling

Use this space to make notes about what you have read, discussed, or heard presented.

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