

L E A D E R G U I D E

 **LUTHERAN** *Faith & Life*

# LIVING ROOTS

## A STUDY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFSSION









**ADULT**

**LEADER GUIDE**

# Living Roots: A Study of the Augsburg Confession

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**LUTHERAN** *Faith & Life*

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**LIVING ROOTS: A STUDY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION**  
Lutheran Faith and Life Series  
Adult Leader Guide

This Leader Guide is for use with the Adult Student Book.

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# Introduction

## SERIES OVERVIEW

*Living Roots: A Study of the Augsburg Confession* is part of the Lutheran Faith and Life Series. This series presents the Lutheran heritage of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to children, youth, and adults. The resources in this series reinforce the Lutheran traditions of reverence for God's Word, faithfulness in worship, and understanding Lutheran confessional writings. As students and teachers remember the heritage and spiritual life of their denomination and their congregation, they will be challenged to move into the future with a renewed sense of mission and outreach.

*Living Roots* offers both a study of history and a look at what our Lutheran faith can mean for us today. The story of the Augsburg Confession takes place in sixteenth century Germany and really begins with Luther's life-changing discovery when he studied the Bible, especially the book of Romans: faith is reckoned to us as righteousness, we are justified in Jesus Christ. Luther's sense of being free from the fear of God's continual judgment and damnation gave him tremendous energy and motivation. He and the other reformers felt compelled to tell others the good news of God's grace and love through Christ.

Emperor Charles V, worried about the growing dissension at a time when his empire needed unity, called for an imperial diet (meeting) in Augsburg, Germany. The statements presented by the reformers later came to be known as the Augsburg Confession. The emperor hoped that after the differences had been discussed, they could be resolved and unity restored.

Luther and the other reformers did not want to see a divided church any more than the emperor did, and in 1530 when the Augsburg Confession was drafted, they still had hope. The articles are carefully worded, with much of their contents drawn from the creeds and the Bible. Philipp Melancthon did the actual writing of the Confession in consultation with Luther and the other reformers.

Articles 1-21 (the focus of this course) deal with faith and doctrine. Articles 22-28 are on correcting abuses. We can learn much about our heritage by looking more closely at the topics lifted up by the reformers as crucial to the faith.

A study of heritage defines the educational task in a certain way. The subject matter is the living faith of those in the past, and learning becomes a matter of looking intently and openly at their faithfulness. That is the most important thing we learn from our heritage—the faithfulness of God. We

teach that to others the way it was taught to us—by witnessing to a living relationship with God.

In reality, heritage is something that keeps growing and building. As we get to know it, what it means for us, and then live it, we take part in that creative enterprise. What we do with the heritage in our lives will be what we give to the next generation. It will be a living heritage if it comes out of our own wrestling with what we have received rather than being just a word-for-word handing over of the information from the past. Our heritage reflects how we have put the Reformation's teachings into practice through our congregations and national church bodies.

## SERIES GOALS

The goals of the Lutheran Faith and Life Series are to help teachers and participants:

- learn about and celebrate their Lutheran heritage at all ages of life;
- develop a sense of appreciation of the heritage of the Lutheran church and treasure it within their Christian faith;
- respond to God's grace with lives of faithfulness to God and service to others.

## USING THE SERIES RESOURCES

Lutheran Faith and Life resources can be used as a teaching and learning resource for: weekday classes; family nights; home use; longer and later confirmation classes; camping and retreats; summer programs; Christian day schools; youth groups; choirs; and Sunday morning programs. Detailed information and helps for using Lutheran Faith and Life in these settings can be found in the planning guide for this series. Before you begin planning the sessions you will teach, make sure you have information about the setting for teaching, the number of times your class will meet, and the amount of time scheduled for each class period.

## COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

*Living Roots: A Study of the Augsburg Confession* will introduce the participants to the Augsburg Confession as one of the foundation stones of the Lutheran expression of the Christian faith.

The course is divided into an introduction and six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the Augsburg Confession. Chapters 2-6 discuss the content of Articles 1-21.





## COURSE MATERIALS

The basic materials for this course are the student book and this leader guide. In addition, participants are encouraged to use their Bibles during the study. The Bible translation suggested for this course is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Frequent references are also made to the *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*.

The leader guide contains background information and instructions for leading the study. This guide explains how to use the student book and also provides many other suggestions to encourage learning and further exploration. You will find it helpful in preparing for each class session. You will need to plan ahead on how the student book will be used.

Although this course is arranged in six chapters, the student book and this guide have enough material and suggestions so that each chapter can be expanded over two or more class sessions.

Articles 1-21 of the Augsburg Confession are printed in the student book, and each participant will need a copy. The student book is intended to be consulted and read by the participants long after the course is ended.

## LEADER GUIDE FORMAT

The format of this course has three parts that are briefly described below. You will be able to organize your basic session plan by observing and using the easy-to-follow steps.

### PRE-STUDY

This section provides the introductory information needed to plan and lead the class sessions.

**Focus Statement.** The focus of each chapter summarizes the main theme of each chapter.

**Chapter Objectives.** The specific learning objectives are provided for each chapter.

**Background.** This section provides additional theological information on the various articles of the Augsburg Confession and on the Christian faith and may be shared with the participants.

**Materials Needed.** This list indicates all the items needed for teaching the session.

**Before the Study.** Read this section to learn what basic preparations should be made prior to class time.

### STUDY

This section provides directions and materials for teaching the chapter. Remember that each chapter may be expanded over two or more class periods. You will need to make choices on which activities you feel will be most helpful and will work best with your group in your situation. In each chapter of this guide, the "Study" section is divided

into five major parts: "Entry," "Exploring the Student Book," "For Reflection," "Our Prayers," and "Further Reading."

**Entry.** This section refers the participants to the opening paragraphs of the chapter in the student book. By reading these paragraphs and reflecting on them, the participants enter into the central theme of the chapter.

**Exploring the Student Book.** This section contains material on the student book and "Key Points to Emphasize." In the sections from the student book, participants are introduced to the articles of the Augsburg Confession. Together with the commentary, discussion questions, Bible references, and activities suggested in the leader guide, the participants encounter the Augsburg Confession and the Scripture on which it is based. "Exploring the Student Book" also provides suggestions for integrating the daily faith and life experiences of the participants. Under "Key Points to Emphasize," important concepts and ideas of the various sections are highlighted for the leader. You will want to make extensive use of these suggestions if you are allotting only one class period for each chapter.

**For Reflection.** This section is in both the leader guide and the student book. The questions and statements in this section of the student book provide another point of entry and reflection on the meaning of the Augsburg Confession for the faith and life of the participants.

**Our Prayers.** This section in both the student book and this guide provides suggestions for closing worship and prayer. Hymns from *Lutheran Book of Worship* are suggested for use.

**Further Reading.** Listed here are other confessional writings such as the Apology to the Augsburg Confession and books that speak to the themes of the session. The leader may want to read some of these in preparation for the session and can tell interested students about these resources.

### POST-STUDY

Following the session, the leader needs to continue planning for future learning.

**Expanding the Session.** This section provides additional ideas for expanding the learning outside of regular classroom settings. Suggestions for individual or class projects, guest speakers, and other activities are provided.

**Looking Ahead.** This section alerts the leader to upcoming activities that may require more time to prepare or arrange. It also reminds the leader to inform the participants of what they are to read or do in preparation for the next session.



## LEARNER AND LEADER

Adults who will use this resource represent a wide range of age and experience. We must not fall into the trap of assuming that all adults are somehow alike. In addition to knowing something about the potential represented by different ages, the leader must get to know individuals well enough to appreciate what each one brings to the learning from personal experience. Knowing the learner in terms of age-level differences and differences among individuals is an important principle of teaching.

Yet, in speaking of the adult learner, there are some general things that can be said that will be helpful. These generalities must, however, always be used to begin the process of knowing the individual learner and not considered as conclusions by which all learners can be understood.

Attention to the social and emotional development in the adult years is important. The struggles to balance the positive and negative events in their lives are just as real in adulthood as in earlier years. Factors of cultural differences and emotional and social development are especially critical in matters of faith because of the personal and group commitments they call forth. Those factors account for much of adult behavior in relationships in families, among friends, and in the workplace.

Adults have reached the stage of intellectual development in which they can think abstractly. This skill is important as adults consider their faith, but they have to be encouraged and supported in using it. For example, applying what is believed in daily life involves complex decisions that cannot be easily made or sustained. Small and large group discussions, as suggested in this study, will help foster thinking skills. As these discussions are used, it will be best to keep them focused on the questions of faith rather than to use them as quick paths to simple answers.

Adults like to be involved in the way they learn. Those who will lead this course can build on that desire by helping adults recognize and claim their needs and interests and by giving them opportunities to guide their own learning. Developing a climate of trust in the classroom is essential for such teaching and learning. The leader can best serve here by encouraging differences in faith commitments and by offering a supportive classroom atmosphere in which they can be expressed.

This does not mean making one's faith intensely private, but to provide opportunities for individuals to come to an awareness of their own personal faith in the context of the community of faith.

The formulation and living of one's faith needs practice. Discussion of the Augsburg Confession can be a place to plan action in the world as well as to reflect upon the essentials of Christian teaching.

Evelyn and James Whitehead assert that the two great contributions of our religious adulthood are conscience and "charisms," that is, personal gifts and attributes. They say that, even with our well-developed consciences and charisms, we have to admit that no one has all the answers. Discerning courses of action in church and world requires listening publicly to other voices in the community ("Reviews for Religious," May-June, 1990).

## THE LEARNING SETTING

The classroom space is not nearly as important to the learning environment as is the classroom environment. Try to create a warm, positive, welcoming environment that will encourage people to share their thoughts and ideas. A good way to do this is to involve the participants in planning and arranging the classroom setting.

Always keep supplies readily available. Plan ahead for such problems as broken pencils or a shortage of Bibles or student books.

You may want to meet as a class outside of the traditional classroom setting. This course can easily be taught in a home or a retreat setting. Such locations may help the participants see that the Augsburg Confession is not a course to be learned, but that it can serve as a guide for faith and life.



## CHAPTER

# 1

# A Confessing People

### FOCUS STATEMENT

The Augsburg Confession guides and guards our steps as we seek to be faithful witnesses to our gracious God who makes us righteous through Christ and whose love reaches out to the whole world.

### OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help adults:

- learn about the historical origin of the Augsburg Confession;
- deepen their understanding of the Augsburg Confession as a witness to the gospel recorded in the Scriptures;
- begin to articulate what it means to be a Lutheran Christian who subscribes to the Augsburg Confession;
- understand that the Confession commits us to be an evangelical, catholic, ecumenical, and reforming church;
- explore ways to "confess and contend for Christ" in today's world.



### PRE-STUDY

### BACKGROUND

#### The Witness of the Augsburg Confession

In the midst of so many denominations, as well as nondenominational and interdenominational churches, what does it mean to be a confessing church? Why and how do Lutheran Christians subscribe to the Augsburg Confession? These are the questions at the heart of this session, "A Confessing People." Behind the questions lurks the fear that the Augsburg Confession is one of the best-kept secrets among Lutherans. It is not unusual to find lifelong Lutherans who have never heard of the Augsburg Confession, as well as "brand new" Lutherans, just out of new member classes, who are equally strangers to the Confession. This is most unfortunate, because the Augsburg Confession strives to guide and guard the church's witness to the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. Its gospel-centered witness is one of Lutheranism's greatest gifts to the church.

### Who?

An important point to consider is that Melancthon, the voice for Luther and his supporters and the writer of the Augsburg Confession, was never an ordained minister in the church but a faithful layperson. So, too, the Confession was not presented before the assembled diet by a bishop or a pastor but by another layperson, Chancellor Brueck. In other words, the Augsburg Confession was a confession of faith delivered by laypersons before a public forum. This is noteworthy.

The Augsburg Confession shows that confession of faith is not just for the professionally religious nor is it a Sunday-only church activity. By our words, deeds, our very lives, we are called to "confess and contend for Christ" (see the preface to the Augsburg Confession) in the world.

### What?

The heart and soul of the Augsburg Confession is its witness to God who justifies sinners apart from works of the law. In traditional terms, this is known as the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. We are declared beloved children, not because of the success of our own striving, skills, or strategy, but solely through the unmerited love of God for us in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

### Why?

The Augsburg Confession was designed to promote dialogue between leaders in the Roman Catholic Church and those calling for reform within the Roman Catholic Church. Luther and his supporters never intended to form a new church, and especially not a rival church. The intent was to guard the purity of the gospel proclamation. The confessors insisted their doctrine was not new, but was indeed the faith of the apostolic church and therefore was in agreement with Scripture and the ancient creeds. What the confessors protested against were the "new" doctrines and practices that had developed during the medieval period such as the doctrines of meritorious works and cooperation (in regard to earning salvation), and practices such as praying to saints.

### So What?

In leading this session and the course, one concern that needs to be seriously and creatively addressed is that of the enduring significance of the Augsburg Confession for the class participants. How does this sixteenth century document yet speak a word of hope and life to us today? Helps are interwoven throughout the sessions to facilitate meeting this goal, and you and the participants will no doubt discover additional ways of accomplishing it.



## MATERIALS NEEDED

Student books ● Bibles ● copies of Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW) ● newsprint ● markers ● pens or pencils ● writing paper

## BEFORE THE STUDY

— Read through the Augsburg Confession, (the first 21 articles are printed in the back of the student book) so you are familiar with its style and content. Don't worry about remembering everything that is in the articles, but do try and sense the spirit in which the Confession was written. It might be helpful for you to imagine the situation at the diet of Augsburg in 1530. Luther could not attend because of threats against his life, but the others came with high hopes. Try to sense their courage as they took a stand and the high drama behind the writing and presenting of the Augsburg Confession.

— Become acquainted with class members. If possible, visit or talk with them on the phone ahead of time. Encourage them to share with you their religious backgrounds, including their knowledge of the Augsburg Confession. Assure all that the course will be a time to become acquainted with the Augsburg Confession and to grow in understanding of the Lutheran heritage together. It is important to share this with those who might feel unprepared for the class because of unfamiliarity with the Confession.

— Decide how you will conduct discussions in order to maximize learning. If your class is large, plan to divide the participants into small groups of three or four for discussion.

— Before the class, check that there is an adequate number of comfortable chairs in the classroom. Arrange them to facilitate interaction, and remember to bring student books and other needed materials.

— Read Chapter 1, "A Confessing People," in the student book. Consider the "For Reflection" questions. How would you answer them? Be prepared to share your answers with the class. Doing some background reading, as time permits, may help you catch some of the excitement behind the Augsburg Confession.



## STUDY

### ENTRY

The purpose of the activities in this section is to introduce the participants to some of the key themes of this course, especially the intent and content of the Augsburg Confession as a historical confession and an enduring witness to the gospel.

#### Introductions and course overview

Before beginning the study, take a few minutes for introductions. Have each participant share something about his or her Lutheran identity.

Such sharing might be encouraged with questions like these: "What does it mean for you to be a Lutheran Christian?" or "What do you think makes Lutheranism unique?"

After participants have introduced themselves, introduce them to the Augsburg Confession as the major confessional document of worldwide Lutheranism. Show them that the first 21 articles are printed in the back of their student books. To be a Lutheran Christian is, among other things, to recognize the Augsburg Confession as authoritative for our doctrine and life of faith. For us as Lutherans to know nothing about the Augsburg Confession would be similar to missing some significant biographical fact about ourselves, for example, our grandparents' last names.

Give a brief survey of the six chapters of this course. This first chapter is an overview and introduction. Chapter 2 looks at Article 4 on justification, the heart of Lutheran teaching. Chapter 3 studies Articles 1, 3, and 17 on God, the Son of God, and the last judgment. Chapter 4 is on Articles 2, 18, and 19, and sin is the main topic. Chapter 5 looks at Articles 5 and 7-15, primarily about the church; and the focus of Chapter 6 is Articles 6, 16, 20, and 21, on the relation of faith and works.

Conclude the introductions by communicating to the class your commitment to and excitement about assisting them in becoming better acquainted (perhaps even friends) with the Augsburg Confession. Emphasize the importance of their presence and participation.

### Confessing Christ

Have participants turn to Chapter 1, "A Confessing People" on page 6 of the student book. You may want to ask volunteers to read aloud the first two paragraphs on page 6 of the student book or have them read them silently to themselves.

Read questions 1 and 2 on page 15 of the student book:

1. *As personally as Peter, you, too, are addressed by the Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). How do you respond?*

2. *What does it mean for Jesus to be the Lord in your life (Romans 10:9)?*

Provide paper, pens, and colored markers for the participants and ask them to give their responses (describe, draw, jot down words—allow and encourage any and all avenues of creativity).

After a few minutes gather the class together and invite participants to share their reflections. Of course, there are no right or wrong answers. Affirm each participant's contribution as a gift to the class. Whenever we tell another of Jesus, our sharing is a gift to be respected and cherished.

Assist the class in understanding that their various responses are acts of confession. Giving answers to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" is an act of witnessing to God and, in fact, of praising God. Relate this to the church's liturgy in which the people of God recite a creed (usually the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed). The tendency is simply



to repeat the creed by rote or read it from the hymnal. Help the class begin to see the creeds as the church's living voice of *praise* to God who has acted in the human story.

## EXPLORING THE STUDENT BOOK

### People of the Way

Have the class read the section, "People of the Way" on page 7 of the student book. Christians are those who witness to God not only with their words but with their lives. Review the terms *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy* on page 7 of the student book. We are called to confess with our mouths, heads, hearts, hands, and lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Encourage participants to share their reflections on this and what it means for their personal lives.

One avenue of approach might be to re-assert the often-used criticism that Christians are hypocrites, those who "don't practice what they preach." You may ask: "Is that a fair critique? What do we as Christians, as a church, communicate by our actions? Do our actions reflect our faith?"

Encourage the participants to consider their personal Christian witness and the witness of their local congregation. What is it that we as a church in this particular community reflect about the God we worship? Consider the worship, social ministry, community activities, ministry with families, youth work, and other ministries of the congregation. Also consider what members are doing in their neighborhoods, jobs, and other settings. To conclude, bring the discussion around again to the central "birthmark" of Christian identity: God chooses us, makes us righteous through Christ, and we in turn confess and give witness to our God.

### The Drama Behind the Augsburg Confession

Have the class read "Luther's Confession" (pages 7-9 of the student book) and "The Confession at Augsburg" (pages 9-11 of the student book) after you give a brief introduction. The events they will read about are hedged in drama, with the powers of the Roman Catholic Church threatening excommunication now and hell later, with the empire putting the reformers' lives and property at peril, and with Luther concealed in a castle many miles away. After an adequate amount of time for reading, ask for initial responses and reflections. When Reformation Sunday comes around again each year on October 31, sometimes we don't grasp the tension and drama of the events surrounding Luther's call for a return to the gospel. Try to recapture some of the reformers' excitement and sense of mission as you talk together.

### Key Points to Emphasize

1. The motivation behind the Augsburg Confession came from the reformers' astounding discovery, first by Luther, then verified by others, that the Bible teaches that God freely grants salvation through faith in Christ. They were freed from the fear that they had to earn their way into heaven.

This great "good news" turned their lives and world upside down. They had a mission, and the Augsburg Confession is part of the dramatic story of the Reformation.

2. Luther's desire was to reform the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, not to establish a new church. Luther and his supporters wanted to stay within the church and work for reform. In 1530, Luther still hoped to avoid a split. However, as the years went by, that hope faded and division became inevitable.

Love of our church doesn't necessarily mean that we accept the way things are or have always been done. It may require us to be critical and to work for reform. Luther expressed his love for the church by calling the church of his day to return to the gospel, to be honest, and to be true to Jesus Christ, the one and only head of the church.

3. On behalf of the other reformers, Philipp Melancthon, a layman, wrote the Augsburg Confession. It was presented to the diet by Chancellor Brueck, another layman. Confession of one's faith is the privilege and responsibility of all baptized Christians in and through the variety of vocations in which they serve.

4. Summarize for the class, with the aid of a chalkboard, the commitments of the Augsburg Confession as presented in the following sections of the student book. During your presentation, allow for discussion and questions from the class:

#### a. Evangelical Witness, page 11

The Augsburg Confession is not an end in itself but bears witness to the Holy Scripture. The Gospel remains the standard against which the Confession is to be measured, judged, and reformed.

#### b. Catholic (universal) Heritage, pages 11-12

The Augsburg Confession stands in continuity with the apostolic faith confessed in the ancient creeds (Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles'). Point out that these creeds are also part of our confessional documents in *The Book of Concord* (also, all three creeds are in *LBW*, pp. 54-55, 64, 65). Explain that *The Book of Concord* is a book of the collections of the confessions of the Lutheran church: The three creeds (Athanasian, Nicene, and Apostles'), the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the *Small Catechism*, the *Large Catechism*, the *Smalcald Articles*, and the *Formula of Concord*.

#### c. Ecumenical Vision, page 12

The Augsburg Confession was drafted with the hope that the disagreeing groups could be reconciled. It strove for oneness. The Confession is not the exclusive property of Lutheranism—it is never "ours" alone. As Melancthon and the reformers originally intended, the Augsburg Confession poses the challenge and invitation for Lutherans to open lines of communication with other Christians for the sake of the church's mission in the world. The church, although it is one because it is Christ's, does not present a picture of unity to the world. There are over 300 established denominations in the United States.



Originally the Augsburg Confession sought to preserve the unity of the one church. Today the Augsburg Confession can serve to restore the unity of the divided church.

Have the participants read and discuss question 4 on page 15 of the student book:

*The Augsburg Confession calls for reform of the one, holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic church. How might such a call guide or determine our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic faith and other denominations?*

#### **d. Reforming Commitment, page 13**

The Augsburg Confession witnesses to the gospel of the risen Christ as a living word that addresses people where they live. Maybe the way things have always been done still effectively serves the gospel, maybe not. Our loyalty is to the gospel, not to our traditions or preferences. The Augsburg Confession insists that the Word of God be spoken, preached, and lived in Christ's church. Where this happens, we can expect some surprises. After all, this is the God who entered our world as a baby lying in a manger with a teenaged mother and quite likely with barn animals in attendance!

Ask a volunteer to read "The Augsburg Confession: Enduring Power" on pages 13-14 of the student book.

If some participants seem interested in learning more, suggest that they check your church library. Give them the names of the resources listed under "Further Reading" on page 9 of this guide.

### **FOR REFLECTION**

See the session plan above for suggested use of questions 1, 2, and 4 from the "For Reflection" section of the student book.

Have participants read and respond to question 3 on page 15 of the student book:

*Martin Luther did not approve of the name Lutheran for those who followed his leading. What do you think? What other names might have been chosen?*

Talk together about being called Lutheran, and the problems the name may have created in the past or even today. What are the positive aspects of being called Lutheran?

Discuss question 5 on page 15 of the student book:

*As you reflect upon Christianity today, where do you see the need for reform and renewal? Is the church still "on the way," or have we taken some detours or run into some dead ends? Try writing a couple of "theses" proposing reform for the church today.*

If time permits, you might have class members do this today. Otherwise suggest that they do this at home and bring their theses next week. They can be about teachings or practices in the church that they think need some reforming. As their statements take shape, write them on newsprint and post them in the room, or collect and type them together for distribution at a later class session.

### **OUR PRAYERS**

Gather the class together in a circle. Begin by singing "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage" (LBW 239). Lead the class in confessing the Nicene Creed (LBW p. 64). You may introduce it by saying, "Let us confess together our faith in God who has made us his people through our baptism." Conclude by praying together "Our Prayers" on page 15 of the student book.

### **FURTHER READING**

1. Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds (LBW pp. 54-55, 64, 65)
2. From *The Book of Concord: Formula of Concord, "Rule and Norm"* (Epitome, pp. 464-465; Solid Declaration, pp. 501-508.)
3. Carl E. Braaten. *Principles of Lutheran Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
4. Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson. *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.
5. James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.



### **EXPANDING THE SESSION**

- Invite a local priest to share his thoughts on the dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.
- Attend the mass in a local Roman Catholic church. Then lead participants in discussing similarities to and differences from your own worship.
- Challenge each class member to keep a journal for a day in which they record the day's activities, especially those involving other people, no matter how seemingly insignificant and routine. Beside each activity have students answer the question: How did I witness to Jesus as living Lord in this activity or action?
- It is not always easy to confess our faith publicly. Ask each member of the class to identify one person to whom they will witness to their faith.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

- Ask the participants to read Chapter 2, "A Justified People" in the student book before the next class.
- Read through Chapter 2 in both the student book and leader guide. Work through the questions under "For Reflection" and plan how you will use them or expand upon them.
- Decide which of the "Expanding the Session" activities you will use or encourage the participants to use.



## CHAPTER

## 2

# A Justified People

### FOCUS STATEMENT

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has ultimately and forever acted to reconcile the estranged, to forgive sinners, and to love us all. Jesus Christ is God's eternal "yes" to us and to the whole world.

### OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help adults:

- deepen their understanding of justification as God's gracious gift of love and life;
- articulate more clearly and concisely the Lutheran understanding of justification by grace through faith;
- confront the challenge posed by the radical proclamation of God's unconditional grace;
- share with others the experience of God's unconditional love;
- explore ways of living as God's justified people in daily life;
- give thanks to God for his amazing grace.



### PRE-STUDY

### BACKGROUND

Justification by grace through faith alone is the heart of the Augsburg Confession and of Lutheran teaching. Popularly, it is often regarded as *the* Lutheran doctrine or what Lutherans *really* believe. But if the Augsburg Confession is a faithful witness to the gospel, and the gospel is about God's justification of sinners, justification is an article of faith that does not belong to Lutherans alone but to the whole Christian church. In fact, we could say it is not just a doctrine, but the totality of the Christ event. What did God do through Jesus Christ? Reconciled the world unto himself (2 Corinthians 5:19), defeated death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57), forgave sinners (Mark 2:1-12), healed the sick (Matthew 9:35), raised the dead (Luke 7:11-17), and loved the unlovely (Mark 5:25-34).

The confessional concern is that justification be boldly and purely proclaimed. This is not an easy task given that we are all so indoctrinated in the ways of the world. From birth we have learned that what matters is what we *do* and achieve in life. We get what we deserve, what we

have earned. If we do well in school, we receive a good grade. If we work hard, we will advance. The world as we know it revolves on such conditional (if-then) statements.

The gospel message doesn't fit this structure. The gospel is not "if you . . .", but "because God" has acted in Jesus Christ, "therefore" your life has meaning, purpose, and a blessed future. The challenge is to believe and proclaim justification: Through Christ God has established a never-ending relationship with us because God chose to do so. Nothing can stop God, not even death (Romans 8:37-39).

When justification is rightly proclaimed, there will invariably be objections. Surely we have to do something to merit and insure God's love for us. *No, we do not.* Given our workaholic society, the objections will persist. Surely we have to be moral people, or experience God's love, or attend church, or believe a certain amount of doctrine, or whatever. *No.* Jesus' proclamation, "It is finished," heralds the new day. God's love for sinners is the way things now are—a matter beyond death, beyond "doing," beyond doubt, and beyond debate. Yet the objections will persist. Well, then, this is cheap grace? No, it cost the Son of God his life. It is not cheap, but it is free—freely given to us all in the life, death, resurrection, and reigning lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Augsburg Confession was written at a time when the church presented salvation as a divine/human endeavor with both parties cooperating in achieving the result. If people did good works—bought an indulgence, made a pilgrimage, prayed—then God would reward them with his love and they would be blessed now and go to heaven when they died.

Although the terms have changed, theories of cooperation still abound in church pronouncements and popular piety. "If only you believe our doctrine." "If only you can attest to a 'born again' experience." "If only you attend church." While these activities may be good, they have absolutely nothing to do with earning salvation or being loved by God. The radical proclamation of justification is this: God has made a decision and it is in our favor. The matter of our salvation is resolved. Our relationship with God has been restored. We are loved and forgiven. Of course, there is much we can and should do in *response* to this great gift, not so that God will love us but because God does love us.

The confessional understanding of justification is of God's restoring us, forgiving us, and loving us in the advent and event of Jesus Christ. The temptation will always be to hedge, to add a condition here and there. This we cannot do. The gospel "rightly proclaimed" is of God, the one in ultimate control, who has freely embraced and made us part of his story. It is the message of the unconditional, unmerited, undeserved, undying love of our God in Jesus Christ.



## MATERIALS NEEDED

Student books ● Bibles ● copies of LBW ● pens or pencils ● markers ● chalkboard or newsprint ● a cross cut from wood or foam ● tacks or push pins

## BEFORE THE STUDY

— Examine your own understanding of justification by grace through faith alone. Without using the traditional terms, how would you explain it? What image—acquittal in the courtroom, acceptance of the unacceptable, brought from darkness to light, life out of death, or some other—best conveys the confessional understanding of justification for you?

— Many find the radical proclamation of justification offensive. If God's love is an unconditional free gift that is neither motivated nor influenced by our good deeds and our bad deeds, then it is available to all (my enemies as well as friends, friends as well as strangers, the strange and the estranged). Explore your own initial reactions as well as your more reasoned responses to justification as such an unconditional promise for all.

— Read or scan Melancthon's explanation of Article 4 in the Apology (BC 107-168).



## ENTRY

The purpose of the activities in this section is to introduce the participants to some of the key themes in the Lutheran understanding of justification as God's forgiveness and acceptance of sinners apart from works of the law.

Open the session by reading or asking a volunteer to read Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession on page 58 of the student book.

Describe to the participants a T-shirt that can be purchased from a mail order catalog. On the shirt are the inviting and awaiting golden gates of heaven. Printed in bold above the gates are the words, "How much can I get away with and still get to heaven?" Modify the question for the class to, "What is it that will keep God from loving and forgiving me?"

Pass out pens and paper and ask the participants to list those things (transgressions, sins, faults, weaknesses, habits) that would cause God to stop loving them and forgiving them. After a few minutes, ask the participants to share as much of their lists as they are willing, and encourage them to state why they have believed a certain activity (or inactivity) would motivate God to withdraw his love.

Then ask the participants to identify and write down various activities and behaviors they feel would safeguard (maybe even increase) God's acceptance of them. Raise this question: "How much do I have to do to make sure God loves me?" Briefly discuss the responses offered.

Help the participants to realize how these questions are those we have been taught both to ask and to fear. Discuss how many aspects of our lives are determined by conditional (if-then) statements. The world has taught us well that we have to earn what we get. After all, "no pain, no gain."

Now read Romans 3:21-26, which is printed as a sidebar on page 18 of the student book and which is mentioned in Article 4 of the Augsburg Confession. Assist the class in understanding that God's acceptance of us is not a question, but the answer. Bring out the cross (of wood or styrofoam). Invite the participants to "nail" (attach) both their lists of sins and weaknesses and their lists of "good works" to the cross. Explain how on the cross of Jesus Christ all our sins have been forgiven and all our striving, skills, and schemings "to get to God" have been crucified to death. Jesus, God who came to us, proclaimed, "It is finished." On this side of the cross and empty tomb, we who have faith in Jesus Christ are freely loved and forgiven.

Briefly review the setting for the Augsburg Confession, and how certain the reformers were of their mission. They wanted to convince the church to return to the gospel (the good news that God freely forgives all who have faith in Jesus Christ) and to shed everything that detracted from the gospel.

Read the last three paragraphs of "The Meaning of Life?" on pages 18-19 of the student book, beginning with the sentence "There is only one answer to the questions of life's meaning and of God's love for us."

## EXPLORING THE STUDENT BOOK

### Justification

Review for the class the section on "Justification" on pages 19-20 of the student book. It may be helpful to outline or write notes on the chalkboard to reinforce learning. Although justification is a well-known term for Lutherans, it is not always so well understood. In the sixteenth century, justification was a familiar legal term. Justification was the reason or circumstance that defended and upheld a person as right and blameless against his or her accusers.

While the legal imagery may still be useful, we need to complement it with other images used in the Bible to clarify our understanding and articulation of justification. In the student book other images of what Jesus Christ accomplished are suggested—the cancellation of debt, a load lifted, light breaking through darkness, life out of death, the unclean made clean, and the reconciliation of enemies. Discuss these and ask the class for other suggestions. What image, word, or concept conveys to them God's free gift of love and forgiveness through Christ?

### Key Points to Emphasize

1. Justification is God's "nevertheless." We are sinners, nevertheless through Christ God forgives. We owe a debt, nevertheless through Christ God pays for us. We are burdened, nevertheless through



Christ God lifts the load. No matter what image is used, God reaches through our predicament. "I have forgiven you and love you" is the promise and victory of Christ's cross.

2. In considering various images that might be used, it is important that they convey: a) The unconditionality of God's act, and; b) God's personal involvement in our lives. We might think that justification could have been accomplished by a divine memo faxed from heaven, but instead God chose to be personally involved in our lives.

3. Review "By Grace Alone" on pages 20-22 of the student book. Emphasize the following points to the class:

a. God is the one who acts in justifying us, in making us righteous. Justification is not our doing, willing, or wishing, but God's doing, willing, and achieving. We do not merit or earn God's acceptance and love.

b. To be justified is to be declared other than what we are (not "just as I am"). We are sinners whom God declares forgiven. The declaration is not that we are in the process of being forgiven but that we *are* forgiven. Consider the words from our liturgy, "I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins" (LBW p. 56). It is not a promise that someday your sins will be forgiven, or that they are partly forgiven, but it is *now*, and it is the *entire* forgiveness of *all* your sins.

c. Justification is not a "push" to get us going toward achieving or working for our own forgiveness or our own righteousness. This we humans cannot do. Righteousness is not "loaned" to us as if it were only temporarily needed until repayment can be made. It is totally God's gift.

d. There is only one reason why we are forgiven, accepted, and loved by God—because God chose to do so in Jesus Christ.

4. Review "Through Faith" on pages 22-23 of the student book. Emphasize the following points to the class:

a. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, not my achievement.

b. Faith is absolute dependence on God's mercy and grace. We especially need to combat the popular notion that faith is belief in certain amounts of religious information. You might use the following comments of Melancthon to enhance your discussion.

"The faith that justifies . . . is no mere historical knowledge, but the firm acceptance of God's offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification. To avoid the impression that it is merely knowledge, we add that to have faith means to want and to accept the promised offer of forgiveness of sins and justification" (BC 114:48).

"Faith is that which grasps God's free mercy because of God's Word" (BC 127-128:153).

"Faith is not merely knowledge but rather a desire to accept and grasp what is offered in the promise of Christ" (BC 139:227).

Read and discuss question 2 on page 24 of the student book:

*If all are freely justified in Jesus Christ regardless of good or bad works, then God loves the most wanted criminal as much as me. Does that sound right? Aren't there some conditions that have to be met along the way?*

One offense of justification is that it is not "just me and God" but that it can include my enemy as well. The worst nightmare for many is being seated at the heavenly banquet right next to that person (if need be, substitute: race, interest, orientation, offense) who has been my mortal enemy on Earth. We might be tempted to ask for another seating arrangement. The purpose of the question is to allow participants to articulate their views and to highlight the unconditionality of God's love. Try as we will to build ladders, impose conditions, jump through hoops, we cannot justify ourselves or another. Again, assist the class in beginning to glimpse what a radical proclamation justification is in our lives.

5. Ask volunteers to read aloud "Justification: A Way of Living" on page 23 of the student book. Emphasize the centrality of justification. Justification is not just one doctrine on a list of doctrines. When we know we are justified, all our actions, words, deeds, and our very beings witness to the marvelous favor of God for us expressed in Jesus Christ.

You may wish to mention the word *sanctification*. That doctrine is about growth in holiness after justification. It is about living our faith. Articles 6 and 20, which are part of chapter 6 in this course, take a closer look at good works and their relation to faith.

Have everyone look at question 5 on page 24 of the student book:

*What would you say or do in a Sunday school class or children's sermon that might explain the Lutheran understanding of justification by grace?*

Have the participants think of role plays about being guilty but then declared forgiven, or light and darkness, or other images.

## FOR REFLECTION

See the session plan above for suggested use of questions 2 and 5 on page 24 of the student book. Questions 1 and 4 can be used as a way to review and evaluate the learning of this session:

1. *In a world where we get what we deserve, how can we trust that this message of undeserved love is true?*

4. *Can I say "no" to God's love? If I do, will it change God's decision to love me?*

Of course, we can say "no!" We may do so with our words or with our actions. We may turn from



God, reject God's free gift, run from God's love, and ignore God's call. The question is whether those actions will alter God's decision to love us. The Augsburg Confession, in its radical proclamation of justification, says God never gives up on us, always loves us, and keeps calling us. There is nothing more powerful, not even my "no," than the cross of Jesus Christ and what God has accomplished there. The last word, spoken from the cross, is God's "yes."

## OUR PRAYERS

Begin by singing together "Have No Fear, Little Flock" (LBW 476) which is printed on page 23 of the student book. Pray together "Our Prayers" on page 24 of the student book. Conclude by greeting one another with the declaration, "The peace of the Lord is with you," and the response, "And also with you!"

## FURTHER READING

1. Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson. *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, pp. 36-68.
2. Carl Braaten. *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
3. Gerhard Forde. *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982 (out of print but available in some libraries).

## POST-STUDY

### EXPANDING THE SESSION

- Plan an activity that gives something free with no strings attached. One possibility is to set up and advertise a free car wash one Saturday morning. Refuse to take any payment for washing the vehicles, even if offered. At lunch together discuss the experience. What was the reaction of people who stopped? Did they believe it was free? Were they looking for a hidden cost or gimmick (we'll wash your car if you come to church)? How did you feel? Relate the experience to justification as God's free gift to us. If the car wash idea isn't possible, think of others.
- Keep a journal throughout the week in which you reflect and pray upon the following questions: How do I experience God's relationship with me? Where is God in my life?
- Encourage the class to set time aside to celebrate God's grace and gift of his love. Encourage them to be creative in exploring new avenues of praise.
- Do a class role play. Playing different roles, the participants can address the class with their objections to the radical reality of justification. Instruct the class to respond with a clear proclamation of justification.

### Examples of Possible Roles

1. Woman active in the church: "I fold bulletins, make sure altar linens are clean, attend every Sunday, tithe, etc., and you're telling me that God loves my rarely-come-to-church neighbor as much as me. No way."
2. Man at the airport: "You have to believe that God loves you in order for God to keep on loving you."
3. TV evangelist: "Christians are those who feel God's Spirit in their hearts. If you want God to love you, open up your heart to God's Spirit."
4. Sunday school teacher: "You have to be a moral person."
5. Pastor in a sermon: "Christ died for those who believe in God."
6. Fundamentalist: "You have to make a decision to accept Christ as your personal Savior."

Create others or rephrase the examples given. The purpose of this exercise is to help the class to recognize and respond to the subtle and not-so-subtle attempts to make God's acceptance of us conditional upon something we do—to sneak in a condition. We are justified as a gift.

### LOOKING AHEAD

- Ask the participants to read Chapter 3, "Freely and Forever Loved by God" in the student book before the next class.
- Read through Chapter 3 in both the student book and leader guide. Work through the questions under "For Reflection" and plan how you will use them or expand upon them.
- Decide which of the "Expanding the Session" activities you will use or encourage the participants to use.



# Freely and Forever Loved by God

## FOCUS STATEMENT

Jesus Christ is the Word of God in whom God's will for humanity is revealed. We hold and teach that God is triune: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

## OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help adults:

- understand the articles of the Augsburg Confession on God (Article 1), Jesus Christ (Article 3), and the return of Christ to judgment (Article 17);
- answer the question, "Who is this God whom Christians worship?";
- articulate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and understand it in light of justification;
- critique movements that proclaim another God and another hope than that revealed in Jesus Christ;
- experience the assurance of knowing that God is ultimately in control of this world.



## PRE-STUDY

## BACKGROUND

In continuity with the ancient church, the Augsburg Confession holds and teaches that God is triune and that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is Savior and judge. The Nicene, Apostles', and Athanasian Creeds cited and inferred in Articles 1 and 3 are the accepted symbols (creeds) of orthodoxy in western Christendom. There is no room for dispute or debate about these articles within the western Christian church. Illustrative of this is the fact that the Confutation, the Roman Catholic response to the Augsburg Confession, acknowledged agreement with Articles 1, 3, and 17.

The inevitable and unanswerable question is this: "How can two diametrically opposed natures, divine and human, be combined in one person?" What, for heaven's sake, does "three persons in one essence" mean? The Augsburg Confession refuses to play the speculation game. What was God doing before the creation of the

world? Quoting Augustine, Luther responded: "Making hell for those who ask such questions." Christian faith is not a spectator sport; it demands participants. Those who boldly go forth in the world face its challenges and dilemmas in the undefeatable truth of God's presence and power.

At issue is the question of authority. Who says God justifies the ungodly? God says so! Well, who is this God? What gives this God authority to make such bold claims? Is this God credible? Behind the anti-speculative commitment of the Augsburg Confession is the enduring fact that we simply do not have the luxury to waste time on theoretical "might be's." If justification is just a human doctrine, we should forget it and get busy doing good works to appease God and earn merits to get to heaven. If God's love for sinners is just an idea that the church cooked up, and not reality, then Christians should definitely get out of the kitchen before they get burned.

The theology of the Augsburg Confession looks to the cross and so witnesses to Jesus Christ (true God, true man) as a full member of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The Confession asserts that the gospel promise of God's justification of sinners is God's Word. You can trust it!

God is "deep in the flesh of Jesus Christ" (Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism*, pp. 91-109. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). We are not to look elsewhere for God than in the Bethlehem babe, the crucified criminal, the risen Redeemer. To know Jesus is to know the triune God; to know the Father to whom Jesus prayed (John 17) and the Spirit Jesus promised he would send (John 14:25-26).

## What is the world coming to?

The risen Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is the realization of the future and goal of history. Jesus, the Word that was in the beginning, will also be the last word. Christians, who know the story of Jesus, are in for no surprises. Jesus Christ, the power of the cross, and the principle of eternal love will reign forever. So we can await with joyful expectation the last day when the wolf and lamb shall lie down together (Isaiah 11:6-10), swords will be beaten into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4), there will be no more tears and sorrow (Isaiah 25:8), and the Lord will be our everlasting light (Isaiah 60:20).

Clearly the Augsburg Confession attests to a separation that will be made at the last judgment: believers (the godly) to eternal life and the ungodly to eternal damnation. Everything that remains in the power of sin, death, and the devil will be condemned. But again this is not an invitation to fly off in a speculative stratosphere. It is the call to proclaim clearly the only message the church has been entrusted to proclaim: the salvation of sinners in Jesus Christ, not their



damnation. The judge on that last day is the one who loves us and saves us, Jesus Christ.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

Study books ● Bibles ● copies of LBW ● symbols and images of the Trinity ● paper ● pens or pencils ● markers ● chalkboard or newsprint ● copies of the poll from *The Lutheran on views of heaven and hell* (see pp. 31-32 of this guide) ● clay ● plastic interlocking blocks ● construction paper ● scissors ● pipe cleaners or wire ● straw ● other art materials as desired

## BEFORE THE STUDY

— Consider the claim that “to know Jesus is to know God.” How would you talk about this to a Christian, a Jew, or a member of another non-Christian group?

— Reflect upon your hopes and fears about the last judgment. Use the poll from *The Lutheran* on pages 31-32 of this guide to direct your reflections.

— Find images, symbols, pictures, and presentations of the Trinity to share with the class.



## ENTRY

The purpose of the activities in this section is to introduce the participants to some of the key themes from Articles 1, 3, and 17 of the Augsburg Confession.

Ask a volunteer to read Article 1 of the Augsburg Confession on page 57 of the student book. Ask the class for their thoughts: What do you hear being conveyed by this article? How would you try to explain it in a Sunday School class? Describe some of the various ways the Trinity has been portrayed, as listed below:

### The Trinity in Language

Words can describe but not prescribe the Trinity, that is, say what is so rather than what we would like the situation to be. We must stick with God's own self-revelation, not invent a God in our own image.

● The Trinity in the creeds (Nicene, Athanasian, Apostles). Hand out copies of LBW and have the class turn to pages 54-55, 64, and 65, and scan the creeds to see where the Trinity is mentioned.

● The Trinity in our liturgy. Have the class open LBW and notice references to the Trinity in the invocation on page 57, the last part of the Great Thanksgiving at the top of page 71, and the benediction on page 74.

The Trinity in the Sacraments  
(Visible Words of God)

1. Baptism, LBW, pages 121-124. Notice the first prayer on page 121 and words said when the

person is baptized: “\_\_\_\_\_, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

2. Eucharistic prayer, the Great Thanksgiving, LBW 69-71, rubric 31:

“Holy God, . . . gracious Father . . . You have filled all creation . . . though Abraham . . . through the prophets . . . you sent your Son.”

“Our Lord Jesus took bread . . . took the cup . . . we remember the life our Lord offered for us . . . we await his coming in power.

“Send now . . . your Holy Spirit, the spirit of our Lord and of his resurrection.”

● The Trinity in pictures, images, and symbols. Remind the class of any symbols present in your church furnishings and share the various depictions of the Trinity that you were able to find.

Lead the class in reflecting further on the Trinity. Ask how they would describe and portray the triune God as “three persons in one divine essence.” Provide paper, pens, markers, construction paper, building blocks, clay, scissors, and whatever else you brought along. Encourage each person to create a symbol that depicts the Trinity (words, prose, poetry, drawings, objects). After most have put something together, ask them to share and talk about their symbols. Expect some comments about the difficulty of doing this; the concept of the Trinity is complex. Display the various creations together in a prominent place in the classroom.

Discuss why, and demonstrate how, Christians name the Trinity when they make the sign of the cross. The cross is the sign of Jesus' love for us and it is Jesus who most clearly reveals the triune God to us.

## EXPLORING THE STUDENT BOOK

### Who Says So?

Review with the class the “Who Says So?” section on pages 25-26 of the student book.

### Key Points to Emphasize

1. The gospel promise is God's Word, the enfleshed Word, Jesus Christ, and not a human word. “Jesus is God's Word, his promise that he gives our lives meaning and purpose, future and fulfillment.”

2. The gospel recorded in Scripture calls and claims us as God's people.

3. Justification happens as the justifying God encounters us.

Assist the class in understanding the liturgy as an encounter with the justifying God. But, some may argue, doesn't God come to us elsewhere? Of course, but sure and certain is his presence where his Word is proclaimed audibly (Scripture, sermon) and visibly (baptism, Lord's Supper) in the community of the faithful. Help the class perceive the liturgy as the enfleshed declaration of justification for them.

To make this as concrete as possible, use question 1 on page 31 of the student book:

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with



you all." Listen anew to these words from the beginning of our liturgy (LBW p. 57). They declare that the presence of the triune God is with you. What do the characteristics and work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit mean for you? How do you experience God's triune presence in your life?

The purpose of this question is to assist the class in listening to the words of the liturgy (LBW p. 57). Remind the class that a great deal of the liturgy uses words from the Bible. Yet we have heard these words so often that we may have stopped listening to them.

### **To Know Jesus Is to Know God**

Review the "To Know Jesus Is to Know God" section on pages 26-27 of the student book. The key point to emphasize is that Jesus is the final and full revelation of God for us.

#### **Article 1: God**

Review the material from pages 27-28 of the student book under the heading "Article 1: God."

Discuss the historic "heresies" condemned by the Augsburg Confession. It might be helpful to list the heresies and group them on the chalkboard in two columns, historic and contemporary:

#### **Historic**

1. Dualists—a good god and an evil god slugging it out for control of the world.
  - a. Manichaeans
  - b. Valentinians (Gnostics)
2. Some deny Son's divinity.
  - a. Arians (Eunomians)—Son was not eternal, but created. "There was a time when he was not."
  - b. Samosatenes—Jesus was a man who was adopted by God and elevated to a special status.
3. Anti-Trinitarians
  - a. "Mohammedans" (now called Muslims)—Father, Son and Holy Spirit are just names, not eternal realities of the Godhead.

#### **Contemporary**

1. Dualists—"The devil made me do it."
  - a. Manichaeans—Seeing the God of the Old Testament as judge and the God of the New Testament as grace.
  - b. Valentinians (Gnostics)—We are all part of God; all have a divine spark (New Age Movement).
2. Some deny Son's divinity.
  - a. Arians—Jehovah's witnesses, Mormons
  - b. Samosatenes—Those who say Jesus is only a great moral teacher.
3. Anti-Trinitarians.  
Muslims, Jews, Unitarians.

Ask the participants if they can think of other contemporary versions of these heresies. Assist them in critiquing and responding. Point out the definition of modalism on page 28 of the student book.

Ask the participants for their responses to the strong language in which those who believe other than what the creeds and the Augsburg Confession teach are condemned. Would we dare say that to those who believe other than we do? Consider Paul's admonition to the Galatians: "Even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!" (Galatians 1:8-9). Assist the class in understanding that behind Paul and the Confession's condemnation is the concern that the gospel be rightly witnessed to in preaching and life.

In light of the discussion, ask the participants to respond to question 2 from "For Reflection" on page 31 of the student book:

*Some people find the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit too masculine and suggest alternatives like Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; or Parent, Jesus, and Spirit. Are we free to change the names of the Trinity? What do you think the writers and supporters of the Augsburg Confession would say?*

#### **Article 3: Jesus Christ**

Review with the class the section "Article 3: Jesus Christ," on page 29 of the student book.

#### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. "The two natures, divine and human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ" (BC 29:2).

a. The humanity of Jesus. Our Savior is identifiable. The world offers many would-be Saviors: this political leader, this economic system, self-actualization, fame and fortune, beauty, and many others. Other religions claim that some other person is the "Savior," such as Krishna or Buddha. The scriptural witness, however, rings out loud and clear: The Savior is Mary's Son, the one born in Bethlehem . . . trained as a carpenter . . . friend of fishermen, tax collectors, and lepers . . . a crucified Jew, the risen Lord.

b. The divinity of Jesus. The affirmation of Jesus as "true God" attests to the saving power of *this one*. If Jesus were only a human we would all be lost. But he who is true man is also true God, the only one who can give everlasting and abundant life.

2. Jesus Christ says I'm justified by grace apart from works of the law. This is the sure and certain word of the gospel.

Hand out copies of the poll from *The Lutheran* on pages 31 and 32 of this guide and ask participants to complete it. Collate answers today, if you have time. Otherwise do this later and bring the results next week.

#### **Article 17: The Return of Christ to Judgment**

Review the section, "Article 17: The Return of Christ to Judgment," on pages 29-31 of the student book. The key point to emphasize is the comfort of knowing who will have the final word about our



lives and future.

Then read question 3 on page 31 of the student book:

*What are your hopes and fears about the last judgment?*

Remind the participants of one comforting fact, if they did not already remember it themselves—the judge on that day will be the one who loves us the most and who gave his life to save us. In his eyes, we are seen as justified, as righteous.

Explain the historic heresies condemned by Article 17 and again think about contemporary equivalents:

#### Historic

1. Earthly kingdom and reign of the “saints.”
2. Universal salvation—all will be saved, even the devil.
3. Reincarnation (implied in rejection of doctrine of apocatastasis).

#### Contemporary

1. Earthly kingdom, etc.  
Millennialism
2. Universal salvation  
New Age Movement, Unitarians
3. Reincarnation  
New Age Movement, Eastern religions

Again, ask the class for other modern-day versions of these heresies. A recent example is the Branch Davidian cult led by David Koresh in Waco, Texas (if needed, review the report in *Time* magazine of April 1993). How do we—should we—respond to such groups with such claims?

Inform the class that if history repeats itself, more such groups will spring up as we approach the year 2000. Pose a situation for the class, such as: “Brother Joe and Sister Josephine arrive in town proclaiming that the end is near and urging all who wish to be saved to move in with them. They buy a vacant lot down the street from our congregation and a tent city soon springs up. The tents symbolize their conviction that they don’t expect to be here long so they don’t need more permanent structures. The group appears relatively harmless except they denounce all who do not heed their message and join them as the “ungodly.” They often stand outside the grocery store, shouting as people enter, “You will burn in hell unless you set up your tent at the ‘New Jerusalem.’”

Ask the class how they would react in encountering such people.

Conclude the session by reading the last three paragraphs of the chapter, beginning with “The story of Jesus . . .” on page 30 of the student book.

#### FOR REFLECTION

See the session plan above for the suggested use of questions 1, 2, and 3. Use question 4 as a way to summarize the Trinity and the participants’ faith:

4. *So, what kind of God do you have?*

#### OUR PRAYERS

Gather the class in a circle around a cross or crucifix. Begin worship with the invocation, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Invite participants to make the sign of the cross. Pray together “Our Prayers” on page 31 of the student book. Sing the hymn, “Father Most Holy” (*LBW* 169). Conclude with the benediction and the sign of the cross. “Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless us now and forever.”

#### FURTHER READING

1. From *The Book of Concord*: Sections pertaining to the Apostles’ Creed in both the Small Catechism (pp. 344-345) and the Large Catechism (pp. 411-420); and Articles 8, 9, and 11 of the Formula of Concord (pp. 486-492, 494-497).
2. Carl E. Braaten, ed. *Our Naming of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.
3. Robert W. Jenson. *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

### **POST-STUDY**

#### EXPANDING THE SESSION

- Have participants interview non-Lutheran coworkers and neighbors with the poll from *The Lutheran*. How do their answers compare with class results?
- Prepare (at least outline) a worship service for Trinity Sunday. Choose hymns and prayers and write down some ideas for the sermon and the children’s sermon. Would you add any visuals?
- Invite a member of the Unitarian Universalist church to talk with the class about their concept of God, the Trinity, and the last judgment.
- Have each participant interview a couple of members of the congregation, asking them to describe what they know of Jesus. Collate and discuss results.
- The Augsburg Confession witnesses to the message of the incarnation—God became flesh in Jesus, one with us. Encourage participants to put some reminder (a cross, Bible passage, image of the Trinity) in their workspace that will trigger thoughts of God’s presence each time they glimpse it throughout their workday.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

- Ask the participants to read Chapter 4, “In Bondage to Sin,” in the student book before the next class.
- Read through Chapter 4 in both the student book and leader guide. Work through the questions in the commentary and under “For Reflection” and plan which ones you will use.
- Decide which of the “Expanding the Session” activities you will use or encourage the participants to use.



## CHAPTER

## 4

# In Bondage to Sin

### FOCUS STATEMENT

The lure of the serpent who asks us if we want to be like God (Genesis 3:5) tempts us daily. Left to our own ways, wiles, and wills, we live in broken relationships with God, other people, and God's creation. In baptism, God loosens the shackles of sin and calls us to walk in freedom as his sons and daughters.

### OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help adults:

- become familiar with Articles 2 (Original Sin), 18 (Free Will), and 19 (Cause of Sin) of the Augsburg Confession;
- reflect upon the Lutheran understanding of sin; our responsibility for, and response to, sin;
- explore their own feelings about evil and suffering in the world and relate these to the Christian message of ultimate hope in Jesus Christ;
- deepen their awareness of God's forgiveness in their lives;
- understand the Law's demand that we be honest about our condition (we are sinners) and the Gospel's declaration that we have forgiveness in Christ (we are justified).



### PRE-STUDY

### BACKGROUND

The three articles of the Augsburg Confession being studied today hold up a mirror in front of us and call us to honesty: to look at our lives, our relationships, our homes, our vocations, our world, and admit that we very often do not place our trust in Jesus Christ as Lord. Other lords—self, security, status—receive our trust and become the objects of our ultimate hope. This idolatry is part of what Article 2 calls original sin. We lack “true fear of God and true faith in God,” with the consequence that we are alienated, separated, and estranged from God.

Luther minced no words as he looked in the mirror at his own sinfulness. Sometimes he described himself as “maggot fodder” or a “stinking worm.” Sin was definitely not an abstract concept or invention of the church for Luther. It

was as incontestable as the daily news, the gossip at the local market, the wronged neighbor, the empty church. Knowing the reality and potency of sin, Luther used “power words” to describe its grip on him. He spoke of being “in bondage to sin” and “in sin’s shackles,” and of “sin’s captivity” and “sin’s deadly hold.”

Left to our own devices, we obviously don’t stand a fighting chance. Sin has us pinned. We are captive. It is only by grace—by God’s merciful intervention—that we are rescued. For Luther, sin was not a philosophical construct, a speculative toy; it was a death and life issue. Luther realized that even though he was justified by faith, he was still a sinner. The Latin phrase for this is *simul justus et peccator*, or, “at the same time justified and a sinner.”

Sin, for Luther and the Augsburg Confession, is not a list of defects and transgressions that can be counted and in some sense be brought under control. Sin is our radical rebellion, our turning away from God and turning to other gods, our lack of faith. Sins, of which there are plenty, are the fruit of original sin. From original sin proceed lying, stealing, bearing false witness, infidelity, and dozens more.

It is important also to note the corporate dimension of sin. Sin is not only personal, but super-personal. The family, the church, the nation, and the people need also to repent and ask forgiveness for their sin and sins.

In asserting its teaching, the Augsburg Confession condemns the Pelagians who denied the reality and potency of original sin. Pelagius, whose followers were known as the Pelagians, was a British monk in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Pelagius asserted that humans have an inherent ability to do what is right without any absolute necessity to sin. The reformers were alarmed because Pelagianism could lead to a denial of the necessity of Christ’s work.

For centuries the church has been wrestling with the question of the cause of sin, evil, and suffering. How does one account for evil in the world and yet hold to faith in a good and all-powerful God? It would seem that, if God permits evil, then God is less than good. It would seem that, if God is unable to remove evil from this world, then God is less than all-powerful.

This thinking about the problem of evil is traditionally called *theodicy*. Theodicy is the attempt to justify the ways of God to humanity, particularly to explain evil in God’s creation. In doing so, the church has engaged in all kinds of mental gymnastics and arrived at incredible intellectual contortions in order to answer the question, “Why does God permit evil?” The problem is that there is no answer to that question, or at least no answer within reach of human intellect or imagination. We know that “now we see in a mirror, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12); we do not understand.



The question we need to ask is not "why" but "who." Who is with us in the midst of suffering and evil? The God of the Bible does not hand us the master plan of creation, but he gives us the master himself. This is the God who weeps over the death of a sparrow; the God who refused to let suffering claim the future; the God who defeated death.

This means that we Christians should not be "wimps" who allow evil to walk all over us. We are called and empowered to stand up and fight evil, sin, and suffering with all of our God-given strength. The empty tomb is the very promise and hope that evil, sin, and suffering will not have the last word. In the light of that promise, we can expose the darkness and refuse to walk in it!

## MATERIALS NEEDED

Student books • Bibles • copies of LBW • a collection of old newspapers and magazines • construction paper • scissors • glue sticks or glue • pens and pencils • a large sheet of poster board • markers • poster with Ten Commandments • copies of Luther's explanations to the Ten Commandments in The Small Catechism.

## BEFORE THE STUDY

— Read Articles 2, 18, and 19 of the Augsburg Confession and Chapter 4 of the student book. Consider the "For Reflection" questions on page 39 of the student book. How would you answer them?

— Examine your own understanding of original sin, human sinfulness, and evil.

— Meditate upon, or use for your personal devotion, the "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness" on page 56 of LBW.

— List the Ten Commandments on poster board for display in the classroom (they are printed as a sidebar on page 52 of the student book).

— If available, read "Heaven and Hell" by Martin E. Marty in the July 1993 issue of *The Lutheran*, pp. 14-17.

## STUDY

### ENTRY

The purpose of these activities is to introduce participants to the Lutheran understanding of sin: our responsibility for it and God's forgiving response to it.

Introduce the topic by asking a volunteer to read Article 2, "Original Sin," of the Augsburg Confession on pages 34-36 of the student book. Lead the class in an open discussion of sin. Prepare some questions to encourage discussion, for example: "What is sin?" "What do we confess when our liturgy includes a confession?"

As the discussion progresses, be sure the par-

ticipants understand that sin (singular) refers to our condition, and that sins (plural) are specific sinful thoughts, words, or actions or absences of action. The participants' initial answers will probably be general and abstract, such as, "We sin when we do not love our neighbors." Gently push the class to be more specific. How do we not love our neighbors? Suggest responses by asking, "If our neighbor is hungry, have we failed to love?" "Is (gossip, slander, rumors, lawsuits, war, global warming, or other examples) evidence of our lovelessness?"

The purpose of this exercise is to assist participants in seeing how our sinfulness (condition) leads to concrete thoughts, words, and actions (sins) by which we separate ourselves from God, other people, and creation. Sin is not abstract theory but has flesh and blood identifiability.

Gather the class around a table on which are displayed an assortment of newspapers and magazines. Invite the class to look through the materials and provide drawing paper, markers, and construction paper for those who might want to create their own images. As a class, create a collage of images on a poster board. Over the top or around the edge write in bold letters, "FATHER, FORGIVE US." Use the collage during the closing worship.

## EXPLORING THE STUDENT BOOK

### Whatever Became of Sin?

Review the material in the section, "Whatever Became of Sin?" on pages 33-34 of the student book. Ask the class for responses. Do they feel the church has become "soft on sin," ignoring or perhaps even blessing thoughts and behaviors that were considered sinful by previous generations? Is sin an issue for the church? Do Christians personally wrestle with sinfulness? Ask the class to read and reflect on question 1 on page 39 of student book:

*How would you define sin? What makes an action or thought sinful?*

The student book identifies relativism and moralism as temptations faced by the church in regard to human sin. Both are deadly because they ignore the gravity, complexity, and tragedy of sin. Relativism allows society to guide behavior, to determine what is acceptable. The problem is not that the world necessarily blesses sinful behavior, but that society acts as though it is God, "knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). As Christians, we believe that God is our guide. The Scriptures—the Ten Commandments and Jesus' teachings, for example—reveal the ways God desires us to live in the world. Unlike relativism, moralism talks a great deal about sins and understands sin to be personal vices. The problem is that moralism misses the forest for the trees. That is, by focusing on individual sins, the real problem of our radical rebellion against God, our unbelief, and our alienation from God is not confronted.

Finally, in presenting this section, explore the corporate dimension of sin with the class. Read



aloud the quote from Douglas John Hall found on page 34 of the student book:

"No one is surprised . . . when abortion, lesbianism, or adultery are described as sinful. But how many of our fellow citizens would think of connecting sin with the arms race, or the greed of the First World, or ecological disasters created by high technology?" (Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering*, p. 78. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

Ask for responses from the class. What are some examples of our corporate sin as a church or a nation? Ask the class why there is a corporate confession and absolution in the Lutheran liturgy. In our world of fast food and other questionable services, do we use them just to save time? Or is there a relationship between our confession of sin and the corporate nature of sin? Assist the class in perceiving the importance of the corporate acknowledgement, confession, and forgiveness of our sins.

### **Article 2: Original Sin**

Have the class review "Article 2: Original Sin" on pages 34-36 of the student book.

#### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. Original sin is defined as the lack of "true fear of God and true faith in God." In our unbelief, we do "curve in on ourselves," fashioning idols out of ourselves, our desires, and our wants.

a. If we push the true God out of our lives, who and/or what takes God's place? Challenge the class to identify and name the idols in their lives. Have them read and answer question 2 on page 39 of the student book:

*Who or what are the idols in your life? Who or what determines how you live today and what you hope for tomorrow?*

Encourage the class to actually name their idols (such as money and property, entertainment, prestige, food). Help them to see that the very act of naming them is the beginning of confession. Conclude with Luther's statement from the *Large Catechism*: "Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it. [The problem] is primarily in the heart, which pursues other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils. It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help, nor does it believe that whatever good it receives comes from God" (BC 367:21).

2. Original sin is original and organic. It is the root sin that germinates and produces all other sins. For Luther, obedience to the First Commandment—acknowledging God as God of my life—is the totality of the Christian life. "Where the heart is right with God and this commandment is kept, fulfillment of all the others will follow of its own accord" (BC 371:48). The other Commandments work out the specifics of this obedience. Remind the class of the Ten Commandments by showing the poster you made that lists them. Emphasize that these are reliable guides for Christian life. If you wish, refer the class to the Ten Commandments that appear as a sidebar on page 52

of the student book. As time permits, you may briefly summarize Luther's explanation of the Commandments or distribute to each participant a copy of Luther's explanations from his *Small Catechism*.

3. Sin is real and it has consequences. We are held accountable and responsible by God. The punishment for sin is damnation, that is, life without God. Without Christ, that would be our fate.

### **Article 18: Freedom of the Will**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Article 18 of the Augsburg Confession, "Freedom of the Will," on page 61 of the student book. Review "Article 18: Free Will," on pages 36-37 of the student book.

#### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. "Civil righteousness" is humanly possible. We can live as decent law-abiding citizens by virtue of our resolve and ability to do so.

2. "Spiritual righteousness" is not humanly possible. We are in bondage to sin, turning in on ourselves, creating idols, deserving damnation.

### **Article 19: The Cause of Sin**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Article 19 of the Augsburg Confession, "The Cause of Sin," on page 62 of the student book. Review the section, "Article 19: The Cause of Sin," on pages 37-39 of the student book.

#### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. The Christian tradition affirms the goodness of God. At the same time, Christianity regards sin as alienation from God with tragic consequences for the sinner, the sinner's neighbor, and the sinner's world. God would have to cease being God in order to cause sin. A good God would not (could not) cause that which is so bad, hurtful, and harmful. The Augsburg Confession, in insisting that God does not cause sin, affirms the goodness and loving kindness of our God.

2. Suffering and evil are not to be seen as a punishment God inflicts upon us because of our sin. Ask the class to read and discuss question 4 on page 39 of the student book:

*"This hurricane (illness, tragedy) is God's means of testing you." Why is this not a Christian response to evil and suffering? What is a Christian response to hurricanes, illness, tragedy?*

Statements that lay the blame on God as if God punishes or tests us by such tragedies can be a form of theological abuse, which happens on a regular basis in the church. Many attempt to explain suffering and evil by calling it "a deserved punishment." So one hears, "This tumor is God's way of punishing me for committing adultery," or "The airplane crash was God's will." Is this the God our faith teaches about? No. If it were, no one would want such a God. Our God is the one who hated evil and suffering so much that Christ suffered an agonizing death in order to snatch us from the death grip that evil and all its cousins (suffering, pain, death) had over us.



The Christian response to suffering and evil is not a pseudo-piety that gives up and accepts everything as "God's will." Not everything is God's will! We know we cannot understand everything. The workings of God in the brokenness of this world are often a mystery to us. What Christians can do is to engage in battle against the forces of evil, praying for strength and wisdom. Christians should be at the forefront of every movement to alleviate suffering in this world. With heart, soul, and strength we should fight evil, absolutely refusing to allow it to reign over us and our world.

Conclude by reading aloud the last two paragraphs of the chapter on pages 38-39 of the student book, beginning with "God does not cause evil."

## FOR REFLECTION

See the session plan above for suggested use of questions 1, 2, and 4. Use question 3 just before your closing worship. Question 5 provides an opportunity to talk more about free will:

3. Read the "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness" (LBW p. 56). What does this confession say to you? What does it mean that we all say it together in church?

5. How much are we able to do by our own powers, by our own free will, and where are the limits of our free will?

Discuss the class results of the poll from *The Lutheran*. Where are the major agreements? Disagreements?

## OUR PRAYERS

Gather in a circle around the collage created earlier in the session. Hand out copies of LBW and have participants turn to page 56. Lead the class in the "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness." Ask the class to look at and reflect upon the collage as they pray the prayer for forgiveness. A lay leader should use the second absolution (In the mercy of almighty God . . .). You may wish to conclude with "In the Cross of Christ I Glory" (LBW 104) or "I Lay My Sins on Jesus" (LBW 305).

## FURTHER READING

1. From *The Book of Concord*: Apology Articles 2, 18, 19 (pp. 100-107, 224-226); Smalcald Articles Part 3, Article 1 (pp. 302-303).

2. Willimon, William H. *Sighing for Eden*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985.

3. Hall, Douglas John. *God & Human Suffering*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986.

4. Simundson, Daniel J., *Where Is God in My Suffering?* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983.

5. Beker, J. Christiaan. *Suffering and Hope*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.



## EXPANDING THE SESSION

As we are called to acknowledge our sinful-

ness, we are also called to acknowledge God's forgiveness. This means letting go, no longer allowing sin to control and determine our lives or our relationships. We cannot do that alone, but only with God's help, as alcoholics will attest. It might be helpful for the class to experience this through a meditation exercise.

Have the participants sit with their eyes closed, hands extended with palms up. Ask them to imagine sin in their lives. You might ask, "What keeps you separate from God?" Ask them to imagine that deed, habit, word, or thought as if they were holding it in the palms of their hands. Encourage them to feel its weight. After an appropriate amount of time has elapsed, repeat aloud Jesus' words, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Tell the class to turn over their hands, palms down, as they stand up. The impression being conveyed is that of letting go of their sins—they fall to the floor; they are not theirs anymore. (Additional step if desired: Use a broom to sweep the "sins" up; they could be discarded.)

Announce, "Through Christ you are forgiven."

Jubilee time. The book of Leviticus, chapter 25, describes the Jubilee year as a time to let the land lie fallow, forgive debts, free prisoners, return what has been taken, and hold a great feast. Declare that the upcoming week is a jubilee time for the class. It is a time for honest self-examination and identification of one's sinful deeds, words, thoughts, and ways in which one has hurt others—family, friends, strangers, environment. The Jubilee time is a time to ask for forgiveness and make remedy for past offenses. Conclude the week by holding a great feast together.

Orthodoxy (right teaching) must live in orthopraxy (right living). Encourage class members to be Christs to their neighbors by visiting in a hospital, nursing home, prison, or shelter, or perhaps family members or others whom they have neglected to visit. Encourage participants to visit those people as a witness to the God who has defeated death and all the powers of darkness and who promises us life, meaning, and hope eternal.

## LOOKING AHEAD

● Ask participants to read Chapter 5, "Gifts from a Gracious God," in the student book before the next class. In addition, ask them to read Articles 5 and 7-15 of the Augsburg Confession in the back of their student books.

● Read through Chapter 5 in both the student book and leader guide. Also read the articles of the Augsburg Confession listed above. Then work through the questions under "For Reflection" and plan how you will use them.

● Decide which of the "Expanding the Session" activities you will use or encourage the participants to use.



# Gifts from a Gracious God

## FOCUS STATEMENT

As God's people, we are gathered together by the gospel of Jesus Christ who gives us life and salvation. In baptism God adopts us into his family, and in the Lord's Supper he nourishes us at his table. Through the sacraments we receive forgiveness and come to know God's abiding presence with us through all the days of this life and the life to come. To be gathered by the gospel is to be the church, and to be the church is to gather around the living risen Christ who is present with us in Word and sacrament.

## OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help adults:

- learn what articles 5, 7-15 of the Augsburg Confession teach about the ministry, the church, confession, and the sacraments;
- explore and discuss the marks of the church, Word, and sacrament, and how identification challenges traditional concepts of the church as building or institution;
- understand baptism as God's gift of new life and grow in the awareness of baptism's continuing importance in their lives;
- appreciate the Lord's Supper as God's gift through which faith is "awakened and strengthened";
- understand how repentance is a return to baptism and reflect upon the benefit of an individual rite of confession and forgiveness;
- grow in appreciation for the church as God's gift that guides and empowers them on the journey of faith;
- deepen their awareness of God's grace.



## PRE-STUDY

### BACKGROUND

#### The Word

The declaration that we are God's beloved children is an external word that confronts me from outside of myself, my subjectivity, my fears and hopes. It is not a word that I conjure up or invent, it is a message spoken to me: "God died for you and lives again for you." This is the message that calls me to life, that calls and claims me. The external address that says to me and my old life—you are different, you are loved by God.

To the question "How am I justified?" the proper Lutheran response is "stop, listen, and look." *Stop* trying to storm the gates of heaven by your own striving, scheming, and speculation. *Listen* to the Word of God in Scripture, sermon, and liturgy, which are the proclamation of God's love reaching out to forgive sinners. The sermon is not just a message about but *is* God's love itself. *Look* at the baptismal font and the bread and wine of Eucharist and see, touch, taste, smell, and feel the story of God's love in Jesus Christ for you. The word proclaimed in the sermon and embodied in the sacraments is the presence of Christ himself. Where Christ is there is hope, life, and salvation for you.

The confessional writings understand the Word as the means through which the Spirit creates faith. This is not to limit the Spirit, as if the Spirit were chained to Word and sacrament and could never be present anywhere else. Of course, God is certainly free to act by whatever means God so chooses. But, and this is the Confession's emphasis, here in Word and sacrament one can be certain of Christ's presence because Christ promised to be there (Matthew 18:20; 26:26-30; 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Where can I find Christ?

Stop, look, and listen!

#### The Word Gathers People

The justifying Word through which the Spirit works must be proclaimed. An office of ministry is needed and provided by God. The Word gathers God's family together. So the Augsburg Confession defines the church as the "assembly of all believers." The church is identified by Word and sacrament. The implications for relations with other Christians are tremendous. The unity of the church is not in traditions, doctrinal statements, or polity, but in the gospel. Unity is not, therefore, just a nice idea, but of the very essence of the church. The church is where the gospel happens, and where the gospel happens, the church is one.

#### God's People Gathered Around the Word

Gathered by the gospel, the church gathers around and receives life from the gospel. Baptism is the sacrament through which we are freed from the claims of the unholy trinity (sin, death, and the devil) and claimed by the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). We are made members of God's family, his justified and loved people. In the Lord's Supper, we receive sustenance and nourishment as Christ gives us his very life. In repentance and confession we are called to vigilance to remember always whose we are, and to live and celebrate accordingly.

When we have questions and doubts, we can remember what Luther reminded himself, "But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body" (BC 442:44).

The articles of the Augsburg Confession being



studied today discuss family life—God’s family, the church. What does it mean for me to be a baptized Christian? It means to be claimed by God’s Word, given God’s Spirit, gathered into God’s family, fed at God’s table, and loved to eternity.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

*Student books ● Bibles ● copies of LBW ● pens and pencils ● paper ● markers ● chalice ● paten ● offering plate ● cross ● bricks ● candles ● baptismal shell or bowl ● folder with “sermon” written across the top ● pictures of people (such as a church directory) ● picture of a pastor ● coffee ● Sunday school materials ● flying disc ● The Book of Concord ● bricks or stones for each participant*

## BEFORE THE STUDY

— Read through and reflect upon Articles 5, 7-15 of the Augsburg Confession.

— Reflect upon your own baptism. What do you remember about it? What have people (family, friends) told you about your baptism? How does the fact that you are baptized affect your life-style: the choices you make, the priorities you set, the battles you fight, and the joys you celebrate?

— Examine your understanding of the Lord’s Supper. How are you aware of the real presence of Christ at communion? Why do you go to communion?

— Ask friends, neighbors, members of the congregation, children, your pastor, and others for their definition of the church (“What is the church?”). Record their responses to share with the class.

## STUDY

### ENTRY

Gather participants around a table on which the following objects are displayed: a chalice, paten, offering plates, LBW, Bible, a cross, bricks, candles, baptismal shell or bowl, a folder with “sermon” written on it, pictures of people (perhaps a church directory), a picture of a pastor, coffee, Sunday school materials, a flying disc, *The Book of Concord*, and other items you might think of.

Ask the class to look at the various objects and identify which ones are necessary for the church (“What makes a church a church?”). Allow time for the class to discuss and identify as many or as few objects as they deem essential. Have the class move the “necessary-for-the-church” items to one end of the table or a different table. Ask if there are other objects that should be included. After they have finished, pose questions like these: “Could there be a Lutheran church without the *Lutheran Book of Worship*?” “Could there be a church without a

pastor? Without people? Without offering plates?” “Is a church with a larger Sunday school program and an active youth group more of a church than one where there is a struggling Sunday school and no youth group?”

The purpose of this activity is to identify the “marks” of the church, that is, what constitutes the church.

Read the following story of Father Fiasco and the members of the Lone Star Cathedral to the class:

“As the notes of the old revival hymn (“Give Me That Old-Time Religion”) drifted up with the dust particles in the early morning sunlight, several people went to the walls of the church, bowed their heads and prayed in silence for a moment. Then each of them reverently removed a loose brick, kissed it, and carried it to the exit . . . [Later George, a seeker of faith in Father Fiasco’s study, says] . . .

**George:** “I was . . . surprised to see some people removing bricks from the walls of your church and taking them out. What’s that ritual all about?”

**Father Fiasco:** “Saint Paul said that we are the living stones of the New Temple. People easily forget that and continue to cling to the idea of the church being a sacred building. My people take a brick home to awaken them to the fact that they are living bricks of the real temple of God. And throughout the day, whether someone’s brick sits on the kitchen sink or beside a computer, it’s a reminder to build Church on top of that stone.” (Edward Hays, *The Magic Lantern: A Mystical Murder Mystery*, pp. 46-47. Leavenworth, KS: Forest of Peace Books, Inc., 1991)

Ask the class for their responses to the story. What does it mean to “build church?” Emphasize that the story, like the Augsburg Confession, identifies the church as the people who have heard and accepted the gospel. The living word of Jesus Christ is present in their lives. Where the gospel lives among people, there is the church. Ask the class to consider the following gatherings of people. Which ones would they consider to be the church?

- A group of people sitting on the beach listening to someone reading Scripture.
- A local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in the church building.
- A group of teenagers meeting on Saturday night for a “youth service” in the church building.
- A group of teenagers meeting on Saturday night for a “youth service” at the local park.
- A dying soldier receiving the Eucharist in a fox-hole.
- A hospital waiting room where a family reads Psalm 23 together.

You may suggest other possibilities. Conclude by again asserting the Augsburg Confession’s teaching that it is the presence of the gospel among God’s people, (not a building or certain objects), that marks the church.



## EXPLORING THE STUDENT BOOK

### Articles 5 and 14: On Ministry

Ask volunteers to read aloud articles 5 and 14 of the Augsburg Confession on pages 58 and 60 of the student book. Review for the class the section "Articles 5 and 14: On the Ministry and the Means of Grace" on pages 41-42 of the student book.

#### Key Points to Emphasize

1. Ministry is of divine creation, not human invention. God instituted the ministry to insure that his gospel would live in Word and sacrament among God's people.

a. Ordained ministers are not religious salespersons, social service workers, psychologists, day-care providers, or scout leaders.

b. Ordained ministers are those called to the office of ministry in order to proclaim God's word and administer God's sacraments. They are God's ambassadors in a congregation.

2. There is an important relationship between the ordained ministry and the ministry of all the baptized that should be lifted up and emphasized. By our baptisms we are called to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16; *LBW* p. 124). Baptism is our ordination to care for the gospel in the world, that is, to proclaim and live the gospel by our thoughts, words, deeds, and our priorities and choices in the vocations where we are called to serve. Ordination to ministry is a call to the vocation of caring for the gospel within a congregation; to proclaim and live the gospel among God's people and together be empowered to do ministry in the world.

3. The Lutheran understanding of justification necessitates an ordained ministry. According to the Augsburg Confession, the Spirit works through the Word to create the faith that justifies sinners. Put very simply then, someone must proclaim the Word. One of those speakers is the ordained minister in the congregation. The Word that Christians are to speak is not their creation, but God's.

After the class has explored the confessional understanding of ministry, present several situations and ask for the participants' response. For example:

a. Your congregation is without a pastor. A "Preacher Joe" arrives in town claiming to be a "spirit-inspired and spirit-filled" minister. He convinces several members of the congregation that he should be your new pastor, although he never attended seminary and has never been ordained by the church. Maintaining that he has been ordained by the Spirit, he holds "services" in several homes. Over the course of several weeks, attendance at his "services" increases geometrically. Many, in fact, are worshiping with "Preacher Joe" rather than attending the services conducted by the supply pastor sent by the bishop. The church council has been advised by the synod to just ignore "Preacher Joe." In their opinion he is a self-

proclaimed preacher with no authority or synodical authorization. As a member of this congregation, what is your response?

b. Josephine has always been a member of your congregation. She has been active in Sunday school and in the youth group. Therefore, many were not surprised when she announced her decision to attend seminary and become a candidate for ordination in the Lutheran church. Her first year at seminary was difficult. She did not pass several courses and experienced rather serious psychological problems. Yet, when she came home during vacations, she still seemed the same happy, committed Josephine to you. At the completion of her first year of seminary studies, the synodical candidacy committee decided that there were several indications that Josephine was not called to ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament. They denied her endorsement, which meant that she could not pursue a vocation as a pastor in the Lutheran church. People in the congregation are surprised and angry at the synod. As one person put it, "That is the end of my contributions to synod benevolence." As a member of this congregation, how would you respond?

With both these situations, reflect together on what Articles 5 and 14 of the Augsburg Confession have to say, especially about the call. Why does there need to be some procedure to evaluate potential pastors, as there was with Josephine? What are some of the problems in determining who can be a pastor?

Ask the class to discuss question 1 on page 47 of the student book:

*Why do we have a pastor in this congregation? Who is a pastor? What makes a person a pastor? What does a pastor do? What should a pastor do?*

### Articles 7, 8, 15: On the Church

Ask volunteers to read aloud Articles 7, 8, and 15 of the Augsburg Confession on pages 59 and 60 of the student book. Review the section, "Articles 7, 8, 15: On the Church," on pages 42-44 of the student book.

#### Key Points to Emphasize

1. The "marks" of the church (that which identifies the church) are the Word purely proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered; the gospel proclaimed and enacted in the midst of God's people.

The church is not static, but is a dynamic event; the living gospel keeps happening among the people.

2. The church is diverse. People join the church for all sorts of reasons. Among the devout Christians are, in the words of the Confession, "false Christians and hypocrites."

This does not call us to point fingers or make a "Who's who" list of "real Christians" and "false Christians." It is a statement of reality. There are true disciples and there are Judases among Jesus' followers.



3. God's gifts to us in Word and sacrament are not tainted or destroyed because of the ungodly in the church. Luther said that the Lord's Supper, even if administered by a "knave," would still be the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

Discuss together question 2 on page 48 of the student book:

*No doubt we find the words of Article 8 reassuring in the face of clergy misconduct today. What might have been some of the concerns related to clergy abuse in Luther's day? What are they in our day?*

Also ask the class to consider question 3 on page 48 of the student book:

*Who is "worthy" to receive communion? Do you ever not attend communion because you feel that you are "unworthy" or not good enough? What is the proper state for receiving the body and blood of our Lord?*

Ask the class for responses. Assist them in understanding that the truth or effect of the sacrament does not depend on us, on any of our qualifications or disqualifications. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, those who are "worthy" to receive it are sinners—those who need it. What is the proper state? A desire to receive God's gift which we so desperately need. It is food for the hungry, not for the well-fed. "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Matthew 9:13).

4. The unity of the church is in the gospel, not in traditions, doctrines, or governing bodies. That means our traditions may change from time to time. We are called to examine our traditions and rituals and ask of each one, "Does this serve to proclaim the gospel at this time to these people?" Ask the class to think of this congregation and consider whether the use or presence of the following in their congregations would hinder or enhance the gospel proclamation: chasuble, sanctuary light, incense, banners, common cup, balloons, healing service, lay lectors, screen with hymn words projected on it, U.S. or Canadian flag, Christian flag, rock music, clown ministry, other.

#### **Articles 9-13:**

##### **On the Word Experienced by the Senses**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Article 9 of the Augsburg Confession on page 59 of the student book. Then review the section, "Baptism: Welcome!" on pages 44-45 of the student book.

##### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. Baptism is God's act of declaring us his justified children. In baptism we are freed from the power of sin, death, and the devil and are called to new life with Jesus forever.

2. Baptism is our ordination to witness to the gospel in the world. We are all called to different vocations, yet we all have the same call: to witness to God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ.

3. Baptism is initiation into the church, the

"body of Christ," God's family. Ask the class to consider question 4 on page 48 of the student book:

*Why do we baptize infants? Should we have baptisms in the worship service or should they take place at another time? Should we celebrate our baptisms, even though they may have occurred many years ago and we cannot remember them?*

Use this question to summarize the Augsburg Confession's teaching about baptism. We baptize infants because God commands us to baptize. Baptism is God's act of embracing people with God's love, from which no one is excluded. Nothing demonstrates the free unconditional nature of God's love as that of infant baptism. The infant can do nothing to earn it, deserve or merit it, and still the infant is declared to be God's beloved child—so are we all! Of course, baptism should occur within the context of the corporate worship. The whole point of baptism is being adopted into God's family, in which one is not an only child but part of a wide and wonderful, diverse and divine family. Of course we should celebrate our baptism. Baptism is new life and it endures for all of life. Baptism is an unrepeatable act, but also a daily event of living in God's presence as God's beloved child. One good way of celebrating the anniversary of one's baptism is to use the "Affirmation of Baptism" (LBW p. 198).

##### **Eucharist: Come and Eat!**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Article 10 of the Augsburg Confession on page 59 of the student book. Review for the class the section, "Eucharist: Come and Eat!" on page 46 of the student book.

##### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. Lutherans affirm the real bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharistic event. It is not just a memorial meal ("Thanks for the memories"), nor is Christ merely spiritually present ("really in heaven, but with us in spirit").

2. The benefit of the Eucharist is "for you" and "for the forgiveness of sin" (LBW 69-70).

3. It is the meal that provides nourishment for us to continue on faith's journey.

##### **Articles 11, 12: On Remembering Whose We Are**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Articles 11 and 12 of the Augsburg Confession on pages 59-60 of the student book. Then review the section, "Articles 11, 12: On Remembering Whose We Are," on pages 46-47 of the student book.

##### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. Repentance is a return to baptism. In baptism God declares the forgiveness of our sin. Repentance is but a return to that baptismal promise. Many congregations try to emphasize this by facing the font during the "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness."



2. Repentance means turning around and turning away from whatever is keeping us from turning to God. It means first, contrition and sorrow, and second, faith.

Have the class turn to the rite for "Individual Confession" on *LBW* pages 196-197. Ask what they think about the use of this rite in the Lutheran church. Then discuss question 5 on page 48 of the student book:

*What are some of the advantages of private confession? Scan the "Order for Individual Confession and Forgiveness" (LBW pp. 196-197). Would you consider using it or recommending it to someone?*

Go back and read to the class the focus statement on page 22 of this guide. Then ask the class to gather for the concluding worship.

## FOR REFLECTION

See the session plan above for suggested use of questions 1-5 from the "For Reflection" section of the student book.

## OUR PRAYERS

Make a circle of bricks or stones (use as many bricks or stones as there are participants). Have the class gather on the outside of the circle. Sing together "The Church's One Foundation" (*LBW* 369).

Lead the class in praying "Our Prayers" on page 48 of the student book. Conclude by having each participant pick up a brick or stone to remind them that they are living bricks of the real temple of God. Invite the participants to place their brick or stone at their workplace and let it serve as a reminder to "build church" on top of that stone, that is, to be witnesses in their vocations to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## FURTHER READING

1. From *The Book of Concord*: Apology Articles 5, 7-15 (pp. 168-222); Sections pertaining to baptism, the Lord's Supper, and confession in both the Small Catechism (pp. 348-352) and the Large Catechism (pp. 436-461); Formula of Concord 5, 7, 10 (pp. 477-479, 481-486, 492-494); Smalcald Articles Part III, Articles 5-7 (pp. 310-312).
2. Jenson, Robert W. *Visible Words*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.
3. Rusch, William G. (ed.). *A Commentary on "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA."* Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990.

## POST-STUDY

### EXPANDING THE SESSION

Invite your pastor to attend the class and talk about his or her call, seminary education, the

candidacy process, and his or her understanding of ministry.

Invite members of other denominations (Baptist, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, others) to discuss their denomination's teachings on the sacraments. If possible, you might arrange a panel with representatives from the various traditions.

Use a guided meditation to encourage participants to reflect upon confession, both public and private; its meaning, need, and presence in their lives. Here is one way to conduct such a meditation:

Read Mark 2:1-12, the account of the healing of the paralytic. After several moments of silence, ask participants to imagine themselves as the paralytic. Ask, "What is paralyzing you? What is keeping you from Jesus?" Name several suggestions: Is your paralysis anger? Grief over a disability? Depression? Hopelessness over a lingering ailment? Fear? Sin? Guilt?

Allow several moments of silence for participants to reflect upon what is keeping them from Jesus, or blocking them from being close to Jesus spiritually.

Now ask participants to imagine the four friends. Ask, "Who are the four friends who help (can help) you come to Jesus?" Remind them that friends do not necessarily have to be people, but may be books, music, quiet time, keeping a journal, the liturgy, and many other things. Again, allow time for reflection. Conclude by asking, "How can your four friends help you? How will you contact them or get in touch with them?"

Have participants take the stone from the worship experience and set it in their workplace as a reminder to witness to God's gospel; to "build church" in the vocation in which they serve. Throughout the week encourage them to keep a journal of thoughts and experiences. Select a time and place to gather together to share experiences.

Find a spiritual friend to meet with you for regular prayer, encouragement, and guidance.

## LOOKING AHEAD

● Ask participants to read Chapter 6, "A Living, Busy, Active Faith," in the student book before the next class.

● Read through Chapter 6 in both the student book and leader guide. Also read Articles 6, 16, 20, and 21 of the Augsburg Confession. Then work through the questions under "For Reflection" and plan how you will use them or expand upon them.

● Decide which of the "Expanding the Session" activities you will use or encourage the participants to use.



## CHAPTER

## 6

# A Living, Busy, Active Faith

### FOCUS STATEMENT

Faith is living and active! God claims us—"You are my beloved child"—and then makes claims upon us—"Be my beloved children." Christians are part of a vast, wide, and wonderful family seeking to be faithful witnesses in all that we do to the truth of God's love for all in Jesus Christ.

### OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help adults:

- learn about Articles 6, 16, 20, and 21 of the Augsburg Confession, especially the Lutheran understanding of faith active in love, justice, and service in the world;
- discover ways that they are called to witness to their faith in daily life;
- reflect upon models and mentors (saints) who have witnessed to the gospel in their lives;
- explore ways to be models and mentors to others.



### PRE-STUDY

### BACKGROUND

Lutherans have not always had a good track record in witnessing to their faith, that "living, busy, active, mighty thing." Throughout the centuries our teachings about sanctification, spirituality, stewardship, and ministry (all describing how we live as Christians) have been rather introverted. That is, we have not spoken out with Luther's boldness or courage. Yet it is precisely in the area of Christian life where Lutherans offer a distinctive witness, assisting the Christian church to recover a sense of the freedom, the joy, the very aliveness of faith in the living Lord.

Lutheranism is committed to proclaim the pure gratuitous grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Justification is a gift. It is therefore blasphemy to regard ourselves and our works as affecting God's decision about us. God is not a cosmic Santa Claus. That we should stoke the fires of hell, thereby inducing guilt in Christians in order to motivate them to perform good works, is simply not a Christian option. Legalism ("you must do this in order for God to accept you or help you") is wrong theology.

On the other hand, it is equally wrong to opt for sloth. It is as deadly to be a slothful Christian as it is to be a workaholic one. Christians cannot do whatever they please. The old excuse, "I can do whatever I want; God will forgive me on Sunday," holds no water. We may be forgiven, but our faith is to be active in love. We are to embark on a new way of living.

God has called us to new life as his children. There are new possibilities, new power, new demands, and new joys now. The justification that Lutheranism confesses is imputative (God's declaration about us—you are justified) and it is effective (because God said so, life is different than before). Christian life is new life lived in, with, under, and through the transforming power of the living Lord. If our Lord is living, our faith in God must also be living. So by no means do we Lutherans veto good works; rather we encourage them. Good works are our response, our "thank you," to God for his lavish love.

In explicating this, the church desperately needs to hear the call to joyful living of the faith. Luther, it should be remembered, took delight in creation and lived life fully and even with gusto (and without guilt at doing so). For him an aspect of faithful witness to the gospel was singing with the children, enjoying the companionship of family and friends, talking with students and parishioners and yes, even "drinking Wittenberg beer while the word of God reformed the church."

This note of celebration is an important legacy Luther left us. He did, so it seems, glimpse the truth of the angel's message, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

As we wrestle with our call to faithfulness, the example of the saints can be very instructive. Lutherans need to take the saints out of the attic where they were placed in storage because of the abuses that had grown up around them. During the centuries preceding Luther, for example, they had been elevated to the role of mediators between God and humanity. Many people worshiped, prayed to, and adored the various saints. This was an abuse, for there is only one mediator, one advocate—Jesus Christ.

Abuse, however, does not negate proper use. It is to such proper use that Article 21 calls us. We should give thanks for the lives of those who have preceded us in the faith, honor and value them as models to emulate. Although Article 21 focuses on saints on the other side of death, the Bible teaches that all baptized Christians are saints, that is, justified, righteous people of God. We also have much we can teach and learn from each other as we hear that call to "come, follow," and our feet, our hearts, our lives are set on the way.



## MATERIALS NEEDED

Student books • Bibles • copies of LBW • pen and pencils • paper • index cards that describe various situations or places (see instructions under "Entry")

## BEFORE THE STUDY

— Meditate on one of Luther's definitions of faith. "O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works" (LW 35:370). How do you understand this statement? How is your faith alive? How can you help others live their faith?

— Examine your feelings about the saints. Are there models and mentors of the faith that have witnessed to you? Who are they?

Read Articles 16, 20, and 21 in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (BC 222-224, 226-236).

— Make cards for the "Entry" activity below.



## ENTRY

Gather the class together in a circle. Give each participant a card on which you have described a place or situation. For example: bus station, day-care center, college campus, hospital waiting room, Sunday church service, local grocery store, lawyer's office, city jail, or government building.

Ask participants to imagine themselves in these various places. Encourage them to reflect upon the ways in which their faith in the living Lord could be active in these places. For example, "As I shop at the local grocery store, how do I witness to my faith?" Go around the circle and encourage participants to share their thoughts and insights.

## EXPLORING THE STUDENT BOOK

### Born Anew

Review for the class the section, "Born Anew," on pages 49-50 of the student book.

### Key Points to Emphasize

1. Baptism is a gift that calls us to a task (in German the word for gift is *gabe* and for task, *aufgabe*). We are called to share the gifts we are given, to live them in ways that benefit our neighbor.

2. As God's baptized people we are free from worrying about whether or not God loves us and wills our salvation. We do not have to worry about earning God's favor, so we are free to love and serve the neighbor.

3. It is important to begin to glimpse the freedom of faith. One of Lutheranism's distinctive contributions to Christianity is its witness to the freedom and joy of faith. Granted, Lutheran

congregations have not always reflected this perspective, nevertheless our understanding of God's justifying love calls us to rejoice in joy and freedom. We are called to echo Mary's words: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46). Yes, God has saved his people! Rejoice, you are free—live!

Read Luther's famous statements from his 1520 treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian," found on page 50 in the student book: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" (LW 31:344). Ask the class to respond. What do these statements mean to them? After they have shared their responses, explain that we are free lords. That is, in terms of salvation we are subject to no one, no thing except God, who has already revealed his will to save all in Jesus Christ. We no longer have to worry about this matter. Therefore, and precisely therefore, we are free to do acts of loving service in the world. We can risk love, time, property, and even life for our neighbor, for in Christ we have everything.

### Articles 6 and 20: On Living Faith

Ask volunteers to read aloud Article 6, "The New Obedience," on pages 58-59 of the student book, and Article 20, "Faith and Good Works," on pages 62-64 of the student book. Review the section, "Articles 6 and 20: On Living Faith," on pages 50-52 of the student book.

### Key Points to Emphasize

1. Lutheranism has too often and unfortunately been caricatured as neglecting good works in the Christian life. But the Augsburg Confession clearly teaches the importance and necessity of good works. Good works are those works that happen after faith has happened.

2. The Augsburg Confession maintains that these works are the fruit, not the root, of faith. Good works are the consequence of what God has done, not what caused God to act in one's life. It is not a matter of "if I do . . . then God will act for me," but "because God has acted on my behalf, therefore I can do these good works."

3. The Holy Spirit, who gives us faith, is "the Lord and giver of life" who empowers us to living faith. Can faith not be alive and living?

4. We are called and empowered to be a "Christ to the neighbor."

a. Read Luther's quote on page 51 of the student book (LW 31:367). Ask the class for their response to Luther's statement. Is it true? Is it realistic? What does it mean for my life today? In considering these questions, read question 2 on page 56 of the student book and ask for responses:

*"I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me"* (LW 31:367). Reflect upon this statement made by Luther. Ask yourself, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) and "Who is not my neighbor?"

You might ask what it would mean for our neighbors if we do not serve or witness to them. Faith



is freedom and joy. Luther spoke of faith as that which makes us "joyous, mettlesome, and merry toward God and all creatures" (BC 553:12).

Read question 3 on page 56 of the student book:

*Is Christian life joyful? Reflect upon your congregation. If our lives are to be living hymns of praise to God, how does your congregation sing their "life hymns"? Like a dirge, rock music, a march, a dance, a children's song? In other words, how does your congregation experience the call to Christian life? With joy? With determination? With play? With celebration?*

Discuss this question with the participants. They will probably identify a number of expressions, all within the same congregation.

### **Article 16: On Christ and Caesar**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Article 16 of the Augsburg Confession, "Civil Government," on pages 60-61 of the student book. Review the section, "Article 16: On Christ and Caesar," on pages 53-54 of the student book.

### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. Government is God's creation for insuring peace and good order in the world.
2. Christians should be involved in and supportive of government.
3. The limits of obedience are reached when government demands and laws would lead to disobedience to God.

Read question 4 on page 56 of the student book:

*We are called to be obedient to the governing authorities. Are there times when we would have to disobey the government in order to be obedient to God? Cite examples.*

Allow for class discussion. Opinions may vary depending on the examples the participants choose (abortions, gay rights, and so forth).

### **Article 21: On the Saints**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Article 21 of the Augsburg Confession, "The Cult of Saints," on page 64 of the student book. Review the section, "Article 21: On the Saints," on pages 54-55 of the student book.

### **Key Points to Emphasize**

1. The Bible teaches that saints are all baptized Christians, which includes those on both sides of death.
2. The saints are God's gift to us as models and mentors, "spiritual friends" of the faith. Their witness of faithfulness, of living faith, is both an invitation and challenge to us to live faithfully.
3. The saints are not mediators between God and us and should not be prayed to. We can and should, however, honor them and give thanks for their lives and witness.

Read question 5 on page 56 of the student book:

*Name a saint (living or dead) who has modeled for you the Christian life. What qualities of that person would you like to emulate in your life?"*

Allow the class time to name those saints that have been and are important as "spiritual friends"

in their lives. Help the class to see each other, and to give thanks for each other, as saints as well. Encourage them to ponder the gift of one another in the class. If the class is at a level of intimacy where this would be possible, encourage them to share qualities that they experience in one another that model the faithful life. Thank God for those qualities.

Conclude this session and the class by reading the following sentences from the concluding paragraph of the student book:

*The saints of God are those baptized children of all times and places who are marked with the cross of Christ forever and sent to bear God's creative and redeeming word to all the world. The saints of God are those who go forward with God in obedience and hope—the people of the way whose words and life proclaim "glad tidings of great joy for all people." Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" for all and forever. Come along and follow!*

### **FOR REFLECTION**

See the session plan above for use of the questions 2-5.

Question 1 looks at the role of good works in daily life and implies that they may be different for each person. Talk about it together: What are some specific good works that you feel called to do? That is, where do your abilities and interests meet the needs of those around you?

### **OUR PRAYERS**

Gather the class together in a circle. Sing together "O God of Mercy, God of Might" (LBW 425).

Pray together "Our Prayers" on page 56 of the student book. Conclude by using this dismissal:

**Leader:** "Go in peace. Serve the Lord."

**Response:** "Thanks be to God."

### **FURTHER READING**

1. From *The Book of Concord: The Apology*, 16, 20, 21 (pp. 222-224, 226-236); Smalcald Articles 3; Formula of Concord 5 (pp. 558-563); Sections pertaining to the Lord's Prayer, prayers, and table of duties in the Small Catechism (pp. 346-348, 352-353, 354-356) and to the Lord's Prayer in the Large Catechism (pp. 420-436).
2. Benne, Robert. *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.
3. Hauerwas, Stanley. *After Christendom*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.
4. Hauerwas, Stanley and Willimon, William. *Resident Aliens*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1989.



## **POST-STUDY**

### **EXPANDING THE SESSION**

In the thirteenth century, St. Francis of Assisi practiced a type of spirituality known as Franciscan prayer. This spirituality emphasized prayer as: 1. spontaneous and informal praise of God; 2. acts of loving service to the friend, neighbor, enemy, and stranger, and; 3. an awareness of all creation as God's good and beautiful gift to us.

Too often we limit prayer to kneeling at our bedside, or to the blessing we say before meals, or to the prayers said in church. Encourage the class to try Franciscan prayer for a week, and to share their experiences at the next class session. Some examples might be:

1. Take a walk through the woods or fields or along the road and look for signs of God's love, beauty, power, wisdom, and goodness. Praise and thank God for these gifts.

2. Think of the person you love the most. Ask yourself the following question: "How can I see

the presence of God in that person?" Spend some time praising and thanking God for giving so much goodness, beauty, and grace to that person. Think of the person that you like least of all your acquaintances. Try to see something of God's goodness, beauty, and grace in that person. Thank God for those gifts.

3. Visit a nursing home resident who you do not know. Talk to this person about God. Before leaving, pray with this person and ask God to bless and help him or her.

Choose a Saturday (or other time) when you can be intentionally involved as a class in the exercise of faith. Make a list of activities and choose one, such as: cleaning up a neighborhood; visiting a hospital, nursing home, prison, homeless shelter, or children's home; or helping out in a soup kitchen.

Arrange a time, probably other than Sunday morning, for a local Roman Catholic priest or Orthodox priest to discuss with your class their tradition's understanding of the saints. If possible, ask the priest to talk about their tradition's use of icons and statues of the saints.

Invite a Mennonite or Quaker to talk with the class about their tradition's views on pacifism. At the same time, or another time, invite an armed forces chaplain or a government official (the mayor, council person) to discuss with the class how he or she understands the relationship between church and state.



# Heaven and Hell

## A Survey of Beliefs

What do you believe about heaven and hell? Please select the responses that most closely express your views:

**1. There is a heaven** (circle one): **a)** strongly agree; **b)** agree; **c)** disagree (skip to question 9); **d)** strongly disagree (skip to question 9); **e)** not sure.

**2. Heaven is** (circle one): **a)** a physical place; **b)** a state of being; **c)** both a physical place and a state of being; **d)** neither a physical place nor a state of being.

**3. Heaven is** (circle all that apply): **a)** up; **b)** complete peace and tranquility; **c)** intense action; **d)** like earth only better; **e)** lacking in many of the things that make life enjoyable; **f)** a paradise of pleasure, delight, joy and laughter; **g)** made of many mansions; **h)** a city of gold and precious gems; **i)** a cloud-like place; **j)** where death and injustice are no more; **k)** a state of wholeness; **l)** the presence of God; **m)** a different experience for each person; **n)** beyond our ability to imagine.

**4. From the following list, who do you expect will be in heaven** (circle all that apply): **a)** faithful Christians; **b)** good people who never had the chance to know Jesus; **c)** Christians who did not combine good works with faith; **d)** faithful Jews; **e)** faithful Mormons; **f)** faithful Buddhists; **g)** unbaptized children; **h)** unrepentant Christians; **i)** wicked people; **j)** serial killers who repent before they die.

**5. Once in heaven, the saved will** (circle all that apply): **a)** praise and worship God; **b)** do good for those on earth; **c)** eat and drink at the heavenly banquet; **d)** continue to do activities they enjoyed on earth; **e)** meet and talk with people from all times and places; **f)** become angels; **g)** live as one big community; **h)** live in family-like groups; **i)** not have enough to do, perhaps get bored.

**6. After death, a person goes to heaven** (circle one): **a)** immediately; **b)** on judgment day; **c)** when Christ comes again; **d)** in two stages—the soul goes to heaven immediately, and the body is raised when Christ comes again.

**7. In heaven, bodies are** (circle all that apply): **a)** non-existent; there are no bodies in heaven; **b)** free of disease and pain; **c)** perfect; **d)** transformed and glorified; **e)** the age one was at death; **f)** all alike; **g)** wispy and ghostlike; **h)** similar to earthly bodies.

**8. For the following statements, circle T for true, F for false or N for not sure:**

**T F N** I have a friend or relative in heaven right now.

**T F N** People in heaven are reunited with their loved ones.

**T F N** I expect to go to heaven.

**T F N** Most people will end up in heaven.

**T F N** There are some things about heaven that I'm not sure I'm going to like.

**T F N** My beliefs about heaven influence strongly my life and witness as a Christian.

**T F N** There will be animals in heaven, especially beloved pets.

**9. There is a hell** (circle one): **a)** strongly agree; **b)** agree; **c)** disagree (skip to question 16); **d)** strongly disagree (skip to question 16); **e)** not sure.

**10. Hell is** (circle one): **a)** a physical place; **b)** a state of being; **c)** both a physical place and a state of being; **d)** neither a physical place nor a state of being.

**11. Hell is** (circle all that apply): **a)** down; **b)** a blazing inferno; **c)** a state of despair, hopelessness; **d)** separation from God; **e)** full of people; **f)** total isolation; **g)** like earth only worse; **h)** the absence of heaven; **i)** physical torture; **j)** psychological torture; **k)** nothingness; **l)** a different experience for each person; **m)** beyond our ability to imagine.

**12. From the following list, who do you expect will be in hell** (circle all that apply): **a)** the devil; **b)** Hitler; **c)** Judas; **d)** good people who never had the chance to know Jesus; **e)** Christians who did not combine good works with faith; **f)** faithful Jews; **g)** faithful Mormons; **h)** faithful Buddhists; **i)** unbaptized children; **j)** unrepentant Christians; **k)** wicked people; **l)** atheists; **m)** agnostics.

**13. Once in hell, the condemned will** (circle one): **a)** suffer eternally; **b)** be destroyed; they don't suffer forever; **c)** might be rehabilitated; one can get out of hell; **d)** none of the above.

**14. In hell, the condemned will** (circle all that apply): **a)** praise and worship the devil; **b)** suffer for their sins; **c)** repent of their sins; **d)** do evil to those on earth; **e)** make restitution for their sins; **f)** eat, drink, and be merry.



**15. For the following statements, circle T for true, F for false or N for not sure:**

- T F N** I have a friend or relative in hell right now.  
**T F N** I worry about going to hell.  
**T F N** I worry that someone I love will end up in hell.  
**T F N** Most people will end up in hell.  
**T F N** My beliefs about hell influence strongly my life and witness as a Christian.  
**T F N** There is a middle ground, like purgatory.

**16. My beliefs about heaven and hell have been shaped by** (circle all that apply): **a)** the Bible; **b)** art and literature; **c)** hymns, music; **d)** movies and television; **e)** sermons; **f)** family tradition; **g)** stories of near-death experiences; **h)** personal experiences; **i)** Sunday school and catechism; **j)** religion and theology classes; **k)** other . . .

**17. For the following statements, circle T for true, F for false or N for not sure:**

- T F N** I think a lot about heaven and hell.  
**T F N** I think a lot about life after death.  
**T F N** Believing in heaven can make a person less willing to work to change life on earth.  
**T F N** Believing in hell can make a person more likely to share the gospel.  
**T F N** It is not necessary to believe in heaven and/or hell to be a Christian.  
**T F N** I believe in some aspects of reincarnation.  
**T F N** A person who doesn't believe in hell is likely to end up there.  
**T F N** More sermons should be preached on heaven and hell.

- If possible, read the article by Martin E. Marty on pp. 14-17 of the July 1993 issue of *The Lutheran* that summarizes the results of this poll.

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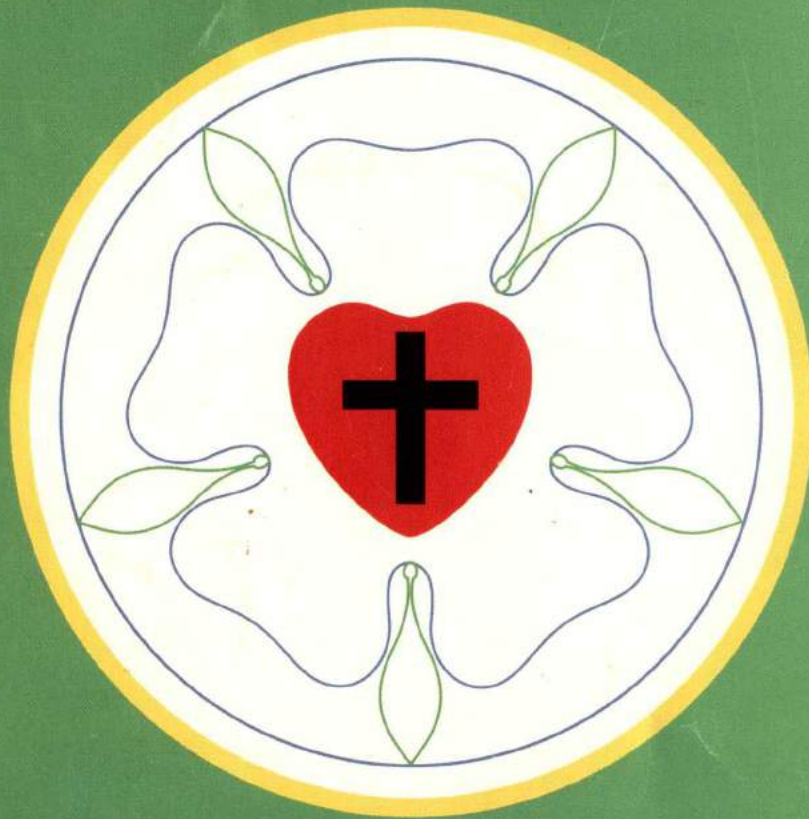




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