



### NO ONE CAN EXIST IN A VACUUM

We are never alone in the family of God. Our Christian brothers and sisters are here to lift us up. When we despair, they point us back to God's Word and the promise of our Baptism. When we sin, they hold the mirror of God's Law to call us to repentance. We worship with them, giving all praise and honor and glory to God. We serve with them as we share the Gospel with the world in acts of love and mercy.



Any Christian community is made of **God**, **you**, **and your neighbor**.



A lone ranger might look cool in movies. But in real life, a lone ranger looks like this:

A child watching from the swings as all the other students play soccer during recess.

A student walking through the hallways lost and scared on her first day in a new school.

A recent college graduate eating dinner alone after he moves to a new city.

A woman grieving silently over a fractured relationship with a friend.

A man sitting in church alone after his wife dies.

None of us can go through life alone. We need friends, family, and our church to cheer us on in happy times but also to be with us during sad times. This community of believers supports one another by helping one another meet their physical needs, by listening to one another, by praying for one another, and by worshiping and serving alongside one another.

#### Being the Church looks like this:

Another child asking the boy on the swing if he wants to play together.

A teacher asking the lost student if she needs help finding her next class.

A neighbor or co-worker inviting the new graduate over for dinner and reading Scripture together.

Another woman asking the grieving one how she is doing and praying with her.

A family sitting with the widower in his pew.

In this issue of *Lutheran Life*, you'll find more ways to foster caring Christian relationships, being the hands and feet of God to express His love and learning the importance of receiving His love from others. ‡





The congregation—the place where God is present through Word and Sacrament ministry—is where Christ comes to His people. But worship is not the only way in which God works through the local congregation.



God brings diverse people together in the local congregation. Rich and poor, young and old, white collar and blue collar, black and white are united in Christ. The kingdom of God is not segregated. Local congregations are to be the vanguard of the new creation showing the world what it looks like to be children of God.





Brothers and sisters in Christ support one another on a local level through prayer. If someone is sick, then the local congregation straps the weight of that sickness on its own back through prayer. If someone is celebrating a great blessing, then the local congregation does a happy dance with that person through prayer.





The local congregation is where Christ is present and active among His people. That means that it is a command post for the kingdom of God. As members of the local congregation make their way out into the community, they carry the Gospel with them.



The local congregation is a conduit for God's love and care for His people. What may appear to be a tuna casserole is actually a divine token of support and consolation. What others deem a box of diapers is really the Body of Christ swaddling its fellow members in love.





#### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

God holds His people accountable on a local level through the congregation. Rogue readings of Scripture are hard to maintain in a confessing community of believers. Absence from worship and life together is noticed and addressed by the local congregation.

The local congregation is the place where Jesus dwells among us. Not the golf course. Not on social media. Jesus comes to you in the hearing of God's Word and the receiving of the Sacraments—through your local congregation. ‡

Adapted from Being Lutheran, pages 238-41 © 2016 A. Trevor Sutton. Published by Concordia Publishing House.

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### GOING AS CHURCH VERSUS GOING TO CHURCH

We love to use the phrase "going to church." Even though many times it means we're going to a building or place to worship the Lord, we also understand that it is a place or building that gathers God's people together in the midst of a community that He loves. As we "go to church," we are reminded that we are going to the community God has bought through the blood of Jesus and brings together every day by the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### **HOW GOD SEES HIS CHURCH**

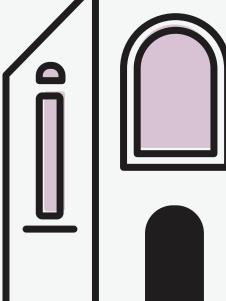
Our heavenly Father invites us to "see" the Church as He sees it. He sees it as His Son's Body through the vision of the Holy Spirit. He sings about the Church, sings through it, and sings out of it into a world that needs to see and hear Him. He speaks to her with bold and tender words. He is intimately, really present in and with her.

#### **GOD HELPS US BE HIS CHURCH**

When we struggle to see ourselves as He does, when we fall short and sin against Him and one another, when we don't represent our faithful God well, He still knows we are His. He will guide us to continue to become who He knows us to be—Jesus' Body, a community alive with the love of Jesus, set apart for the good works He has already prepared for us to do. We faithfully confess this reality even as we daily work to live in it. May we be a community of saints that is always going as the Church. ‡

Adapted from *Devotions on the Small Catechism*, pages 56–57 © 2019 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.





# WHY CHRISTIANS PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Christians are baptized into a people, a kingdom, a body, a huge global family of Christians. To be a Christian is to be a member of a larger group.

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

Consider how Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. The first words are "Our Father." If Jesus' only goal for your faith was merely for you to have a personal relationship with Him and God the Father, and if personal intimacy with God was the main point of His teachings on prayer, wouldn't He have taught you to pray, "My Father"? But He didn't do that in His Sermon on the Mount, and He still doesn't today.

#### **COMMUNITY BY DEFINITION**

Your relationship to your heavenly Father is inextricably linked to your relationship to your brothers and sisters in Christ, your fellow believers. If you have Christ as King, you are part of a kingdom. If you have God as Father, you have brothers and sisters. You have that relationship to other Christians simply by virtue of being a Christian yourself.

#### **BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST**

There is no use trying to be connected to God without being connected to the rest of His family. If, when you were a child, your parents had another child, you couldn't decide whether you wanted to be a sibling. You could only decide how good of a sibling to be. That's the case in the family of God. All Christians are a group; the challenge for each individual Christian is how to acknowledge, express, and realize that fact. ‡

Adapted from *Connected to Christ: Why Membership Matters*, pages 9–12 © 2017 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.



Common LISTENING PITFALLS and How to Avoid Them

Listening is essential to make any other communication skill work. But there are many things that get in the way. Here are some common stumbling blocks and how they can be avoided.

#### **TOO MANY INFORMATION-GATHERING QUESTIONS**

Several information-gathering questions, one right after another, put the questioner in a position of control and place the impetus of the conversation squarely on the questioner.

**How to Avoid:** Early general questions, such as "Please tell me how you are doing," are invitations to talk about substantive matters the talker wants or needs to discuss.

#### **TELLING A PARALLEL STORY**

While this kind of response might seem like an empathic one, especially in the early stages of the conversation it turns the attention from the talker to the listener.

**How to Avoid:** Place full attention on the experience and context of the talker and seek to understand the talker's experience by focusing on how the talker is feeling.

#### **ADVICE TOO EARLY**

Focusing on the first concern and attempting to give advice can stop further exploration into areas that may be more central. Additionally, sometimes people just want to be heard and understood.

**How to Avoid:** Often neither the presenting issue nor the first statements concerning what is happening are really driving the concern. Attention to underlying or seemingly background concerns is critical.

#### **INATTENTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

An attentive discussion around other people may not be possible. For instance, in a hospital setting, family members may want to speak for the talker or medical personnel may come in.

**How to Avoid:** In order for active listening to occur, there need to be conversation boundaries and minimal distractions. Asking for one-on-one time might solve this.

#### INATTENTION TO YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY

The listener might not be in an emotional position to be in listening mode. For instance, if the listener has just had a confrontation with someone else, he or she might be agitated.

**How to Avoid:** The listener must be aware of his or her own whole-person health before offering care to another. Consider debriefing with a trusted person before meeting with the talker. ‡

Adapted from *Building Up the Body of Christ: Supporting Community Life in the Church*, pages 74–76 © 2016 Bruce M. Hartung. Published by Concordia Publishing House.

Ministering to people is not just providing them information about God. Caring for God's flock requires being present with people in their daily lives.

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IN BIBLICAL TIMES

Our God is a God of relationship. He cared so much about us that Christ took on flesh and dwelt among His people. In His earthly ministry, Jesus didn't just study and preach and teach all the time, avoiding contact with people. He was physically present among them in groups and individually. He listened to their cries for help. He spoke with them. He fed them. He touched them. He forgave and healed them.

#### **RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD TODAY**

Today, our Lord is still present with His people through His Word and Sacraments. Christ speaks to us through the Bible. God's Spirit dwells within us. We are made children of the heavenly Father as we are touched in the waters of Holy Baptism. He physically comes to us in His body and blood during His Holy Supper to strengthen our faith and keep us in holy relationship with Him.

#### **OVERCOMING HURDLES TO COMMUNITY**

Today, more than ever, personal contact makes a difference. With the busyness of our society, and with communications becoming more and more digitalized, connecting with someone in person is an unusual blessing. We all have a responsibility to care for one another, even when we must jump over earthly and contemporary hurdles.

God gives us one another to serve in a ministry of presence. He creates and nourishes our faith through His Word and Sacraments. Then He sends us out to serve others, to love them and care for them, whether they are within or outside of the Christian community. ‡

Adapted from *Built on the Rock: The Healthy Congregation*, page 252 © 2017 Ambassadors of Reconciliation. Published by Concordia Publishing House.





When You Don't
Want to
Go to
Church

When your feelings are too tender to allow you to come into God's presence and when you can't work up the courage to step into God's house, God is willing to visit you where you are. Home visits are His specialty.

#### **GOD KNOWS YOU NEED THE CHURCH**

The Church coming to you involves much more than catching a worship service on television or joining an online worship opportunity from the safety of your living room. It means more than reading God's Word on your own or praying in the privacy of your home.

God created the Church because we need one another. The Church is a living and breathing organism, enlivened by the resurrection of Jesus and the sending of His Holy Spirit. God's Church consists of sent people, receiving and sharing His love and grace. It is true that God's people aren't perfect. Some may disappoint you. But God will provide others who lift you up in your times of need. He will bless you with shoulders to lean on.

#### **GOD SENDS HIS CHURCH TO YOU**

If you feel like you can't muster up the stamina to go to church, ask the church to stop by and see you. Your pastor will be pleased to sit with you, to listen, and to pray. He will be glad to share the Lord's Supper with you. Christian friends will be overjoyed to stop by for a personal time of conversation and worship. It may be exactly what you need as you gradually and gently phase into your former routine.

If you don't want to immerse yourself fully in a crowd of people, and you can't bear the thought of seeing the familiar surroundings that trigger your sadness, let a little community of trusted friends come to you so you can bring your praise and prayer to your Savior with people you trust and love. Take it slow, knowing that even if you feel far away, God is always close to you. ‡

Adapted from *Hope When Your Heart Breaks: Navigating Grief and Loss*, pages 139–40 © 2017 Michael W. Newman. Published by Concordia Publishing House.

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## WORSHIP AS A COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

Worship is transcultural, but it is also supertemporal. Worship bridges time and enables all believers living in the "now" to glimpse eternity. Whether it is in the Preface of the Service of the Sacrament when we join "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven" or in the private moments of Compline as we confess our sins "before the whole company of heaven," worship goes beyond the present and joins with that of the great throng of angels and heavenly hosts.

#### **LINKED TO BELIEVERS OF ALL TIMES AND PLACES**

Lutheran worship links those present as God's gathered guests to the eternal truths of God's people of all time and all places. The messages of the prophets and apostles still speak to today's situations. The Old and New Testaments still bring hope, comfort, and joy. We hear the Father's forgiving voice in the words of Holy Absolution. The Holy Spirit still comes in the sacramental waters of Holy Baptism to create faith. Jesus continues to be present in, with, and under the elements of Holy Communion to grant us forgiveness, life, and salvation.

#### LINKED TO THE HEAVENLY FEAST TO COME

Yet this weekly celebration is only a foretaste of the feast to come. Worship reminds us of the heavenly glory that will someday be ours. The writer to the Hebrews says: "Stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (10:24–25). More significant, the Revelation of John shows us the continuing worship of God's people (Revelation 19:1–10). The heavenly banquet is being prepared by Jesus, and He will return to bring us to celebrate with Him eternally (Revelation 22:12).

After the last Benediction is spoken here on earth, there will still be the everlasting worship in the new creation of the Lamb who sits on the throne with psalms, hymns, and songs of joyous victory by all God's gathered guests.

Adapted from *Gathered Guests*, *Second Edition*, pages 530–31 © 2003, 2009 Timothy H. Maschke. Published by Concordia Publishing House.

Scripture: ESV®.

# LOOK INSIDE TO LEARN ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND HOW TO BUILD IT.

# Lutheran



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