

A Bible Study On The Articles Of “THE COMMON CONFSSION”

*A Seven-Part Statement of Faith
Highlighting Biblical & Confessional Lutheran Doctrine*



Written by Members of the LC3 Steering Committee

Edited by Rev. Steven King

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The *Lutheran Churches of the Common Confession (LC3)* is a cooperative mission association made up of churches who have publicly covenanted with each other around a statement of beliefs, as outlined in our *Common Confession*. The LC3 was created to be “A Big Tent for Traditional Lutherans” who desire to work intentionally and cooperatively in serving the mission of Christ. Written inquiries may be sent to: LC3 Bible Study, PO Box 462, Maple Lake MN 55358. Questions and comments are welcomed. Email communication may be sent to: LC3@charter.net.



A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

Introduction to "The Common Confession"

The Historical and Theological Rationale for this Statement of Faith

"As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Throughout the history of the Church, each new generation of God's people has been called to "hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering" trusting that "he who has promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23)

In the early centuries of the Christian era, when many heresies threatened to undermine the Gospel and distort the teaching of Scripture, faithful people drew up the Ecumenical Creeds, to teach the basics of the Christian faith, to warn against false belief, and to provide a common confession by which faithful Christians could speak of their faith together. Likewise, in the Middle Ages, when the gospel of Christ had become obscured by the human traditions of the Church, reformers wrote new confessions to address the challenges confronting the biblical message in their own time. Documents such as the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Formula of Concord* did not seek to invent new doctrine, but were an attempt by the reformers to remove obstacles that had been placed before the Word. All of these historical confessions are still used to this day, that we as believers may "continue in what we have learned and firmly believed", in a testimony that is consistent with those who have gone before us in faith.

In our own day, the Gospel of Jesus Christ faces new obstacles and distortions. As Paul warned, there is always the risk that the Church may be "deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ." (Galatians 1:6-7).

To address the doctrinal issues at stake for those of us in the American Lutheran tradition today, many individuals and reform movements have attempted to outline the biblical teachings we have inherited, as it relates to our own context. Various statements and confessions have been drawn up, to which many have subscribed. One of the more broad-based statements has been the "Ten Affirmations of the Word Alone Network", a summary of beliefs that have helped to guide the network. Another is the "Dorado Covenant", a statement of principles offered in support of biblical and evangelical proclamation, supported by congregations and individuals.

Along with the constitutional "Confession of Faith" of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, these statements formed the basis for the text of the *Common Confession*, a document written in 2005 for distribution among Lutheran churches in North America. This confession was not a presentation of any new doctrine, nor was it intended to replace the historical confessions that came before it. In addition, though it is based on the teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, it was not written to serve as a comprehensive summary of Christian doctrine. Rather, it was meant to address the particular theological concerns facing Lutherans in the 21st Century.

This Bible Study is offered as a resource for studying the *Common Confession*, with the hope that it will inspire congregations to examine the core beliefs of traditional Lutheranism, and how these beliefs apply to our own context. The study was written in an introductory discussion-based style, focusing on texts from the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions (namely, the Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession).

Additional background information can be found on the LC3 website at: www.commonconfession.net.

THE COMMON CONFSSION

*(The faith statement of the "Lutheran Churches of the Common Confession"
and of "Lutheran CORE – Coalition for Reform." Adopted: November 2005)*

CC1) The Lord Jesus Christ

We are people who believe and confess our faith in the Triune God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We trust and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

CC2) The Gospel of Salvation

We believe and confess that all human beings are sinners, and that sinners are redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God alone justifies human beings by faith in Christ – a faith which God creates through the message of the Gospel. As ambassadors for Christ, God uses us to speak his Word and build his kingdom.

CC3) The Authority of Scripture

We believe and confess that the Bible is God's revealed Word to us, spoken in Law and Gospel. The Bible is the final authority for us in all matters of our faith and life.

CC4) A Common Confession of Faith

We accept and uphold that the Lutheran Confessions reliably guide us as faithful interpretations of Scripture, and that we share a unity and fellowship in faith with others among whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel.

CC5) The Priesthood of All Believers

We believe and confess that the Holy Spirit makes all who believe in Jesus Christ to be priests for service to others in Jesus' name, and that God desires to make use of the spiritual gifts he has given through the priesthood of all believers.

CC6) Marriage and Family

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman.

CC7) The Mission and Ministry of the Congregation

We believe and confess that the church is the assembly of believers called and gathered by God around Word and Sacrament, and that the mission and ministry of the church is carried out within the context of individual congregations, which are able to work together locally and globally.



A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

SESSION 1

Article CC1:

The Lord Jesus Christ

We are people who believe and confess our faith in the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We trust and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

From the earliest days of the New Testament apostles, the first public statement of the Christian faith was a simple phrase: "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3). Likewise, the first article of our Common Confession focuses on that same center of faith. Just as God commanded "you shall have no other gods before me" – our faith begins and is brought to fullness in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The first century Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, showed himself to be much more than just a human being. He claimed to be one with the heavenly Father, and we have come to see in him the very being of God (John 14).

Our God is a real person, not simply an idea or philosophical concept. Like with all real people, the truth about God is not found in what we would like to believe about him, but in what he has revealed to us of himself. In the Scriptures, we witness the words and deeds of the one true God, who has revealed himself as three distinct "persons" – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Since the days of the early Church, Christians have used the word "Trinity" to refer to this reality of "One God in three Persons." The theologian Tertullian (c. 200 AD), coined the word as a combination of "tri" and "unity", meaning "three-in-one."

From the Small Catechism:

"God encourages us to believe that he is truly our Father and we are his children. We are therefore to pray to him in complete confidence, just as children speak to their loving father."

"We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else."

"Anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God, dishonors God's name among us. Keep us from doing this heavenly Father!"

ELCA Confession of Faith (¶ 1 – ¶ 2b)

This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.

Some Initial Questions:

1. Why begin a confession of the Christian faith with Jesus? Why not Scripture or the Church? Is the priority of our various faith statements important?
2. What is the difference between the word "Trinity" and the word "Triune"? What do these words tell us about God?
3. How is our Christian understanding of "revealed" truth, different from the idea that each of us invents "our own truth"?
4. Is there a difference between the words "trust" and "belief"? How do both these words help us define what faith is?

Scripture Lesson - Session 1:

Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

(Matthew 28:18-20 NRSV)

Often referred to as "The Great Commission," this text represents the final words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. After his resurrection, Jesus proclaimed his lordship over all heaven and earth, and sent his people into the world with his Word, in the name of the Trinity.

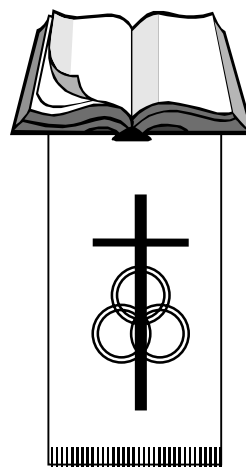
Questions:

1. Why does Jesus speak of his authority *prior* to sending out his disciples? Where did Jesus get his authority?
2. In what way is Jesus the Lord of *every* culture and nation? Does his authority depend upon our human acknowledgement of him, or not? Explain.
3. How does Jesus "name" God? What does it mean for something to be done "in the name of" someone? How do we as Christians give God a good or bad "name"?
4. What would be wrong with baptizing in some other name for God? How does using the name that God revealed for himself relate to what Jesus said about 'authority'?
5. How is obedience related to faith? How are they different? Why do you think Jesus used the word "obey" here, rather than something else, like "respect" or "believe"?
6. To whom is Jesus speaking here? Is Jesus' commission to the disciples any different from what it is to us? Explain.

Entering the Biblical Story

Read the story of the encounter of Saul (Paul) with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. It is found in: Acts 9:1-22 .

1. How does this story demonstrate Jesus' power and authority? In what way are his words here a call for obedience?
2. What in the story exemplifies the grace and mercy of Christ? How does this relate to Jesus' promise to 'be with us always'?
3. How do you imagine Saul (Paul) felt through this experience? Have you ever had such a life-changing encounter? What would it mean to say that Jesus 'transforms' us daily?
4. Who do you think performed the baptism in the story? What did Saul's baptism and his healing have in common? Who made both happen?



Scripture Passages for Further Study:

- Colossians 1:15-19
- Psalms 2:1-11
- Isaiah 44:10-13
- Luke 10:21-22
- John 3:31-36

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A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

SESSION 2

Article CC2:

The Gospel of Salvation

We believe and confess that all human beings are sinners, and that sinners are redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God alone justifies human beings by faith in Christ – a faith which God creates through the message of the Gospel. As ambassadors for Christ, God uses us to speak his Word and build his kingdom.

Scripture makes it clear that human beings are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by their own works. We are justified ('made right') in the sight of God, not by what we do, but through trust in the saving work of Christ. As Scripture says in Ephesians 2:8-9: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

We do not boast of "faith" as if it were our own doing, because it is God himself who creates faith within us through the message of Jesus Christ. By God's own Word, the Holy Spirit moves our hearts to believe the promise that Christ died for our sins. When God changes our hearts and makes us his own, the Spirit leads us to share this same message with others.

Faith never leaves us as we are, but daily transforms us into new people. For this reason we were chosen to be Christ's witnesses to the world, his ambassadors. "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." (Eph. 2:10)

From the Small Catechism:

"I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith"

"In this Christian Church, day after day, he fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day he will raise me and all the dead, and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true."

ELCA Confession of Faith (¶ 2 and 2b)

This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Some Initial Questions:

1. Is the salvation of an individual person something God does up in heaven, or here on earth? Is it both? How does it happen?
2. What instrument or "means" does God most often use to get his work done? Why doesn't God just 'snap his fingers' to make things right?
3. Scripture says in Acts 4:12 that there is salvation in no one else but Jesus, "for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." Do you believe this? Explain why or why not.

Scripture Lessons - Session 2:

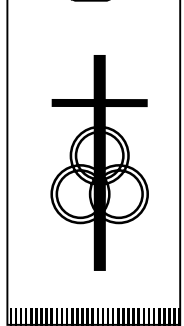
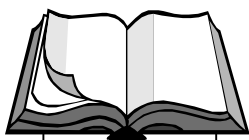
Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:19-20 NRSV)

The gospel of Christ is the message about Christ and what he has done for us. Christ was born into the world for our sake, to give his life for us on the cross and to raise us up to new life in his resurrection. This Word of "good news" is the means by which God creates in us the faith to trust and believe in Christ.

Questions:

1. If faith in Jesus Christ as the sacrifice of atonement is the critical factor in salvation, how does one obtain such faith?
2. If faith comes by hearing, and even that is a gift of God, what is there left for us to do? How are we as Christians used by God to bring the promise of Christ into the lives of others?
3. What is the job of an "ambassador"? From what or whom does the authority of an ambassador come? How many different ways can you think of to be an ambassador of Christ?



Scripture Passages for Further Study:

- Acts 4:5-12
- Habakkuk 2:1-4
- Romans 1:16-17
- Galatians 2:15-21
- Ephesians 2:1-10

Entering the Biblical Story

Read an example of the way in which the Apostle Paul preached the gospel of salvation in Christ, from Romans 3:21-28 .

1. What is meant by 'righteousness from God'? (v.21) Is righteousness something we do or not? Compare Jeremiah 23:6.
2. How do you see or hear the law and the prophets testifying to this righteousness of God? Give an example of a person from the Old Testament Scriptures who exemplifies the righteousness of faith apart from works.
3. Re-read v. 22. What does this mean to you? Are there no distinctions among sinners? Is a serial killer, for instance, no different from anyone else in the eyes of God? Explain.
4. What is 'faith' in Jesus Christ? Is it a task to be done by us as human beings? Compare what Jesus himself says in John 6:65 & 15:16. How can this be true? What of free will?
5. Read verse 24 aloud once again. "Justified", "grace", and "redemption" - these are very big words. What do they mean to you?
6. What does it mean to say that God presented Jesus as "a sacrifice of atonement"? Compare Leviticus 16:15-19. What did Jesus' death accomplish for us? How?
7. What is meant by "faith in his blood"? How is this same thing described in Hebrews 9:11-22? Does the writer here agree with Paul?

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A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

SESSION 3

Article CC3:

The Authority of Scripture

We believe and confess that the Bible is God's revealed Word to us, spoken in Law and Gospel. The Bible is the final authority for us in all matters of our faith and life.

Most discussions of the authority of Scripture tend to focus on what it **is**. For Luther, the more important question has to do with what God's Word **does** – to us and in us.

Luther taught that God reveals his Word to those who read the Scripture: "The Holy Spirit speaks to those who read the Word of God." As Law, the Word shows us our sin and need for repentance. As Gospel, it speaks the promise of forgiveness and new life in Christ.

In a sermon on John, Chapter 1, Luther stressed God's goal, saying "the external Word serves the purpose of engendering faith and of imparting the Holy Spirit..." We find the same goal stated in Romans 10:17, where Scripture shows how God is active in his Word, saying: "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the Word of Christ."

The power and authority of Scripture rests in the fact that God **does** something to us through his Word. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to create faith, when and where he pleases. When a living faith is removed from the equation -- when it is forgotten that the Bible's primary purpose is to lead us to repentance of sin through the Law and salvation by faith in the Gospel -- the truth and authority of the Scriptures is lost to us.

From the Small Catechism:

"God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word, and live a godly life on earth now and in heaven forever."

"We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect his Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it."

ELCA Confession of Faith (¶ 2c and ¶ 3)

The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world. This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

Some Initial Questions:

1. What does it mean to call the Bible "the authoritative norm" of our proclamation, faith, and life? What is a "norm"? What does it measure?
2. What do Lutherans mean by the distinction between God's Word as "Law" and "Gospel"? What is Law? What is Gospel? For what purpose does God use each of them?
3. Jesus prayed to the Father: "Your Word is truth." (John 17:17) How would you define the word "truth"? Do you believe the Bible is true?

Scripture Lesson - Session 3:

We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NRSV)

Scripture has authority because it comes from God. Or as Scripture itself says, it is "inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16) – literally "God-breathed." This means that the Holy Spirit is at the heart of what the Bible is and what it does.

Questions:

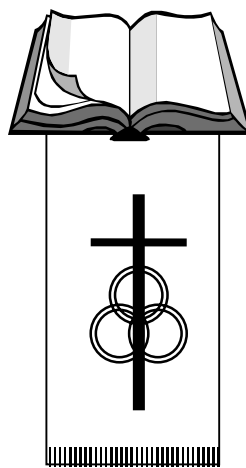
1. What is the difference between the words of human beings and the Word of God? Which is easier to trust? Explain.
2. How would you describe the way in which the Holy Spirit was at work in the writing of the Scriptures? How does this establish its authority?
3. In what way is the Holy Spirit at work in the *hearing* or *reading* of God's Word? Does the Bible have the same authority in our lives when it is sitting unused on a shelf?
4. Do you tend to see God's Word as more of a comfort or a challenge? In what way is it both?
5. What does it mean to 'receive' the Word of God? Is faith a human action, or does God himself create faith his Word?
6. In what way is God's Word "at work" in believers? What does it do **to** us? What is God's ultimate goal?
7. The Lutheran Confessions state: "Scripture is the only judge, rule, and guiding principle, according to which, as the only touchstone, all teachings should and must be recognized and judged, whether they are good or evil, correct or incorrect." What other authorities does such a statement reject? How does God's Word give a *content* to our faith that reason cannot?

* *Formula of Concord (Preface to Epitome 7)*

Entering the Biblical Story

Read the story of Peter's sermon in Jerusalem on Pentecost from Acts 2:14-41, and note the apostle's use of Scripture.

1. When Peter addressed the crowd of people in Jerusalem on Pentecost, he made reference to passages from: Joel 2, as well as Psalm 16, 110, 132, and others. What role does Scripture play in Peter's sermon? Why does he quote them?
2. What writings would Peter have considered to be "the Scriptures"? What about us? How are the two related?
3. Compare: 2 Peter 1:16-21. What authority did Peter believe was at work in the Scriptures? Did Peter's experience confirm his trust in the Scriptures, or did Peter set his experience over against Scripture?
4. In what way is God's Word a light to, rather than a reflection of, the world?



Scripture Passages for Further Study:

- 2 Timothy 3:14-17
- Acts 8:27-35
- Psalm 119:105-114
- 2 Peter 1:16-21
- John 8:12-32

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A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

SESSION 4

Article CC4:

Common Confession of Faith

We accept and uphold that the Lutheran Confessions reliably guide us as a faithful interpretation of Scripture, that we share a unity and fellowship in faith with others among whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the Gospel.

We as Lutherans have a great heritage. One of the great gifts of our heritage is our confessions of faith. For example, we accept the great Creeds of the Church – the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. In addition we have our Lutheran Confessions, which include such documents as Luther’s Catechisms and the Augsburg Confession. These documents give definition and guidance to what we believe, as faithful interpretations of Scripture.

Another gift we have as Lutherans is that we find unity with other Christians when we share in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. As it says in the Augsburg Confession, Article VII:

“It is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.”

Anchored in the Scripture and our confessions, we are free to share with brothers and sisters in Christ in the doing of ministry.

From the Small Catechism:

“God’s name is hallowed whenever his Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God live in harmony with it.”

“In the same way [the Holy Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

ELCA Confession of Faith (¶ 4-6)

This church accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this church. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. This church accepts the other confessional writings of the Book of Concord ... as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.

Some Initial Questions:

1. What do you most value about being Lutheran? What do think is central to our Lutheran identity?
2. What do we have in common with other (non-Lutheran) Christians? On what is that commonality based?
3. In faith and practice, Lutherans distinguish between “adiaphora” (ie. unessential matters of indifference) and matters that are the “status of confession” (ie. essential to the faith). What kind of things in the church are adiaphora? What kind of things have a “status of confession”?

Scripture Lesson - Session 4:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

(Ephesians 4:4-6 NRSV)

Scripture insists that we as Christians are called into one faith and one hope. This call to oneness is not an optional part of our faith; we are always directed to our brothers and sisters in Christ, who is our common Lord.

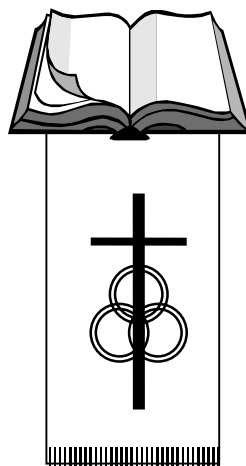
Questions:

1. Give an example of a time when you felt a unity with other Christians, perhaps Christians of other denominations. What occurred, and what was it like?
2. Give an example of a time when you experienced a lack of unity (or perhaps even animosity) with other Christians. What occurred, and what was that like?
3. The letter to the Ephesians assures us that the one Spirit works to unify God's people. How does the Spirit do this among us?
4. If we are all one in Christ, why are there so many "types" of Christians? How might the various differences between denominations actually be a good thing?
5. Is Ephesians 4 speaking of unity in essential matters, or in adiaphora? Could we have a different "Lord, faith, and baptism" and still be united as one church? Explain.
6. Reflect on some of the potentially divisive issues currently facing the ELCA, or your own congregation. Are they matters of adiaphora, or do they have the 'status of confession'? Is there a basis on which you can tell the difference?

Entering the Biblical Story

Read the story of Jesus' prayer for his disciples at the Last Supper. It is found in: John 17:1-24 .

1. What do we have in common with the original disciples? What is different?
2. When Jesus prays that his followers be one, for what is he asking? Is he speaking of institutional unity, or something else? What does Christian unity look like to you?
3. In what way is unity among Christians Christ's gift to us? How is this true despite what we do or don't do?
4. How is the unity that Jesus speaks of related to his Word? What does Jesus pray that the Word would do to us? What does that mean?
5. How is it possible for us to faithfully deal with disagreements in the Church, while at the same time maintain a spirit of unity?



Scripture Passages for Further Study:

- Psalm 133
- Micah 6:6-8
- 1 Corinth. 12:12-27
- Matthew 12:46-50
- 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

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A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

SESSION 5

Article CC5:

The Priesthood of All Believers

We believe and confess that the Holy Spirit makes all who believe in Jesus Christ to be priests for service to others in Jesus' name, and that God desires to make use of the spiritual gifts he has given through the priesthood of all believers.

When God handed down his law to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, he established regulations and standards for Israelite worship. God provided instructions for order in setting up the tent of worship, laws for sacrifice at the altar, and standards for the tribe of Levi who would serve as ministers of the temple. Moses' brother Aaron became the first Israelite "priest" of God under this new law.

In the years thereafter, the Levitical priesthood was passed on to Aaron's male descendants. Within this system, the priest interceded for the people by offering appropriate sacrifices to God. The priests served as 'go-betweens' on behalf of God and the Israelite laity.

All this served to foreshadow the coming of Christ, who Scripture declares to be both "our great High Priest" (Hebrews 4:14) as well as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). As the Book of Hebrews says, the once-and-for-all atonement of Christ eliminated the need for any further sacrifice; Christ is our only mediator. He has given to his followers the authority and calling to speak his word of forgiveness to one another in his name, that all Christians may serve as 'priests' of his gospel.

From the Small Catechism:

"What is the Office of the Keys? It is that authority which Christ gave to the church to forgive the sins of those who repent, and to declare to those who do not repent that their sins are not forgiven."

"In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

From the Augsburg Confession:

Article V: To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel ...

Article XIV: It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.

Some Initial Questions:

1. Is the difference between clergy and laity a matter of divine or human authority? Is there a supernatural or spiritual power that clergy possess that lay people do not?
2. The word "ordination" is related to the word "order." How does ordination bring 'order' to the church's ministry? Why is this important? Who establishes this order?
3. Would you say that a Christian's calling by God in baptism is more or less important than a call to ordained ministry? Why?
4. What responsibility do lay people have in holding clergy accountable to God's Word? How or when might that happen?

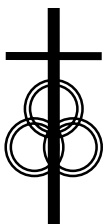
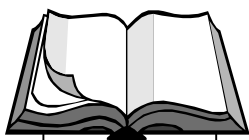
Scripture Lesson - Session 5:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
(1 Peter 2:9-10 NRSV)

Here the Apostle Peter speaks of Christian believers as "a royal priesthood, God's own people." Our identity rests in the Lord who claims us and calls us to his service.

Questions:

1. Why might Peter's words have sounded remarkable to people familiar with the Scriptures? Was the Jewish priesthood open to anyone? What were its limits?
2. Who has the power or authority to announce God's forgiveness among Christians? Where does this authority come from?
3. Do you feel 'called' and 'chosen' by God? If so, in what sense? Would you describe this in a supernatural way, or in more ordinary down-to-earth terms?
4. For Lutherans, the distinction between clergy and laity has to do with the difference between 'public' and 'private' ministry. Why is this distinction important? How does this relate to standards and accountability?



Scripture Passages for Further Study:

- Romans 12:3-8
- John 20:19-23
- Matthew 18:15-20
- Exodus 18:12-27
- 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Entering the Biblical Story

Read the story of the missionary Apollos, and how he was instructed by Priscilla and Aquila. It is found in: Acts 18:24-28.

1. Who was Apollos? Where was he from? How does Acts suggest he was educated?
2. Apollos was preaching Christ in Ephesus. What were the strengths of his preaching? Was his message perfect, or were there areas that needed correction?
3. What did Priscilla and Aquila do after they heard Apollo's preach? Why? What was at stake?
4. Do you consider the action Priscilla and Aquila to be presumptuous? Why or why not? Does it appear that they followed Jesus' precepts of mutual correction in Matthew 18:15-17?
5. How would you describe Apollos' reaction to the correction of Priscilla and Aquila? What was his response: anger, sadness, humility, pride, or exasperation? Did he call the bishop's office for intervention?
6. What does this text suggest about the relationship between clergy and lay? Is there mutual responsibility to maintain the faith handed down by the saints? Is there mutual responsibility to admonish and correct?
7. Apollos desired to extend ministry to Achaia. Whom did he consult concerning his ideas about ministry? What does this say about the mutuality of the call process between pastor and congregation?

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A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

SESSION 6

Article CC6:

Marriage and Family

We believe and confess that the marriage of male and female is an institution created and blessed by God. From marriage, God forms families to serve as the building blocks of all human civilization and community. We teach and practice that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the biblical boundaries of a faithful marriage between one man and one woman.

From the first pages of Scripture, God affirms the goodness of his creation. "God created humankind in his own image ... male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). The distinction of genders was built into who we are as human beings.

Jesus reaffirmed God's creative work by reminding his listeners that "from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.'" (Mark 10:6-7) Though there have always been many kinds of relationships and familial arrangements allowed by the laws of various human cultures, God's intention for marriage remains the same.

God chooses to build families around husband and wife, parents and children, not only that humankind could 'be fruitful and multiply', but also to reflect the faithful union between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:32). Even as we human beings continue to find ways to be unfaithful to this union, God himself remains faithful.

From the Small Catechism:

"We are to fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honorable, and husband and wife love and respect each other."

"God's name is hallowed whenever his Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God live in harmony with it. Help us to do this heavenly Father! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God, dishonors God's name among us. Keep us from doing this heavenly Father!"

ELCA Confession of Faith (¶ 3)

This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.

Some Initial Questions:

1. Does love between human beings always imply sexual activity? What kind of relationships are off limits to sexual behavior? On what basis?
2. Is it judgmental to place external standards on human relationships? Would you want your children not to 'exercise judgment' in choosing their friends or their spouse?
3. Think of some examples from the Bible of marriages that did not adhere to God's standard of "one man and one woman." Were such people outside of God's grace?
4. How is it possible to maintain a biblical position on God's intention for marriage, and still treat all people with respect and dignity?

Scripture Lesson - Session 6:

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they said, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mark 10:6-8 NRSV)

In the context of being asked a question about divorce, Jesus broadens the topic by describing God's original intention for marriage. The very reason for the distinction between genders of male and female, is that the two were meant to be complementary in the union of husband and wife.

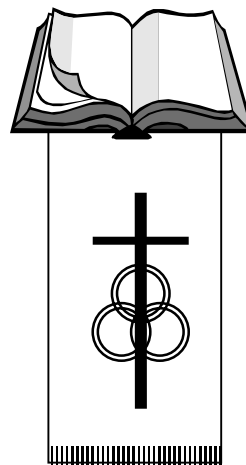
Questions:

1. Is Jesus being "judgmental" in this text? Explain the reason for your answer, and why someone else might disagree with you.
2. What does Jesus mean when he says "for your hardness of heart" Moses gave his commandment? (v.5) In what way does God's law address cases of both obedience *and* disobedience?
3. Is there a difference between what is legally allowed and what is morally right? In a culture such as ours, is it desirable (or even possible) to equate the two? Why or why not?
4. How do culture and society support the institution of marriage? How do they not?
5. How might "forgiveness" be at work in Jesus' words in this text? Does the reality of sin -- or the reality of forgiveness -- mean that God's intention no longer applies?

Entering the Biblical Story

Read the story of God's creation of male and female from: Genesis 2:18-25.

1. In what way is loneliness a part of our common human experience? What is God's response to our need?
2. God says the human being needs a "helper" (Hebrew: 'ezer' = help). Does this term imply a lesser status? How is the same term used elsewhere in Scripture? Compare: Psalm 33:20 and Psalm 115:9-11.
3. God determines that one potential partner for the man was "fitting" and the others were not. Was the appropriateness of the relationship based on attraction or consent, or on the identity of partners themselves?
4. Are male and female of fundamentally different substances, or are they alike? What do they share in common?
5. What do you think is meant by the phrase "joined together"? (v.8) What does it mean to say that **God** is the one who joins us?



Scripture Passages for Further Study:

- Hebrews 13:4
- Romans 1:18-28
- Proverbs 31:10-31
- Song of Songs 8:6-7
- Colossians 3:12-24

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A Bible Study On The Articles Of "THE COMMON CONFSSION"

SESSION 7

Article CC7:

The Mission & Ministry of the Congregation

We believe and confess that the church is the assembly of believers called and gathered by God around Word and Sacrament, and that the mission and ministry of the church is carried out within the context of individual congregations, which are able to work together locally and globally.

Article Seven of the Augsburg Confession says:

"It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere."

This Article has been called the Magna Carta of the Lutheran Church. It focuses on the heart of the Church, cutting through all clutter to remind us of that which is essential. In essence, the Church is found wherever is preached the Gospel of forgiveness of sins through Christ's atonement, and the sacraments are administered in accordance with that Gospel. Therefore the Church is not a specific place but rather a community of believers, among whom the Spirit works to create faith in Christ.

From the Small Catechism:

"In the same way he calls gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church day after day he fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day he will raise me and all the dead, and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true."

ELCA Confession of Faith (¶ 7)

This church confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.

Some Initial Questions:

1. How would you define what the Church is and does? What are some other definitions you have heard? How do these compare with the definition from the Lutheran Confessions?
2. Some claim the local congregation is obsolete. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
3. How should our confessional and biblical heritage inform the structure and mission of our denomination?
4. Where can we applaud the ELCA? Where should the ELCA be open to criticism?
5. If you could change anything about your local congregation, or the ELCA in general, what would it be? Can you support the need for this reform by reference to the Scriptures or the Lutheran confessions?

Scripture Lesson - Session 7:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:15-19)

In this text we hear the great confession of the Church, on the lips of Peter. We are people who believe that Jesus is more than just a great teacher and miracle worker, but that Jesus is our Messiah, the very Son of God.

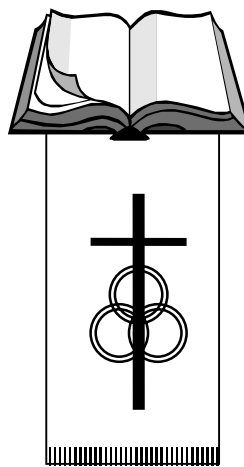
Questions:

1. What question did Jesus ask of his disciples? Why do you think he asked this?
2. Who responded to Jesus? What did he say? What do you think he meant by this?
3. What do Christians claim about Christ that is unique? Is it possible to 'believe' in Christ, without sharing Peter's confession?
4. What are the "gates of Hades"? What does faith in Jesus have to say in the face of human mortality?
5. Upon what will Jesus build his Church? How do we know this promise doesn't only apply to Peter? (see John 20:19-23)
6. What does Jesus mean by "the keys to the kingdom of heaven"? Are these "keys" still present in today's church? If so, where?

Entering the Biblical Story

Read the story of Pentecost and the origins of the Church, found in: Acts, Chapter 2.

1. What usually happened at the Jewish festival of Pentecost? Refer to the description of the "Feast of Weeks" in Numbers 28:26-31.
2. What happened on this particular occasion? Who was the primary "actor" in this text?
3. Describe Peter's sermon to the crowd. What did he have to say specifically about Jesus? Have you ever heard a sermon like Peter's?
4. What "cut" the hearts of the listeners? How did Peter encourage them to respond? Does this have anything to do with churches today?
5. What did the early church devote its time to? Compare that picture to today's church. Is there any contrast?



Scripture Passages for Further Study:

Matthew 28:18-20

John 10:11-18

Acts 6:1-7

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Acts 15:1-35

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