

- According to 1 Cor. 10:16–17, who and/or what make the Church “one body”?
2. The Church is Christ’s creation. He brings it about and sustains it through the forgiveness delivered in the Gospel proclaimed (Rom. 1:16), through Holy Baptism (Titus 3) and through the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:16–17). When Christ walked the byways of ancient Palestine, He constantly demonstrated love by both Word (the Gospel!) and deed. What do the following verses indicate about the origin, cause and continuing motivation of the Church for caring for other members of the body of Christ?
- 1 John 3:16–18
 - Rom. 7:5–6 (Note the connection to the language of “death” of Rom. 6:1 ff.!)
 - Look at Titus 3:4–7 again. How is verse 8 related to the preceding four verses?
 - Compare 1 Cor. 12:12–14 with 1 Cor. 12:25–26 (and note which famous chapter follows chapter 12!)
 - Compare 1 Cor. 10:16–17 with 1 Cor. 12:25–26.
3. Martin Luther had a profound understanding of the Church’s corporate life of mercy, based directly upon 1 Cor. 10–11. Please read and briefly discuss what Luther says regarding the Lord’s Supper and its ramifications for the life of the Church (*see margin note*). Note that Luther’s understanding encompasses both the local and worldwide Church!

*There your heart must go out in love and devotion and learn that this sacrament is a sacrament of love, and that love and service are given you and you again must render love and service to Christ and His needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in His holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing: **You must fight, work, pray** and, if you cannot do more, have heartfelt sympathy. That is bearing in your turn the misfortune and adversity of Christ and His saints. ... He said “This is my body ...” As though he said: I am the head, I will first give myself for you, will make your suffering and misfortune Mine own and bear it for you, that you in your turn may do the same for Me and for one another, have all things in common in Me and with Me and let this sacrament be unto you a sure token of this all, that you may not forget Me, but daily call to mind and admonish one another by what I have done for you and still am doing, that you may be strengthened thereby and also bear with one another (Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, against the Brotherhoods*, Luther’s Works 35, Page 54).*

Sharing the Gospel and serving others — within the Church and beyond

1. Read Luke 17:11–17, Matt. 28:19 and Gal. 6:10. Did Christ limit His proclamation of the Gospel or His care for those in need, to Israelites (i.e., to members of the “true Church”)?
2. From verses like Gal. 6:10, we see a clear primary responsibility of Christians to care for other Christians, but then to also care for those beyond the fold. Which of the following statements would best express the reason Christians “do good to all ...”?
 - We provide physical care in order to attract people for the real task of evangelism (See James 2:14ff).
 - If we provide physical care, there is no need to evangelize (Matt. 16:26).
 - Jesus loved people body and soul. We do well to love our neighbor, Christian or not, with our words (the Gospel!) and our deeds.
3. According to what the Augsburg Confession says (rightly), what belongs to the essence of the Church?

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel Article VII (Martin Luther, Formula of Concord, Augsburg Confession VII, Tappert, Page 32)

4. While good works and charity are not the essence of the Church (i.e., they don’t create or sustain the Church in faith), what is indicated if they are absent in the Church’s life? See Matt. 25:34–46 (*Note: The “righteous” did not earn heaven. In fact, they are not even aware of their good deeds, much less fixated upon them for gaining eternal life. Verse 37*). See also James 2:14–17.
5. Answer the following questions regarding Acts 6. Note that what is translated “daily distribution of bread” actually says only “daily *diakonia*” or “daily service.” “*Diakonia*” (Dee-a-ko-NEE-a) is a wonderful word still used by most churches in the world to describe what we Americans have called “social ministry.”
 - What was the need expressed in this chapter?
 - Would it be fair to say that “the apostles cared about preaching the Word, not about care for the needy?”
 - Was the need to be met by individuals acting alone, or did the Church act as “the Church” to address the need?
 - What needs do the members of your congregation and community face?
 - How does your congregation address local physical need? Through a deaconess? Social ministry committee? Connection with a nursing home or social ministry organization? Neighborhood renewal? Care

NOTES

“Feed My Lambs”

Session One

Session goal: Explore how as individual members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), we show love and compassion to people in need whom God has set before us. We practice deeds of mercy, both planned and unplanned, to bring hope and encouragement to others and to bring honor and praise to the God whose love motivates us to show love to others.

Kindness: How “Random” Can it Be?

Perhaps you have seen the message in a public service advertisement or on a bumper sticker: “Practice Random Acts of Kindness.” This is an idea that has appeal for us as individuals. We seldom form groups and elaborate plans to perform random acts. You and I help fix a flat tire, reunite a lost child in a department store with his parents or carry a neighbor’s grocery bag that was one-too-many because those are needs that often occur when we are by ourselves — and needs to which we can respond as individuals.

What do you think of when you imagine yourself performing a “random act of kindness”? Do you see yourself in the stereotypical “Boy Scout” role, helping a little old lady across the street? Do you see yourself being called upon to respond to an emergency situation?

Large or small, our acts of mercy flow from our living faith in Christ. We respond to His love for us by acting in love and compassion toward others.

List one or more ordinary acts of kindness you have done in your station in life. If it’s helpful to your study, group members may wish to share their experiences.

An Unplanned — and Uncharacteristic — Act of Kindness

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Read Luke 10:25–37.

1. Was the act of kindness a “random act”? Discuss. What excuses might have been offered to avoid acting?
2. What was the flaw in the young expert in the Law’s understanding of the Law — specifically the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself?
3. An act of compassion responds to a need. Discuss how the story of the Good Samaritan effectively illustrates this.



LUTHER: FAITH DOESN'T ASK IF GOOD WORKS ARE TO BE DONE.

Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it.

Oh, faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, so that it is impossible for it not to be constantly doing what is good. Likewise faith does not ask if good works are to be done, but before one can ask, faith has already done them and is constantly active . . . Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God’s grace, so certain that it would die a thousand times for it. And such confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes us joyous, mettlesome, and merry toward God and all creatures (Martin Luther, *Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration*, IV. 10f., Tappert, Pages 552-53).

LUTHER: BAPTISM, “STATION” AND “ORDINARY ACTS OF KINDNESS”

God has given every saint a special way and a special grace by which to live according to his baptism. But baptism and its significance He has set as a common standard for all men, so that every man is to examine himself according to his station in life, to find what is the best way for him to fulfil the work and purpose of his baptism . . . (*Treatise on Baptism*, 1519).

“Feed My Lambs”

Session Two

Session goal: Explore how as the body of Christ, i.e., congregations and other Christian entities, we demonstrate love and compassion to those in need. Explore how we share God’s love through emergency response in the United States and abroad, as well as through intentional efforts to reach into communities, both domestic and international, to help people improve their standard of living.

Many Members, One Body

ACTING TOGETHER FOR GOOD

One of the privileges with which God has blessed the Church is that of caring for people in need. The Church may respond to need in the same way an individual might — alleviating the suffering of one person or family in a single situation or providing funds for emergency supplies in a disaster. But the Church also is equipped to respond to ongoing or chronic needs. Congregations and faith groups bring comfort and hope to countless struggling people by offering a variety of programs, including:

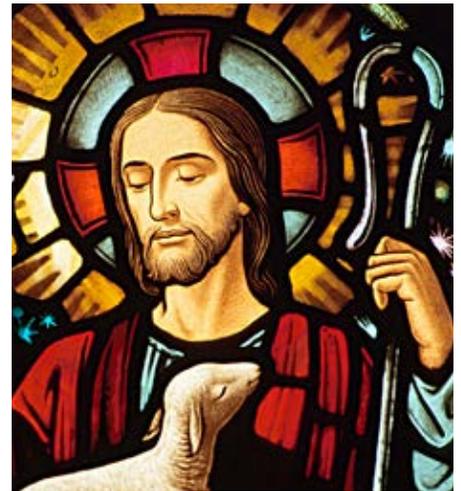
- Counseling
- Housing/shelter
- Food pantries
- Literacy/English as a Second Language
- Job skills
- Immigrant/refugee resettlement

The list is long and illustrates how fervently the Lutheran church has embraced its long tradition of seeing to the needs of those in distress.

Your Plenty Will Supply What They Need

Read 2 Cor. 8:1-14.

1. Why does Paul tell the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonian churches? Discuss other scriptural examples of sacrificial giving. What does I John 3:16–17 say is the motivation for such giving?
2. What was the attitude of the Macedonian churches toward “sharing in the service to the saints” (verse 4)? What is our attitude? A Christian care organization often uses the slogan, “Live simply, so that others may simply live.” How is this idea related to our attitude toward giving?
3. What does it mean for the churches to have given “themselves first” (verse 5)? How can that be done?
4. What does it mean to “excel in the grace of giving” (verse 7)?



LUTHER: AS ONE BODY, THE CHURCH ACTS IN LOVE.

On the basis of 1 Cor. 10:16-17 (“Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body...”), Martin Luther saw a most profound reason for such acts of mercy in, by and for members of the church as “one body.” ... The blessing of the sacrament is fellowship and love, by which we are strengthened against death and all evil. This fellowship is twofold: on the one hand we partake of Christ and all saints, on the other hand we permit all Christians to be partakers of us, in whatever way they and we are able; so that by this sacrament all self-seeking love is uprooted and gives place to love which seeks the common good of all, and through this mutual love there is one bread, one drink, one body, one community, that is the true union of Christian brethren (*Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament*, 1519).

“Feed My Lambs”

Session Four

*Session goal: Explore how as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), we show love and compassion to people in need as an expression of faith in Christ’s mercy, and look for opportunities to **proclaim** the love of Jesus Christ as well as demonstrate it — by sharing the saving message of the Gospel.*

Whole-Person Ministry

We can find no better model for responding to both people’s physical and spiritual needs than our Lord Himself. Matthew reports that early in His ministry “... he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people” (4:23). List instances you can think of in the Gospels that show how Jesus coupled preaching and teaching with healing or with providing food or income.

People who need to hear the Good News of God’s grace in Jesus Christ also live in a physical world and have real physical and economic needs. Jesus’ attention to the hunger, sickness, poverty and other struggles of the many who came to hear Him demonstrates His care for them in the physical sense. His words in Matthew 25, “... as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me,” encourage us to live our faith not only by making disciples, but also by sharing what we have with those who have less.

When we care for the whole person, physical and spiritual, as Jesus did repeatedly, we refer to the ministry as “holistic.” In addition to our desire to follow the model of Christ, what are some reasons we offer holistic care — physical care and spiritual care together?

Seeing is Believing

Opening the eyes of a man born blind Read John 9:1-17.

1. In this portion of John’s story of the man born blind, what is Jesus doing — preaching or healing? Defend your response.
2. Compare the disciples’ questions about the nature of the man’s blindness with Jesus’ explanation for it. Do we ever find ourselves debating the causes of people’s needs while the needs go unmet?
3. Discuss the reactions of the various witnesses to this event — the neighbors, the Pharisees and the blind man himself.

Read John 9:18-34.



THE SMALCALD ARTICLES (an official public confession of the Lutheran church)

“The church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ ... diligently joined together in unity in doctrine, faith, sacraments and works of love” (II.4.9. Tappert, Page 300).

MARTIN LUTHER: SO THAT THE EVILS OF THE PRESENT MIGHT BE SOMEWHAT LESSENER

Luther wrote to the Duke of Saxony, when the latter was suffering illness. For Luther, as for Jesus, physical healing and spiritual consolation belonged together:

Our Lord and Savior Jesus has left us a commandment which applies equally to all Christians, namely, that we are to render humanitarian services, or rather (as Scriptures call them), the words of mercy [Luke 6:36] to those who are afflicted and in a state of calamity, and that we are visit the sick, try to free the captives, and do similar things for our neighbor so that the evils of the present may be somewhat lessened. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself gave us the brightest example of this commandment when, because of his infinite love for the race of men, he descended from the bosom of the Father into our misery and our prison, that is, into our flesh and our most wretched life, and took upon himself the penalty for our sins so that we might be saved ... And while we have the duty to visit and console all who are afflicted with sickness, we are especially obligated those of the household of faith (Fourteen Consolations, *Luther’s Works* 42:122).

4. The man to whom Jesus gave the gift of sight is questioned by the Pharisees. During the interview, he displays frustration and even some irony. What issues seem to have the most significance for the Pharisees? For the man who had been blind? Discuss “blindness” in the context of this passage.

Read John 9:35-41.

Bread King? Rice Christians?

THE OUTCOME OF OUR ACTIONS

Even acts of kindness can be misunderstood. Jesus fed more than 5,000 people out of His compassion for them (Matt. 14:14) but then had to escape the crowd because they began to consider the miracle a reason to make Him a king by force. He had not come to be a “bread king.”

One unintended result of offering physical care along with the Gospel is what some people call “Rice Christianity.” The term was born out of the frustration of early missionaries to China and India who distributed food or provided other services as part of their ministry. Some people didn’t seem to mind sitting through a sermon — or even accepting Baptism and claiming to be Christian — if they knew their physical hunger or other needs would be satisfied in the end.

1. Should we insist that recipients of our acts of kindness be Christian (or Lutheran) — or at least be willing to listen to the Gospel message? Share your thoughts.
2. Missionaries relate that people they have served often ask, “Why have you done this for us?” They answer that the love of Jesus motivates them to help others. Ideally, the next question will be, “Who is this Jesus?” What is the best way to provide physical help and spiritual care — and yet avoid creating “Rice Christians”?

A related unintended result of holistic ministry is dependency.

Occasionally the recipients of physical care end up relying entirely on the help they receive from a ministry or other organization.

3. A well-known proverb advises that to give a man a fish is to feed him for a day, but to teach him to fish is to feed him for a lifetime. This is one of the principles behind a relief and development concept called *accompaniment* (which involves being present, building relationships and “walking alongside” recipients of help). How can we avoid fostering dependency and instead give real help that leads to self-sufficiency?

Prayer Thoughts

Suggestions for prayer: that God will continue to reveal opportunities to help others and to make disciples; and that God will keep us in His Word and send His Spirit to guide and comfort us.

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