Incarnate Community

A Bible Study from the LCMS Northern Illinois District

Incarnate Community Bible Study Leader's Guide

Session IV The Body of Christ Incarnational Community

Helping congregations be more centered on a rich life of Word and Sacrament, with congregational support in transitions as well as time of joys and sorrows.

Using Incarnate Community Leader's Guide

Welcome to Incarnate Community and thank you for your willingness to lead a group through this Northern Illinois District study. It is our prayer that our Lord will bless you and your group as you journey with us through this resource.

This leader's guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion of the materials with your group. In it, we've included the author's own responses to the questions with theological content to give you Pastor Kris' perspective on the questions your group will address in this study. Feel free to draw from this guide's content, making it your own, as you deem helpful for your group.

A few thoughts on your group:

- Ideally a small group consists of a leader and six to eight participants. This size allows for everyone to participate in discussion.

- The materials can be downloaded to a mobile device, printed for hard copy, or projected on screen.

- You may want to have a means of projecting the video portion of each session for ease of viewing and hearing for your entire group.

- Depending on the dynamic of your group's participation, you may not cover all the material in four one-hour sessions. If your group's goal is to work through the material in the course of four one-hour sessions, feel free to pick and choose sections and questions you think would be significant to your group and encourage participants to work through the remaining material on their own.

- It is the hope of your NID staff that many churches will participate together in this study during the Sundays of February 2022. If your group chooses to do this, you may wish to encourage them to then participate in the livestream discussion of the materials on our NID YouTube channel. (Go to the NID website at nidlcms.org to find the link.) This broadcast will feature President Buss and his panel of pastors and lay leaders who will go into more depth of discussion on each week's session.

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Focus Verse: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to 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." [Hebrews 10:23-25]

Welcome and Fellowship [15 to 30 minutes in a 90 minute time frame]

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, according to Your Word, one day Your Son, Jesus will return in the flesh. It will be a joyous day for, as He returns to judge Your world, Jesus will raise us with glorified bodies like His own. Even as we long for this day, we praise You now for the certain hope of the resurrection of all flesh and the gift of eternal life that is ours in Christ. Until that day comes, dear Lord, give us, Your Church, a sense of hopeful anticipation for Jesus' return and an understanding of the witness He works through us to the world as Your Spirit gathers us together around Word and Sacraments ministry. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

I Now Pronounce You…

The flowers…the beautiful music…the rings…the families gathering together…the grand toasts and blessings…the amazing food…the laughter…the tears…the dancing…and of course a dashing groom and the beautiful bride…there are many wonderful details that make up a joyful wedding celebration! The fun, fellowship, and the celebration of committed love that a wedding brings for attendees reflects something greater…a deeper need in us that our Lord fulfills in His committed relationship to us…as well as a hope of a future, greater fulfillment.

1. What blessings do you receive in getting to attend a wedding celebration in-person? What blessings to you bring by attending such a celebration?
2. On what would you miss out if you could not attend a family member or dear friend's wedding in-person?

3. Why do you think the Scriptures often liken God's relationship to His people in imagery of a wedding celebration? What does such imagery communicate about our present life?...about our future?

Video Segment [Three to four minute segment of a series of people making hopeful statements on the reality of eternal life.]

1. With what comments from the video did you identify?
2. What aspects of eternal life are you most anticipating?

An In-Person Eternity
Throughout the Scriptures, our Lord paints an amazing picture of the eternal life He has won for us by His life, death, and resurrection and given to us as a free gift of His grace! Read the following Scriptures and discuss the related question about what those passage reveal about eternal life for the followers of Jesus:

Isaiah 25:6-9, I Corinthians 15:42-49, Luke 24:36-43, John 14:1-4, Revelation 7:9-17

1. What would seem to be the purpose of Jesus giving us a corporal body like His own resurrected body in eternity? What are some of the physical aspects of eternal life that are revealed in these passages?
2. How do these passages reveal that our eternal life with Christ will be an "in-person" eternity, lived out with fellow believers?
3. How do the images of eternal life, as they reveal an in-person experience of it, influence and shape our experience of the community of faith here on earth?
4. What would be lost if someone did not regularly experience the life of the Church in-person?
5. What is gained when we receive the gifts of God's grace together in in-person community?

We Join this Celebration, Already in Progress

The victory of eternal life has already been won! Jesus has already accomplished everything that His creation will be restored, that we [and everyone who has ever existed] will receive a glorified body, and that we [and

anyone who believes in Him according to the Scriptures] will be together, rejoicing before our Savior and enjoying life without sin and without end! All of this will be fulfilled with Jesus' return on the Last Day. Until that joyful day comes our Lord leaves His Church in the dynamic of being gathered by Him around His gifts of grace, and, equipped by those same gifts, being sent by Him out to the world to welcome and gather others into the celebration of His grace. That dynamic is powerfully played out for us in Jesus' own life in the event Luke records in Luke 15.

Read Luke 15 and discuss the following questions

1. What is Jesus doing at the start of the chapter?
2. As this chapter describes an actual event in Jesus' ministry, what is the likely explanation for the Pharisees and scribes knowing that Jesus was "welcoming sinners and eating with them," on that given night? Discuss the details of which two "in-person" audiences, then, hear Jesus' three parables.
3. Discuss how the following details change from parable to parable and why you think Jesus makes those changes:
    a. Who is the main character of each parable
    b. The percentage of what is lost in each parable
    c. What is lost in each parable
4. What does the main character do to find what was lost in each parable?
5. What "in-person" communal aspects are found in each parable? How are those communal aspects reflective of what is going on in verse 1-2? How are they reflective of the Church throughout history and today?
6. What truly is being celebrated in the third parable [if not really all three]? Again, how is that reflective of the life of the Church as we gather around Jesus?
7. Why do you think Jesus leaves the third parable somewhat unresolved? What lessons are there in this for His followers?

Final Thought

The most beautiful of worship services…a feast, like a wedding banquet…a tender homecoming…our Lord reveals what awaits us in eternal life with wonderful, comforting, joyful imagery. It is all guaranteed for His children because Jesus has done all that is needed to make such a future our reality.

He has fulfilled God's law with perfect obedience in our stead. He has died the death we deserved on the cross. He has victoriously risen from the grave! His resurrection also reveals a wonderful future reality. We too will rise, and experience His gift of eternal life with glorified bodies; a physical, in-person experience of salvation! We will get to do this together with all the saints…the community of the redeemed, physically living together with Jesus at our center. Until that day is fulfilled, our Savior joyfully welcomes us into His home…to care for us, to grant us His grace, to mercifully set us at His table to feast as He rejoices that He's found us lost children, alive in Him. And as He does all this, our Lord keeps a watchful eye outside the banquet hall, seeking to welcome those not yet at the feast. He'll even go outside the house, and bring us along, in-person, to bring someone else in, because the feast He brings us to is the foretaste of the eternal joys to come.