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

For Concrete Learners from

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.

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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 live 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).

The blue questions and yes/no or the thumb up or thumb down responses are meant to be used with participants who think and operate on a more concrete level of understanding. They may be young, have intellectual disabilities, and perhaps nonverbal in their communication skills. This may be due to a variety of contributing factors such as: being on the autism spectrum, trauma from brain injury or stroke, or even age onset dysfunction like dementia or Alzheimer's.

Please adjust the level of questions to the level of function for your individual person. If they are able to communicate beyond the yes/no format, simply give them the opportunity to share by asking follow-up questions: Please explain, tell me why you think this, and let's talk more about this and others. For this person, the blue questions should be viewed as discussion starters. There are times a series of questions are presented to lead up to a concept. Adjust any and all questions to the needs and abilities of your group or individual.

This format of questions and responses are presented with the belief that all members of the Body of Christ are able to learn, grow, and participate in spiritual growth and that intellectual or physical disabilities does not exclude them.

Welcome and Fellowship [15 – 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 do 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?

NOTE: Your participant's answers will vary here, but encourage as many as you have time for to share.

Video Segment [A 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?

NOTE: Again, allow participants to share as time allows.

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?
   Can we see, touch, taste, and even smell the bread?

   Yes or No (or circle correct thumb)  

   Can we see, touch, taste, and even smell the wine or non-alcoholic wine?

   Yes or No (or circle correct thumb)  

   We believe Jesus is “in, with, and under” the bread and wine. We mean that the Holy Spirit makes the bread and wine a part of the Body of Jesus.

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Can we understand this with our minds?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb)  

Can we believe this with the help of the Holy Spirit?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

2. How do these passages reveal that our eternal life with Christ will be an "in person" eternity lived out with fellow believers?
   Did Jesus rise from the dead only in spirit like a ghost?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Did Jesus rise from the dead in someone else's body?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Did Jesus rise from the dead in His own real body?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

We know this because He showed His scars and wounds.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

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?
   When we gather together in heaven, are we:

Gathered in our bodies and spirit (soul)?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Gathered only by spirit without our body?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Gathered in our own special place by ourselves?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Gathered in one place able to see, hear, touch, and even taste and smell like we do now?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

4. What would be lost if someone did not regularly experience the life of the Church in person?
   Is it good to gather together and be able to see, hear, and touch each other?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Does in person gathering have benefits that you cannot get when not in person?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Are there people who cannot gather in person due to illness, family issues, or other needs?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Do we let them miss out on the benefits of worship?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

There are people who cannot gather in person. Are there people who could gather but chose not to?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Is this a good thing? Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

5. What is gained when we receive the gifts of God's grace together through in person community?
Is it good for a person to decide to be separated and not in person fellowship?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Can the followers of Jesus really support one another and grow together without in person gathering?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Again, is it good to gather together and be able to see, hear, touch, and support each other?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

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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?

   Is Jesus having a feast or party with all kinds of invited guests?

   Yes or No (or circle correct thumb)  

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.
   Did the church leaders of Jesus' day want to have a feast with people they said were "sinners"?

   Yes or No (or circle correct thumb)  

   Did the church leaders come in and join the feast Jesus hosted?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Is this a good thing? Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

NOTE: Now Jesus has two audiences that have gathered, in person, who will hear His stories. There are the "sinners" who are at Jesus' table, gladly hearing His word and feasting at His table. Then there are the "righteous," who stand outside the home, looking in and refusing to receive Jesus' hospitality. The scene looks very similar to the last scenes of Jesus' third story of the lost son, as the father hosts a feast and the older son refuses to join the party, angered that the father would make merry as the younger son has been returned home.

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?

In the first story is the main person the shepherd?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

In the second story the person we see is a woman who lost a coin.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Is the Father the main person of the story of the Lost Son?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

b. The percentage of what is lost in each parable.

c. What is lost in each parable?

In the first story a sheep was lost and it was one out of 100.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

In the second story a coin was lost and it was one out of 10.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

In the last story a son was lost and he was one out of two.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Does Jesus make the value of the "lost thing" greater with each story?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

4. What does the main character do to find what was lost in each parable?

The Shepherd of the first story stays with the flock and never finds the lost sheep.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

The Shepherd of the first story goes out and finds the lost sheep.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

The Woman who lost the coin calls all her friends together and they cry about the coin.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

The Father watches for his lost son and runs to accept him when the son returns.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

5. What "in person" communal aspects are found in each parable? How are those communal aspects reflective of what is going on in verses 1-2? How are they reflective of the Church throughout history and today?
   Is it true that all of the main people in the stories seek to get back that which was lost?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

The Father actually worked to "bring back or bring in" both of his sons to a right relationship.

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Is this a good thing? Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

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?
   Are the people celebrating the return of the lost son?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Did they celebrate by sending cards and letters?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Did they come in person? Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Is this a good thing? Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

7. Why do you think Jesus leaves the third parable somewhat unresolved? What lessons are there in this for His followers?
When Jesus stops telling the story of the lost son, the church leaders were listening in from the outside of the gathering. Did Jesus want them to decide for themselves if they would join the feast?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

In worship does Jesus want us to celebrate new life in Him and support each other?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

If people are unable to join in person are we to help them as much as possible?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Will some people take advantage of this and not come in, like the church leaders in Jesus day?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Should we seek them as well as always keeping an open door and mind?

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Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Again, is it good to gather together and be able to see, hear, touch, and support each other?

Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

Is this a good thing? Yes or No (or circle correct thumb) 

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.