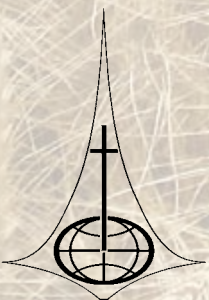




LWF ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY  
STUDY MATERIALS

Day Six

# The Bread of Life



The Lutheran World Federation  
– A Communion of Churches





*The LWF Eleventh Assembly study material takes into account the regional focus of the meeting's worship life. Each of the six brochures includes a contribution from an LWF region on "Questions worth pondering" (p. 7); a hymn (p. 8), a feature story (p. 10) related to the assembly theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread," and information about some of the region's staple foods (p. 16).*

*This brochure is dedicated to the North America region.*

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## Bible Study Six: Bread of Life

# The Bread of Life: the question

Our week of meetings under the umbrella of the fourth petition reaches a fitting climax as we turn to the theme of the sixth day of the Assembly: *Bread of Life*. So far, following the lead of Luther, we have considered the “bread” in the fourth petition as a figure of speech referring to “everything that belongs to our entire life in this world” (LC, 73, Kolb-Wengert, p. 450), including even “good weather, peace, health, decency, honor” and more (SC, 14, Kolb-Wengert, p. 357).

But what, then, is *Bread of Life*? Has not everything that pertains to human life already been covered by the “bread” in the fourth petition? The expression *bread of life* plays a major role in the Gospel according to John. In chapter six of that gospel, Jesus is disappointed when the people for whom he provided food the day before want to make him their king because, as he says to them, “you ate your fill of the

loaves.” Jesus wishes that they would come to him for “the food that endures for eternal life” (Jn 6:26f.). Evidently, the “loaves” do not.

People who regularly eat their fill and who experience no shortage of the finer things in life sometimes confess that they feel “empty.” They say that they are “hungry” for something more, “thirsty” for something they do not fully understand, “yearning” for—they do not know what. Is that, possibly, a need which the *bread of life* is designed to fill? If so, what *is* this *bread of life*? The people in the John 6 account wrestle precisely with that question: What is it that people yearn for that is not provided by the “loaves?” As Jesus keeps talking with the people in that gospel, they gradually come to a better understanding of what is at stake.

For starters, here is an example. Several of the key words in the Fourth Gospel carry a double meaning. For instance: there is a Greek

word that can mean both “from above” and “again.” That double meaning is what tripped up Nicodemus (3:3). Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the need to be born by the Holy Spirit (from above), but Nicodemus heard him say that one must be born once more (again). It is precisely that sort of ambiguity that serves the writer of the Fourth Gospel so well as a means of exploring the difference between birth and rebirth, between water and living water, between *bread* and the *Bread of Life*.

The misunderstanding that is created by the words with a double meaning gives Jesus the opportunity to pursue the subject in ever more explicit terms and in several different ways. The people in the story gradually catch on, but they can never really figure out the main point of the mystery. They can comprehend the matter only if and when Jesus finally reveals it to them. Then, finally, they reach the point where they can confess their faith (or walk away, as the case may be). To do justice to the ambiguity of the question, we shall examine *two* sequences (chapters four and six) in the Fourth Gospel.

### Living water (John 4:1-42)

On his way to Galilee Jesus stops at the well of Jacob at Sychar in Samaria (Jn 4:3-6). His disciples have gone to buy food (4:8) when a woman from the city comes to the well for water. Jesus initiates a conversation with her by asking her for a drink. The woman expresses surprise. For a Jew to request assistance from a Samaritan is quite extraordinary. Jesus arouses this woman’s curiosity by giving her a mysterious hint: “If you knew ...” (4:10). The stranger with whom she is speaking claims to be able to give *her* water to drink—and not just ordinary water; he can provide her with *living* water. Since “living water” ordinarily means *moving* or *flowing* water—like water from a spring—and since the well of Jacob is the only reliable source of water in these parts, she dismisses the words of Jesus as some sort of joke. Who does he think he is? This 30-meter deep well dug by Jacob has served the city as the only supply of water for centuries. And what is he going to do? Make a spring erupt in this semi-arid desert? The fellow doesn’t even have a bucket to draw from the water that is already there! Ridiculous!

Her reaction to the claim of Jesus shows her as a quick-witted and intelligent no-nonsense kind of person, the sort of person with whom one can have a lively and substantive discussion.

Jesus seems to have read her thoughts, since he continues her play on words. He says something like this: “yes, that is exactly what I am going to do: make a spring leap up (like a geyser) in the person who drinks the living water so that she will not only never be thirsty herself, but she will become a source of refreshment for others.” She evidently senses that Jesus can provide something she deeply desires; she seems to believe that Jesus can actually do what he said, but she is not quite sure what will be the implications. She wants that water, and she requests it, even though she does not yet know what it all means. The idea of never again having to walk for miles to fetch water appeals to her. The discussion has already made much progress. Jesus decides to enlarge the learning circle. “Go, call your husband” (4:16).

Jesus has evidently touched a nerve. It turns out that Jesus knows her entire life story. No doubt she feels vulnerable. There are things in everyone’s life that one does not want to talk about with anyone, least of all a stranger. She tries to change the subject: Let’s talk about where is the appropriate place to worship (4:19-20). Jesus, a Jew, does not discredit the tradition of the Samaritans, but insists that *both* traditions are inadequate. The woman seems satisfied and affirmed by that response. Some of those questions of hers, she agrees, will have to wait until the Messiah comes (4:25). Did she say Messiah? Jesus interrupts her train of thought, “εγω ειμι” (*ego eimi*), he says: “I am.”

This is the first time in this gospel that Jesus says these words, but we shall hear them again—frequently. They always mark a high point in the gospel, the point where one meets Jesus eye to eye. The words remind one of what God had instructed Moses to say to Pharaoh: “I am who I am ... ‘I am’ sent me” (Ex 3:14). The words “I am” become a personal name for Jesus—an allusion to the divine name of God?

At this crucial juncture in the story (4:26), the conversation is terminated by the arrival of the disciples. The Samaritan dashes off, leaving her jar behind, excited to talk to the townsfolk about her experience. Can this be the Christ? she asks, hopefully. This has been an enormous journey of discovery for her. She began by calling Jesus “you” (4:9), soon referred to him as “sir” (4:11, 15, 19a) and then quickly shifted to “prophet” (4:19b), as her respect for Jesus increased. Already she begins to wonder whether Jesus might be the Messiah. At the end of the story, she and the townsfolk who have been influenced by her

testimony agree that Jesus is “the Savior of the world” (4:42). Her simple testimony has produced much fruit. Many Samaritans have been led to faith in the Savior of the world through her (4:39-42). Her story demonstrates how meeting Jesus leads step by step to faith and to mission.

She still does not know what the expression “living water” means, but she has met someone who takes her seriously, who accepts her fully, who honors her by treating her as an equal, and who welcomes her in a nonjudgmental way. She has found someone from whom she needs to hide nothing, one who welcomes her into his company and affirms her dignity. Maybe she *does* now know what “living water” is?

## Bread of Life (John 6:1-71)

### *Feeding the five thousand (6:1-15)*

There are many similarities between the sixth and the fourth chapters of John. The overall structure of the two sections is almost identical. Chapter six begins with the feeding of the five thousand, but it is not a self-contained miracle story as in the other gospels. In John it sets the stage for what is to come—as the mention of water did in chapter four. The real focus of the chapter is not on the feeding story, but on the dialog that follows it. At the conclusion of the feeding story people make a very astute observation. They see a connection between the food provided by Jesus and the manna God sent at the time of the Exodus, and they conclude that Jesus must be the second Moses, the prophet (like Moses) who is expected in the Messianic age (6:14). They are on the right track, but there is still a long way to go (see 6:52-59). They expect the prophet of the end-time to have political aspirations, so they want to make him king. But Jesus will have none of that. He escapes (6:15).

### *The bread of life (6:22-59)*

Next morning the crowd that had wanted to proclaim him king caught up with Jesus on the other side of the lake. He is not thrilled to see them. He knows that they have come for one purpose only: to get more of that perishable food (6:27). Jesus does provide that, of course—he has done so just yesterday and will do that again and again—but he has something still more precious to offer and it would be regrettable if they were to lose out on that. Jesus explains: he has food to offer that “endures for eternal life,” nourishment that

sustains life in fullest perfection, as God meant it to be from the very beginning (6:27).

Unfortunately, that does not seem to interest them. They call him “Rabbi”—a term of ordinary politeness. The best topic for conversation they can think of is “when did you come here?” (6:25). The situation is not hopeless, however. Since Jesus mentioned something about working for food (6:27), they ask what they must do to accomplish the work of God (6:28). They do want to *do* something, to *accomplish* something for God. But when Jesus gives them the deceptively simple answer “believe in him whom he has sent,” they want to see “signs” first, overlooking the fact that his “signs” are all around them. The Fourth Gospel is a *book* of “signs!”

They again bring up the name of Moses who, they say, “gave them bread from heaven to eat” (6:31), quoting Ps 78:24 (cf. Ps 105:40). Jesus rejects their understanding of that biblical text for two reasons: first, it was not Moses but God who provided the manna, and secondly, it is a mistake to consider the manna as something preferable to the “Bread of Life.” By now, the question has become increasingly urgent: what *is* this “bread of life?”

Finally (6:34) they ask for what Jesus had offered. “Sir, give us this bread always” (the Samaritan woman in 4:15 expressed a similar desire for the “living water always”). At this point Jesus reveals himself in the fullest way possible: *εγω ειμι* (*ego eimi*), he says: “I am [the bread of life].” The secret is out! The “Bread of Life” is a person! A person who wants to nourish the whole person, like bread! Are they beginning to understand, yet?

Well, many do not. They insist on debating baffling questions. How can Jesus say that he has come down from heaven when everyone knows that he was born right here on earth, where his father and mother are well known? (6:42). How can he give us his flesh to eat (6:52)? Eventually even some disciples become unsure. Many of them begin to have questions. “This teaching is difficult,” they say; “who can accept it?” (6:60). Some even stop following him (6:66). But Jesus does not answer any of these futile questions. He simply keeps repeating what they should all know by now: He is the Bread of Life (e.g. 6:48); the bread that came down from heaven (6:41). Such affirmations are not points to be argued, but gifts to be received and believed. Simon Peter speaks for the faithful disciples: “You have the words of eternal life” (6:68).

The one called the “Bread of life” offers the most intimate of relationships. To describe that relationship adequately, one needs to speak in





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the tender language of hospitality and love, using such expressions and images as “abide in me and I in them” (6:56), remain in, live within, eat and drink, consume with one’s entire being. It is this close companionship with God that distinguishes the human race from other living creatures. So, we are back where we began: God created human beings in God’s image and likeness as beings whose identity will be in Christ who is one with the one who sent him.

That closeness is nowhere more intimate than it is in the Eucharist where the Bread of Life gives himself in such a special way. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life” (6:54), he assures those who believe in him. In this eating and drinking Jesus offers himself in tangible form as he enters into their very being and becomes one with them as they become one in him. It is that awareness that enables human beings under seemingly impossible conditions to persevere without losing hope, confidence, self-respect or dignity. In the Eucharist they experience their own identity as nowhere else. Here they come to know that they are not—they are never—alone.

It has often been noted that the Fourth Gospel does not tell the story of the Last Supper and the words of the institution of the Eucharist that form such an important part of it. In its place this gospel brings a most moving story: Jesus washes the disciples’ feet (Jn 13:1-20). After doing so, Jesus explains his

action: he has left them an example. They are to become one another’s servants, as he, their master, has become theirs. Is this a commentary on the significance of the Eucharist? In this Holy Communion Jesus has constituted the group of his faithful followers as a community empowered for mutual service. The Bread of Life sustains all those who eat it in a life that thrives on mutual up-building.

### **The night when Jesus walked on the sea (John 6:16-21)**

Tucked away from the view of the crowds in chapter six there is a little episode that can be regarded as a summary of the entire chapter, if not the entire Gospel of John.

After a long day of dealing with the public, the disciples are alone in a boat, far out on the lake, in deep darkness, with a strong wind creating a turbulent sea. In the mist of the night they can just barely make out the figure of Jesus coming toward them, walking on the sea. They are terrified.

Then they hear the familiar words: “I am” and “do not be afraid.” And fear gives way to peace, the kind of peace that the world cannot give. Within moments they are on safe ground.

I am with you always, to the end of the age  
(Mt 28:20b)

From the North America region

# Questions worth pondering

## *The Bread of Life: the question*

North American life as a whole has for too long been based on material excess. We are five percent of the global population consuming 25 percent of the world's resources. When the people of Israel did this with the manna, it became foul (Ex 16:13-21).

*How do we perpetuate the lie that the abundant life means prosperity and material excess, no matter the cost to our neighbor? How do we—who have enough bread, and more than enough—move from always wanting more “bread” to a deep hunger for the Bread of Life? How does being filled with the Bread of Life impact our provisions for daily bread—not only for ourselves but for our neighbor? What is truly enough for the abundant life?*

## *Living water (Jn 4:1-26)*

Clean, safe water is now recognized as a miraculous gift in and of itself, but also seen by some as a commodity, instead of a right for all. It is becoming a significant factor in many armed conflicts around the globe. Changing weather patterns make the once abundant resource scarce.

*How can the living water offered by Christ help to solve the growing problems of access to clean and safe water?*

As disciples, we are called to be springs of this living water, satisfying others with the gifts of God (Jn 4:14).

*How can we as individuals, churches, the communion, the whole body of Christ in the world, live our call together to be springs of living water?*

Water features prominently in our entrance rite to the Christian family, Holy Baptism.

*How does being washed in the life-giving waters of baptism both make clear our human thirst and dire need for God's renewal, while giving us the strength and call to bring about that renewal?*

## *Bread of Life (Jn 6:1-71)*

“You are what you eat,” a common expression in North America, reminds us that our physical health is no better than the quality of nourishment we provide our bodies. “Preach the gospel; use words if necessary.” In that oft-quoted summary, St Francis reminds us that what we do powerfully communicates what we believe. The strong messages leading up to our global super-recession have lured us into believing that more is better. When will it be enough? Jesus, recognizing that we, like the first disciples, are sometimes slow to catch on, makes it very clear: “I am (εγω εμιμ (*ego eimi*)) the bread of life” (Jn 6:35).

*Why do we, who enjoy an excess of daily bread, seem content even while our sisters and brothers in the communion, God's beloved creatures, created in God's image, have none? What can we learn from one another about what is enough? What practices in our life and in our communities help us abide in the Bread of Life? What practices hinder? How does receiving the Bread of Life, with the Lord Jesus himself our only host around the table of Holy Communion, help us deal with these questions?*

## *The night Jesus walked on the sea (Jn 6:16-21)*

The darkness is thick, the wind is strong, the waves are big, the future is uncertain, and yet Jesus, God's presence among us and in the world, is with us: “It is I,” (εγω εμιμ (*ego eimi*)) he says. *Immanuel*, God is with us. We—all of us, all of God's beloved children—are literally in the same boat, regardless of our differences and disagreements, because the same One abides in us and with us.

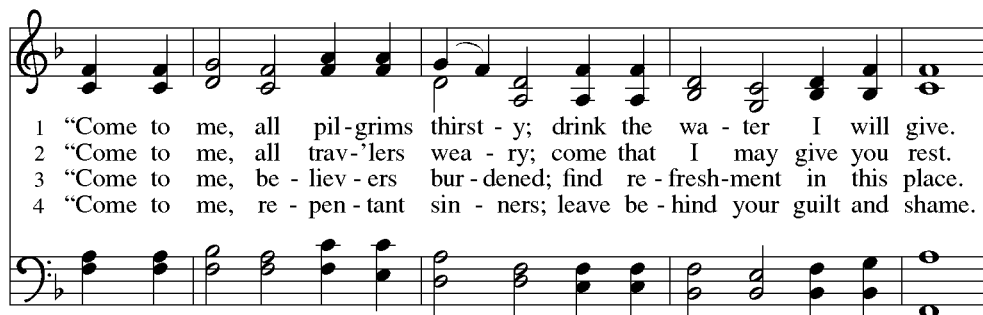
*What difference does it make that God is with us—for your life? For the community in which you live? For the world? For the communion?*



From the United States

# Hymn

## Come to Me, All Pilgrims Thirsty



1 "Come to me, all pil-grims thirst - y; drink the wa - ter I will give.  
2 "Come to me, all trav - lers wea - ry; come that I may give you rest.  
3 "Come to me, be - liev - ers bur - dened; find re - fresh - ment in this place.  
4 "Come to me, re - pen - tant sin - ners; leave be - hind your guilt and shame.

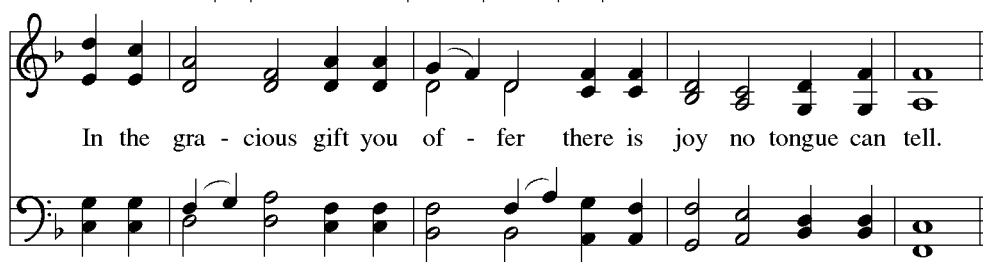


If you knew what gift I of - fer, you would come to me and live."  
Drink the cup of life I of - fer; at this ta - ble be my guest."  
Come, re - ceive the gift I of - fer, turn to me and seek my face."  
Come and know di - vine com - pas - sion, turn to me, I call your name."

*Refrain*



Je - sus, ev - er - flow - ing foun - tain, give us wa - ter from your well.



In the gra - cious gift you of - fer there is joy no tongue can tell.

- 5 "Come to me, distressed and needy;  
I would be your trusted friend.  
Come and seek the gift I offer,  
come, your open hands extend." *Refrain*
- 6 "Come to me, abandoned, orphaned;  
lonely ways no longer roam.  
Come and take the gift I offer,  
let me make in you my home." *Refrain*

Text: Delores Dufner, OSB, b. 1939  
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# Devotion

## “Less Titles—More Towels” (John 13:1-5)

That was the catchy theme for a retreat setting. These words are emphatically not a recipe for achieving greatness.

On the contrary, they subvert the entire conceptual world of social hierarchy.

Does it seem strange that a mixed group of people should have chosen such a phrase as a slogan for their retreat?

Participants only had first names and used no titles or job descriptions of any kind.

One could only guess whether anyone held positions of considerable trust and whether anyone had achieved a considerable degree of expertise and success. No doubt, several had both.

None of that mattered at that retreat.

People met each other as people.

No one drew attention to people’s age, skin color, profession or economic status.

None of that made any difference.

Everyone was on the same level.

It was clear that all of them wanted to follow that example of Jesus, to break down the barriers that divide and to share the passion that unites.

It was no doubt what Jesus had in mind when he took a bowl of water and a towel to leave the disciples an example of what the Eucharist can mean and do.

## Prayer

Gracious God,  
Make us masters of ourselves  
so that we may become servants of others,  
and free us from ourselves  
so that we can accept the service of others with  
dignity and grace.

Amen

# Canada: a ministry of presence in inner-city Edmonton

Gail (not her real name) lives in Edmonton's inner city, a poor neighborhood in the oil-rich province of Alberta in western Canada. She suffers from mental health issues and lives in assisted housing.

When she had to attend a meeting about her accommodation, she was worried and turned to Rev. Rick Chapman of the Inner City Pastoral Ministry (ICPM).

"She came to me one day after Sunday service and mentioned she was having to go before the housing board. She looked so nervous so I offered to go with her," Chapman recalls.

protect themselves from our laws. So I walk with them." With Chapman's support, Gail was able to deal with her housing situation.

Since 1978, ICPM, an interdenominational outreach program, has been providing both spiritual and physical nourishment to those in need in inner-city Edmonton. A partnership of Lutheran, Anglican, United and Roman Catholic churches, ICPM offers Sunday morning worship followed by nutritious lunches for more than 300 people. Volunteers from Edmonton's 100-plus area churches serve the hearty meal, catering to many who would otherwise go without.

Chapman, one of ICPM's three pastoral team members, oversees the ministry in a role that was previously sustained by pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). The ELCIC encourages partnerships within the Lutheran communion and ecumenically as part of its concerted efforts to boost its outreach to needy communities.

ICPM reaches those living in the deepest levels of poverty in the community. Over half of the families living in the neighborhoods served by the program live below the poverty line.

But not everyone knows about the ministry that takes place during the rest of the week. "It's a ministry of presence," says Chapman.

Not only does ICPM seek to serve those who make the effort to come through the doors seeking refuge and relief from the streets, but the program literally and spiritually shares bread on a daily basis with individuals in the community by offering human contact and compassion, care and support in Christ's name.

Chapman explains that it is about "building relationships with people." He walks with them when others may have given up or disappointed them. He is an advocate providing support to those who may otherwise fall through the cracks in the system.

While there are many success stories, the pastoral team prefers to see their work in terms of the relationships they have fostered, the real meaning of the "ministry of presence."

Human contact, spiritual trust and the affirmation that grows out of these contacts are the real success stories, rather than getting people "off the streets" or "overcoming addictions."



*Over half of the families living in the neighborhoods served by the ICPM program live below the poverty line. © Bri Vos*

By being present and, often, offering a prayer before such meetings, the Anglican pastor is able to "walk with those in need" during trying, and often difficult, situations. "These are individuals who might otherwise fall through the cracks," he says. "They can't

The theme of the day

# Bread of Life

Today our thoughts revolve around Jesus, the “Bread of Life” who nourishes and sustains believers in a most intimate relationship with himself and with God. As today we address sometimes unsettling, sometimes exhilarating realities, let us remind one another that as creatures made in the image of God, we are reconciled with God through Jesus, nourished by his Holy Communion, and empowered by his example for mutual service one of another. Let us listen for his reassuring words: “I am,” “do not be afraid.”

Village Group 1:

## Good soil – Clean water

### Life in abundance: proclamation

#### *Getting our bearings*

➤ Please take a few minutes to talk about your experience so far this morning. What stands out for you as something to pursue further?

#### *Proclamation (preaching) as good news*

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation...” (Isa 52:7). God’s message is good news. It brings liberation “to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners . . . gladness instead of mourning” (Isa 61:1b, 3b). The good news is a message of promise, healing and grace. This is the message that Jesus claimed as his own agenda (Lk 4:18-19). In his hands the good news (*gospel* means *good news*) stills every sort of hunger, including hunger for the Bread of Life. As the message of “the cross of Christ” (1 Cor 1:17) and as the “power of God” (Rom 1:16), the gospel challenges the status quo and calls for its transformation (Rom 12:1-2). The gospel offers life in its fullness.

➤ Please discuss: How can preaching as good news address the reality of daily hardship without appearing to make light of it?

#### *Good news as thanksgiving celebration*

The words of Jesus introducing the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew “. . . your Father knows what you need before you ask him,” (6:8b) provided Luther with the key for interpreting it: God gives what is needed even without being asked. The prayer is not so much a *request* for bread, as it is a grateful *acknowledgement* of it: “we ask in this prayer that God causes us to recognize what our daily bread is and to receive it with thanksgiving.” (SC, 13, Kolb-Wengert, p. 357). The worshippers offer thanksgiving for what God has already done, is now doing and promises to keep on doing. Proclamation can result in jubilation, dancing and singing God’s praises. God has heard the cries of God’s people, so that they can “sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land” (Ps 137:4).

➤ Please discuss: How does one keep worship as celebration from becoming cheap entertainment—or should one worry about that?

#### *Thanksgiving celebration as caring action*

St. Francis of Assisi said: “Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary use words.” If there is any truth in the stories that circulate about St Francis, then the animals understood his nonverbal “preaching.” His actions spoke louder than words ever could. His message was one of love and care and healing. The animals came to show him their wounds, wordlessly pleading for his healing touch.

Sound preaching expresses itself as caring action, empathy, accompaniment and advocacy. LWF endeavors to speak through action, even when verbal proclamation of the gospel is forbidden (as it is in some Muslim countries where the fear of being proselytized prevails). Sound preaching finds expression in passionate concern for the well-being of the whole person. Obviously, preaching without accompanying action is “cheap,” while well-intentioned action without a testimony of faith is almost indistinguishable from secular humanitarianism. In any case, the use of God’s gifts as a sort of bribe as encouragement for people to convert, would clearly be a perversion of the gospel.



- Please discuss: How should the church meaningfully combine word and service in its proclamation?

### *Caring action as vocation*

All followers of Christ are called upon to bear testimony to the grace of God and to the power of the Holy Spirit, and to do so in word as well as in deed—each according to the measure of gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit. Lutherans call it “the priesthood of all believers.” The proclamation of the good news is every Christian’s baptismal vocation.

- Please discuss: How do you proclaim the good news in our daily life? To the clerk at the counter for “customers’ complaints”? To your competitors in the sports arena or in the market place? To the member of your family who does not know about Jesus?

## Village Group 2: Sowing

### Education and empowerment

#### *Getting our bearings*

- Please take a few minutes to talk about your experience so far this morning. What stands out for you as something to pursue further?

#### *The power of education*

The health of a nation is to a large extent determined by the quality of education achieved by its inhabitants. An educated person will enjoy a better quality of life, even though her/his better qualifications will not necessarily result in significantly higher remuneration and a higher degree of economic self-reliance. Money is not the measure of all things. Nev-

ertheless, there are real benefits of education, and they get passed on to future generations.

- Please discuss: What do you regard as some of the great benefits of education?

#### *Education as a right*

The Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Education (2007) emphasizes that education, as a human right, should be available to all and offered free of charge, regardless of the students’ status of residence. This is particularly desirable when (as in Germany) statistics project that “in some 20 or 30 years, more than one third of all school children [in Germany] will be of immigrant origin.” Several countries have raised the age of compulsory school attendance to 18, while in others as many as 40% of school aged children do not attend even primary school.

- Please discuss: What steps are under way in your surroundings to ensure that education is accessible to all children—and mandatory until a certain age?

#### *Infrastructure for education*

Quality education is dependent on several factors, such as well run educational systems; committed, well trained, highly motivated and adequately paid teachers; enough well equipped schools, etc.

The Association of the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) identifies corruption as the main cause of poor learning. Transparency International blames widespread embezzlement and misuse of resources for causing students to “learn from a young age to value corruption, accepting it as norm for them and society.”

- Please discuss: In what ways can small and poor communities ensure that adequate buildings and supplies as well

as highly trained and motivated teachers will be available to teach their children?

#### *Gender balanced education*

The education of girls is still undervalued in many parts of the world. UNESCO reports that in much of Africa twice as many girls as boys do not go to school at all. Whether women become mothers or follow professional careers in law, medicine or politics, they increasingly manage financial affairs, play important roles in society and serve as elected members of governments. Inadequate education can bar them from many such possibilities. Those who get married in their pre-teens usually drop out of school.

- Please discuss: How and why will you persuade your people and their leaders to make education of women a high priority?

#### *Continuing education*

People can learn in many ways, even when they must drop out of school to work for a living. For example: classes and workshops can be offered during evenings and weekends. Correspondence courses can be taken at home. Internet technology offers exciting new ways of teaching at a distance. Self-disciplined students can pursue self-teaching projects by visiting websites (free of charge) that are gold mines of reliable information.

- Please consider: How could you (and your church) persuade certain knowledgeable persons to offer quality instruction to working people during off-hours?

#### *Signs of hope*

Some governments of developing nations have achieved significant increases in the percentage of children going to school. Others have hired large numbers of teachers and/or abolished school fees.

Enlightened employers now provide incentives for their employees to participate in continuing education courses and workshops.

“Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Lk 12:42b

## Village Group 3: Growth – Harvest

### Living by Grace

#### Getting our bearings

➤ Please take a few minutes to talk about your experience so far this morning. What stands out for you as something to pursue further?

#### Treasures in earthen vessels

The spiritual heritage of the Reformation is a blessing to be claimed and widely shared. It has far-reaching implications for Christian life. This page can do no more than touch upon the most central aspects of it.

#### Justified by God’s grace

*Justification by grace alone through faith alone*, the central principle of the Reformation, affirms that believers are made right with God not by their own efforts. There is nothing humans can do to become worthy of God’s care. God already loves them unconditionally. God’s grace, not their faith, comes first. “While we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Luther and Calvin agreed that this is the pivotal conviction of the Reformation and the Joint Declaration between LWF and the Vatican further affirms that claim for today.

This is an earth-shaking statement. God loves people unconditionally. One’s standing before God is measured not by a person’s

success. Faith is not something believers offer to God to be rewarded; it is the outstretched hand into which God places the free gift of grace.

➤ Please talk about this: Luther, as he splashed water on his face every morning, reminded himself: “I am baptized!” How do you counteract the pressure of society that values people according to their performance?

#### Simultaneously saint and sinner

Closely connected with that pivotal confession is another: Every believer is “*simultaneously saint and sinner*.” The believer is a saint in Christ, but also continues to be a sinner—not sometimes one and sometimes the other, but both, always. The God-given dignity of believers is not compromised by their human frailty. All are members of a broken humanity. No one is perfect. There is a dark side within each one of us. Paul himself lamented that while he desires to do the good, evil lies ready at hand (Rom 7:15b-21). So, every believer can be honest with self and with others. God accepts you as you are. You can therefore accept yourself on the same basis. Everyone can set high goals without fear of failure. No believer or church needs to claim perfection. All are always on the way.

➤ Please reflect together: People often find it difficult to think of themselves as lovable persons. How does the conviction that God loves you as you are affect your self-perception?

#### Faith and works

Lutherans are rightly suspicious when “good works” are spoken of as though they were prerequisites for receiving God’s love. Nevertheless, justification does produce results. It would be a sad commentary on the power of Christ if it did not. In fact,

Lutherans do emphasize “good works.” The Augsburg Confession states (Art. 6) “... faith is bound to yield good fruits” and “ought to do good works commanded by God” but “not so that we may trust in these works to merit justification before God” (Kolb-Wengert, p. 41). Such action is a joyful response, empowered by the Holy Spirit who distributes gifts as the Spirit wills.

➤ Please discuss: How can Lutherans still more vigorously affirm social action as a result of faith, rather than as a condition for earning God’s favor?

#### The new life

Paul (Rom 8:1-17) describes the Christian’s new life as a life not under law but under the life-giving Spirit who dwells in them. For that reason, believers can please God (8:8-9), not for selfish reasons, but as an integral part and an expression of the new life empowered by God and focused on the welfare of brothers and sisters throughout the world. Paul freely acknowledges that whatever good happens through him is not his own doing, but is to be ascribed to “Christ within me.”

➤ Please discuss: How can believers be sure that their actions are not motivated by selfish reasons? Must they be sure about this? If not, why not?

## Village Group 4: Processing what is harvested

### Migration

#### Getting our bearings

➤ Please take a few minutes to talk about your experience so

far this morning. What stands out for you as something to pursue further?

***The world on the move***

Human migration is as old as humanity itself. The Israelites, liberated during the Exodus, settled in a new land, displacing some of the original inhabitants. Many of their descendants were later exiled to Babylon. More recently, the “New World” attracted multitudes of European settlers who displaced and sometimes annihilated the indigenous societies and imported (and enslaved) much-needed laborers.

Presently, we witness the beginning of possibly the most extensive movement of people ever. The *Global Commission on International Migration (2005)* reports that in the past 30 years, the rate of international migration has doubled. Well over 30 million migrants are said to be “undocumented.”

- Please talk about the migration history in your region of the world. How have past patterns of migration changed your country for better or for worse?

***Reasons for migrating***

Migration is usually the result of pressures of various kinds. Today some people migrate to escape natural disasters due to climate change (e.g. a rise in sea levels), or violations of human rights by totalitarian regimes. Others are threatened by armed conflict or persecution for ethnic and religious reasons. Still others can no longer endure the prevalence of corruption and crime at home. Many migrate in pursuit of false promises made by human traffickers. Many migrate in search of a better standard of living elsewhere.

Today the global North experiences a low birthrate, an aging population and a shortage of

workers and taxpayers to meet the demands for services. The developing nations of the global South, on the other hand, experience precisely the opposite. It seems like a foregone conclusion that huge numbers of people will seek to migrate from south to north.

If people must move and if they have a choice where to go, they naturally prefer a place where they can have a better quality of life than they now do. Near the top of the list of desirable goals is the availability of decent work and reasonable wages that will enable them to save money and to support the families they left behind. The Council of Economic Advisors (2007) reports that Latin American immigrants in the US send home over 10 percent of their earnings (\$ 45 billion in 2006).

- Please talk about this: What are the prime reasons why people in your area decide to emigrate (or immigrate)? What developments could persuade people to decide to stay where they are?

***Host countries and their apprehensions***

People in the receiving countries are often concerned that the arrival of huge numbers of migrant workers and their families will seriously compromise their present culture and economy. While variations in matters of customs, dress, language, religion, culture and economic status can be absorbed without major dislocations, it is feared that major shifts may upset the balance and that the distinctiveness of the host country will be lost. For instance, what will be the impact on the country’s educational and health care system? How will the internal security of the country be affected? How will the introduction of different value systems affect crime rates and political voting patterns?

- Please talk about this: How does one distinguish between legitimate apprehensions on the one hand and groundless fears and prejudices on the other? Are migrants and refugees treated significantly differently, and if so, why?

***Signs of hope***

Newcomers will usually thrive when friendly efforts are made to help them get settled. Host countries often discover that the gifts immigrants bring outweigh the liabilities. Migrants may bring a better work ethic and expertise in skilled trades.

- Question: What role can the church play in promoting the flourishing of a harmonious community of rich diversity?

I was a stranger and you welcomed me.  
Mt 25:35b

**Village Group 5:  
Breaking  
the bread  
– Sharing  
solidarity**

**Your kingdom  
come: eucharistic  
hospitality**

***Getting our bearings***

- Please take a few minutes to talk about your experience so far this morning. What stands out for you as something to pursue further?

***The riches of eucharistic traditions***

The sacrament of Holy Communion is so rich, its meaning cannot be exhausted in any one description of it. The New Testament employs a whole series of Eucharistic descriptors. We can



sketch only some of the more prominent images.

### ***The new covenant***

Jesus occasionally used covenant language in reference to his blood in the sacrament: “my blood of the covenant” (Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28) and “the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). A covenant is a contract made by a powerful person offering terms which the less powerful beneficiary will find too good to pass up. The word undoubtedly alludes to the “new covenant” which God promised to Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31-34), replacing the old covenant which they were unable to keep. Under the new contract God promised (Jer 31:34) to “remember their sin no more.” Accordingly, in the sacrament God establishes a new way of dealing with humans: God starts fresh by erasing their past rebellion from the divine memory bank.

### ***Forgiveness of sins***

Matthew emphasizes (26:28) that Jesus’ blood is poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins*. The Eucharist thus assures worshippers that their many wrongdoings are pardoned through the death of Christ.

### ***Breaking of bread***

In Acts, believers gathered daily for the “breaking of the bread” (e.g. 2:42). This sacramental practice was evidently rooted

in the experience of the two sad disciples walking to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) when Jesus joined them and conversed with them unrecognized until they recognized him “in the breaking of the bread” (24:35). Their sorrow turned into joy and they became energized to run back to Jerusalem to share the good news of the resurrection. Here the sacramental meal causes the followers of Jesus to experience the presence of the risen Lord and to be empowered for mission.

➤ Discuss: How is your participation in Holy Communion affected when you think of it as eating with the resurrected Lord as host?

### ***Mutual service***

The Gospel according to John does not relate the institution of the Lord’s Supper. Instead, John tells how Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (Jn 13:1-20) leaving them an example. Here, the Eucharist empowers worshippers to become servants of one another, dismissing all notions of status and exclusion.

### ***Bread of Life***

Jesus, the “Bread of Life” (Jn 6:35, 48, cf. 6:51), describes his flesh and blood as “true food” and “true drink” (6:55) and promises that those who eat and drink it have eternal life already now, will never die (6:50), will live forever

(6:51) and will be raised on the last day (6:54).

➤ Reflection: Early Christians frequently referred to the sacrament of the altar as the medicine of immortality. How does John 6 help you think in new ways about the sacrament, eternal life, death, resurrection and immortality? Is the enjoyment of eternal life here a gift reserved for the time after a person’s death?

### ***A foretaste of the feast to come***

In all three Synoptic Gospel accounts of the words of institution Jesus states firmly “I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mk 14:25; cf. Mt 26:29; cf. Lk 22:18; see also 1 Cor 11:26)—an expression of confident anticipation of future celebrations beyond death.

➤ Discuss: How will your celebration of the Eucharist be enriched if you think of the Eucharist as a “foretaste of the feast to come?”

➤ Note that the various images of the sacrament highlight different dimensions of human existence. Which ones highlight community building, and which focus on the wellbeing of the individual believer? Which enhance life here and now?



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## A staple food

# Wheat

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)

Until recently the most widespread of the world's three main food crops, wheat, in 2007, dropped to third position after maize and rice.

Wheat is widely cultivated as a cash crop. The popularity of foods made from wheat flour creates a large demand even in economies with significant food surpluses. Wheat flour is one of the most important foods in European and North American culture, and the defining ingredient in most breads, pastries and pasta.

In North America, most wheat flour has had the germ and bran removed. What is left has no fiber and very little nutrition. Vitamins and minerals are put back in, but not as many as are taken out. Whole wheat flour has a greater fiber content and lots more minerals and vitamins.

The history of wheat is part of the history of humanity. Wild wheat was domesticated in the Fertile Crescent of Western Asia about 10,000 years ago, and wheat-growing reached the Aegean by 8500 BC and the Indian subcontinent by 6000 BC. Wheat reached Ethiopia, Great Britain, Ireland and Spain 5,000 years ago and Spanish missions brought it to North America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The primordial nature of wheat has given it symbolic meaning in mythology and religion. It is considered the fruit of the earth, a gift of life and of the gods, associated with purity, covenant and blessing.